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Be True to Yourself... Be Confidently You

Amber Ford

Western Kentucky University, amber.ford@wku.edu

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Amber Ford

“Be True to Yourself...Be Confidently You”

Essay Contest

March 18, 2011

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face... You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” (Eleanor Roosevelt - *You Learn by Living*)

November, 1999 found me facing a personal dilemma, give in to my desire for a higher education, and face my fear of failure; or continue my current career path knowing that eventually I would find myself at the base of an impenetrable wall halting any hope of opportunity for advancement and professional fulfillment. Oddly enough, my decision did not only impact my professional endeavors, it proved to be a profound precursor for every aspect of my life. How have I built and maintained confidence throughout my college experience? By taking the advice of Eleanor Roosevelt, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

I graduated high school in 1989 already married and with a new baby boy. I enrolled at Western Kentucky University that fall and quickly found that juggling a full-time job; full-time class schedule; new baby and a home was a challenge I wasn't quite up to. I failed miserably, and after deciding I'd had enough of school and needed a break, I dropped out in the spring of 1990. My marriage fell apart shortly thereafter, and I found employment on an assembly line to support myself and my young son. By 1996 I had worked my way up to the level of administrative assistant, and then later payroll and human resources administrator. In 1999 the position of human resources manager became available, and despite the fact that I was already doing the job, I was passed over for promotion due to my lack of education. It was both personally devastating and professionally embarrassing. Like running blindfolded headlong into a brick wall, reality hit hard! I was a 28 year old single mother with a high school diploma and

nothing to show for the 10 years since graduation, but a stack of bills, a small two bedroom rented duplex, and a 1985 Ford Escort on its last legs. This promotion would have meant the chance to finally own a home and a car that was less than 5 years old, but now...nothing; just an invitation to remain at the same desk, doing the same job. I knew what I had to do, but how could I go back to school? It had been a decade since I took algebra or wrote a paper, not to mention how long it would take to graduate.

The prospect of returning to school was mortifying to say the least. I felt old just walking around campus. I had no idea what degree program to select. Many, many times I tried to talk myself out of it. Many more times others said I was “crazy.” “Just think of all that work”, they’d say, “When will you have time to go to class?” It seemed I was defeated before I even began. Then I remembered the words of my high school English teacher, Ms. Mayhew. You see, when I was pregnant my senior year, I was “strongly encouraged” by administrators to drop out of high school and enroll in Adult Education. Ms. Mayhew thought otherwise, and I took her advice. On graduation day, she came down on the floor of Diddle Arena, hugged me and said, “I’ve never been more proud of anyone than I am of you right now. I knew you could do it!” It was then I realized that the only obstacle I had to overcome was me.

I began my Associates Degree in Business Management at Western Kentucky University’s Commonwealth School in January, 2000 and graduated in May, 2004. I completed my Bachelor’s Degree in Public Administration from Kentucky State University in May, 2010 and am currently working towards my Master’s in Public Administration due to graduate in December, 2011. So how did I build and maintain confidence throughout my college experience? First by believing in myself! Second, I never took my eyes off of the goal no matter what.

My educational journey was long, hard, and hands down the single most rewarding personal accomplishment of my life! I found plenty of supporters on campus, and with every completed semester my confidence grew until there was no question I would succeed. With my 40th birthday on the horizon, I finally understand that *confidence* is simply empowering yourself to decide your own destiny while refusing to let others do it for you.