



This is the first series where prominent Alumni are spotlighted based on their professional success and commitment to the community. This month I am honored to speak with Katherine Laster. Mrs. Laster is a proud Morgan State University MBA alumna who is currently the Assistant Controller and Assistant to the Vice President of Fiscal Affairs at Albany State University in Albany Georgia.

**Q. What was life like for you at the University?**

*Life was really great, because I had just graduated summa cum laude from the undergraduate program with a degree in Business Management and looking forward to the same level of success in graduate school as I pursued my MBA in Finance.*

**Q. What professional challenges did you face initially after receiving your MBA and what advice would you give current MBA students to overcome these obstacles?**

*Even though I had five years of work experience prior to my matriculation into graduate school, my first challenge upon graduation was I lacked professional work experience. My experience prior to graduate school was more administrative duties. I realized I needed the opportunity to prove myself so that I could put into use the theory that I had learned at Morgan.*

**Q. What advice would you give to students entering your specific industry of finance? What is the natural career path to achieve your level of seniority?**

*I would strongly recommend getting some work experience. The challenge that most MBA students have when they complete graduate school is that they have to prove themselves. They are faced with the challenge of entering a work place where seniority meets new ideas, youth and energy. Students should consider getting the work experience through either a graduate assistantship, or work study either on or off campus. Recruiters will tell you that experience is definitely a plus; however, there are a few companies that are willing to give you that entry level management position. Getting the experience prior to graduation is crucial. Also, in the financial market, it is important to stay up to day with current events in the economy, especially given the situation in our country right now. Read, and ask questions.*

**Q. If you could go back to your career at the inception, what advice would you have given yourself?**

*Follow my heart! Making lots of money should not be the only priority in finding a career. While it is important to make money upon graduating from university, it should be about your heart, your passion, what you enjoy doing daily. Yes, I thought it was about being in corporate America, sitting in a big office, behind a desk crunching numbers all day, but I realize after years of not finding fulfillment in my career that I did not follow my heart. My passion has always been working in education and giving back to my community. While the pay structure for educators has not been the most attractive career path, it should be a calling and a love for students, education and imparting knowledge. I can not personally recall, however, my mother continuously reminds me how my first grade teacher saw and spoke great things into my life. I would want to be able to do the same for some little boy or girl. Even though I am still not in the classroom, it has taken me several years after college to realize that higher education is really where I want to be, it is never too late to follow your dream.*

*While I was at Morgan, Drs. Agboh and Nwanna were the two professors that really encouraged me to go further and enroll in the doctoral program. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, I returned to the Bahamas, landed a great job and never did the doctoral program.*

**Q. From your experience, what could students do to supplement their education at Morgan to make them even more competitive and marketable?**

*First of all, everyone now understands the importance of a good education. Corporate America has become so much more competitive so it is important for you to stand out above all others. I think going above and beyond and taking on personal research, through working with professors and getting guidance will aid you in getting that competitive edge or advantage. Taking on extra tasks and skill building projects will help to build your work experiences.*

**Q. As a professional, what are ways any individual can accelerate their career development?**

*Continue to better yourself and stay updated with what is going on the field of your choice. Upgrade your skills by attending seminars and training workshops; stay abreast of new technologies, new laws and regulations. This will come through reading and research. I graduated 15 years ago and a lot has changed. It is important for me to be constantly in training and in seminars and things of that nature to stay current of the new changes. Volunteer to work on projects to improve processes that are inefficient, outdated or just simply too manual and lack productivity in your workplace...*

**Q. Has the glass ceiling ever been a factor to you?**

*No. The glass ceiling has never been a factor to me. To me, the glass ceiling is as high as I can see it.*

**Q. As an Assistant Controller and Assistant to the Vice President of Fiscal Affairs, did you always target this career? Whether you have or not, is the role fulfilling?**

*I did not always target this career choice because I saw myself working in corporate America; however, like I mentioned previously I realize that the education field is where my passion and heart lies. In my new position as the Assistant Controller and Assistant to the Vice President of Fiscal Affairs at Albany State University, my role has been extremely fulfilling. I am able to be a part of meetings and make recommendations that improve the quality of life and service given to students where I once was. I am able to make valuable contributions to processes and changes that effect students prior to graduation and entering the workforce. I am able to assist from an accounting or financial aspect as well as an academic prospective depending on which meeting I am a part of.*

**Q. Assuming you have other hopes or aspirations, do you have time to fulfill them?**

*It is extremely challenging to juggle the many hats that I have to wear. I have to be a devoted and committed mother and wife; a positive contributing employee; an active church member; a loyal and true friend; an enthusiastic exerciser; a listening sister; a loving soror (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.) mentor and advisor among other roles. There are just not enough hours in a day to do everything I want to do, but that is where prioritizing and organizing my days and weeks helps tremendously. I try to find a balance between the different hats I wear. There will always be time for improving and bettering myself when the time arises.*

**Q. What advice would you like to leave for future MBA's that are embarking on their journey in the real world?**

*Just know that the sky is the limit and you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. You have to put your total body, mind and spirit into whatever it is you desire. You have to be driven, determined and committed to the end result. There is no time for giving up and failure is not an option. The difference between the person that succeeds and the person that fails is the one that stays focused and sees their dream through to fruition. There will be bumps and obstacles, highs and lows along the way, but it's how we overcome the hurdles in our way that is most important. You cannot be deterred or allow situations beyond your control to derail you. A wise man once said, "most people don't plan to fail; they just fail to plan." So stays focused and keep your eyes on the prize and consistently press toward the mark! Know that YOU ARE ABLE!*

**By: Keyshawn Addison**