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# Alumni Unscripted: Lessons Learned from WMU

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# Post: Lessons learned from WMU

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What was your favorite childhood story growing up? I loved the story about the Tortoise and the Hare, especially the Bugs Bunny version, which in my humble opinion, ranks as one of the greatest cartoons of all time. On one side, you had the slow and methodical tortoise, who was definitely the underdog, and on the other, the more athletic, pedigreed hare. The hare, in theory, was the superstar who needed no introduction and only needed to show up to win. Sound familiar? How many times have you been up for a job interview or been up for a new role and found out that another candidate received their degree from what you perceived as a “better” school?

During my first few years at Western, I remember hearing my Michigan friends talking about their peers and contemporaries who attended bigger schools in the state and how they hoped to compete in the future job market. That always stuck in my head. How could some people already feel defeated because of where they attended school—even before they graduated or had the opportunity to prove themselves?

If you are familiar with my favorite story, you know that the tortoise wins the race. As we get older, the moral of the story has been translated into a variety of inspirational quotes and motivational statements such as, “Slow and steady wins the race,” or “Life is a marathon, not a sprint.” Thinking about that story and how it applies to my life since graduating in 2003, I jotted down some additional lessons that have served me well as I continue my journey.

**Humility:** While my first job out of school, on my resume, was for an insurance broker here in Chicago, I actually worked as a custodial engineer for six months. After graduation, I thought firms would be lining up to hire me once I returned to Chicago—no such luck. Those six months were incredibly humbling and formative, so much in fact that I still have the janitorial uniform



hanging in my closet. That person you look down upon today could wind up as your boss tomorrow. Starting at what you perceive to be the bottom is nothing to be embarrassed about. Sometimes those experiences are what really help mold you into the person and professional you are today.

**Adaptation:** When I got to Western, I had no idea what I wanted to study. After changing my major three or four (maybe five) times, much to my parents chagrin, I dove into the economics program with the hopes of becoming a banker or pursuing a role in insurance. And as a result? Almost 14 years later, I run a public relations/communications firm, specializing in strategic, crisis and grassroots communications. Sometimes you plan for one thing and something entirely different happens. Being able to adapt and change can be the key to finding what best suits you.

**Gratitude:** This is probably the most important lesson that I learned. While in school, my experience was enriched by amazing friends with whom I've created memories that will last a lifetime, professors who were willing to shape and mold my malleable mind into something of substance, and countless other experiences in and around Kalamazoo. Those years helped me become who I am today, and I am truly grateful for it. All of us are where we are because of the service of someone else—parents, friends, co-workers, etc. Being mindful of those people and thanking them for their influence on your life is a wonderful thing.

Nothing against those who have received their educations from larger and more well-known institutions throughout the United States, but the lessons I learned at Western Michigan University are what makes this school a special place. The lessons learned and friendships forged while at Western are designed to grow and evolve over the course of a lifetime, bringing continued value and enjoyment—like a bottle of burgundy or an episode of Seinfeld.

Maybe some of the above applies to you or maybe it doesn't. Either way, if you're reading this, over the course of your lifetime, I'll be willing to bet that something significant about your life started or traces an inflection point back to Kalamazoo and our fine university. As a graduate and a representative of the University's Alumni Association, I encourage you to tap into that memory and use it as a catalyst to get involved with WMU. Any amount of time, talent or treasure that you can provide now just might be a spark for a student who may one day follow in your footsteps.

Go Broncos!

*DeRondal Bevely graduated in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in economics. He currently serves as the founder and managing director of RubyRose Strategies, a strategic communications firm in Chicago.*