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Curiosity jumpstarts unique HR career for OU graduate

It has been said that choosing a university can make or break a career. Reflecting on 20 successful years in the human resources profession, Pipier Bewlay (SBA '86) is glad she made the right decision. She applied and was accepted to Cornell University, General Motors Institute, and her school of choice, Oakland University.

"Oakland is as good or better than the other name-brand schools out there," Bewlay said. "People take for granted that there is a great university in their own backyard."

Born and raised in Pontiac, Bewlay lived in the residence halls her freshman year to fulfill a scholarship requirement. She said it gave her the freedom to figure out who she was and the opportunity to experience living on her own. It also gave her the chance to immerse herself in campus activities.

Bewlay decided to commute the following years. To her surprise, giving up her campus residence didn't make her feel like an outsider. "As a commuter, I was still offered engaging activities and opportunities to enhance my education," she said.

Take, for instance, the Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity. As one of the founding members and active participants, Bewlay said it helped shape who she is today.

"It instilled a drive within me, and I learned the process of getting something off the ground. I learned how to work with people different than myself, while building camaraderie. I also learned the importance of commitment to achieving success," she said.

The fraternity provided her with relevant, hands-on experience to complement her human resources management degree. As chairperson of new pledges during her second year with Alpha Kappa Psi, she dabbled in recruiting and training. "I didn't realize it then, but looking back, it was my first role in human resources."

She's come a long way since that fraternity experience, though she still keeps in touch with the friends she made there.

General Motors is often the pinnacle of a person's career, but it was just the beginning of Bewlay's professional journey. "It's a great company, but I couldn't stop wondering about the opportunities outside Michigan's automotive industry," Bewlay said.

That curiosity led Bewlay's career path through four states, two industries, and multiple promotions. Her resume boasts positions with General Motors, Kraft Foods, Target and Home Depot.

Today, Bewlay is senior vice president of human resources, training and development for INROADS Inc. in Atlanta. The nonprofit's mission is to develop and place talented minority youth in business and industry, and prepare them for corporate and community leadership. This process often starts at the college level, placing interns in professional settings.

When the position at INROADS first came across her desk, she passed it along to a colleague. "I didn't think I was interested in working for a nonprofit," Bewlay said. "My colleague passed it right back, telling me to rethink the opportunity."

Upon closer consideration, Bewlay decided the role was a perfect match to her credentials and ideals. "It feels good to give something back," Bewlay says. "Especially to those who aspire to reach their goals."

For more information about Oakland's human resources programs, visit the management and marketing page of the School of Business Administration Web site at www.sba.oakland.edu/mgt/.

SUMMARY

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