UAlbany Weekend MBA Stories – Michael Keyes
Engagement Leader, 3M Health Information Systems/Treo Solutions

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy from Daemen College in Amherst, NY in 1996, Michael began his career treating patients as a physical therapist at a small rural hospital with 20 beds in Cambridge, NY. Not only was he able to evaluate and treat out-patient orthopedic and sports injuries, he built relationships within the community, leading to an impressive 100% increase in out-patient referrals over four years.

Not surprisingly, Michael quickly embraced a leadership role and was promoted to Director of Rehabilitation, leading a team of 12 full-time equivalents. Despite solid leadership, the small community hospital was struggling through a financially tenuous period and Michael saw the writing on the wall. The hospital would be closing soon.

Embarking on a new adventure, Michael Keyes went to work at Saratoga Hospital, moving from Senior Physical Therapist to Clinical Specialist, charged with identifying and growing business opportunities for the mid-sized regional hospital with 200 beds. Duplicating his previous success of building a following of patients, he was responsible for increasing patient referrals by 25% at each of two of the three out-patient community locations over a two-year period.

“I loved helping patients succeed in their therapy,” he expresses. “But at the end of the day, I realized I felt limited. It wasn’t what I wanted to do day in and day out.” Not only was his earning potential capped out, he began to find the daily routine somewhat mundane and had an itch to advance professionally.

Seeking more intellectual stimulation and not wanting to be pigeon-holed into only treating patients, it was apparent to Michael his Bachelor degree alone wouldn’t move him into an advanced role. “Others in the field had more qualifications on the business end of things, so I started looking around at advanced degree programs,” he explains.

Two things provoked Michael to pursue his MBA. He shares, “When working at the small 20-bed hospital, the CEO promoted me but also recommended I take an accounting course to help my budgeting skills. That stuck with me and I understood the need for broad focus.” As one of the youngest and most motivated employees, Michael enjoyed the
management and leadership and also realized it was the accounting piece that had the hospital struggling for survival. The second provocation came from his father, who recommended his son pursue his MBA to open the doors of opportunity.

“I didn’t want to stop working and take on a load of debt just to get my masters,” tells Michael. “Once I make a decision, I’m pretty impatient about getting started.” His decision was to search locally for a program that wouldn’t drag out over four years in the evening. “I wanted something that was broad in focus, economical, local, and convenient to my work schedule and where I was living.”

Enter the perfect solution, the UAlbany Weekend MBA Program. “Most executives I see have advanced degrees,” says Michael. “And most of those in my industry have a Master of Public Health, which is a great degree but it’s specified, allowing less room to expand. I chose the Weekend MBA Program at Albany because of its broad offering. Healthcare is still a business and much more than just health.”

“I think one of the best things to have is an advanced degree,” he adds. “It’s a way to differentiate yourself. For me, the difference between advancing myself professionally or not was achieving my MBA.”

After graduating in 2004 with his MBA, Michael invested time determining what he wanted to do next. He followed a help wanted ad for WellCare of NY, a government contract managed care organization, and impressed the president of the division with his story of achieving his MBA while maintaining a full-time work schedule at the hospital.

“Immediately, my MBA opened doors for me,” he says with enthusiasm. “During my tenure at WellCare, the organization doubled from one million covered lives across five states in 2005 to two million covered by 2011.” The experience was very “boots on the ground,” translating well into what he is doing now.

In 2001, Michael Keyes joined Treo Solutions as a Lead Consultant, responsible for guiding clients in the use of risk-adjusted data as they introduced and implemented value-based payment programs. “I followed in the footsteps of a co-worker from WellCare,” he expounds. “We were able to work alongside the early adopters of transforming the payment of health insurance claims to providers on a patient’s behalf.”

In April 2014, 3M acquired Treo Solutions to integrate into their health information services division. “The transition of pay-per-service, which is really what’s driving healthcare cost in comparison to other industrialized nations, is not translating to better care or longer life,” Michael offers. “Through outcome-based data and risk adjustment methodology, we help pay for value rather than volume, working with clients to hold providers accountable.”

The results have been phenomenal; growing from 100,000 people in the Accountable Care Collaborative pilot program in Colorado to almost a million today and saving $100 million in medical expenses. “It’s certainly not the perfect system yet,” advises Michael. “But we’re pleased to be getting to where we can have an impact on the system, increasing patient care and reducing the overall cost of care.”

Nearly a dozen years after achieving his MBA, Michael Keyes says it continues to help him in his career. “A large part of it goes back to being part of a cohort structure,” he tells. “Almost everything we did involved presentations. I believe the biggest part of being successful in business is having the ability to aptly craft and deliver a message.”
“We all do a ‘sales’ job in some fashion,” he continues. “The work we did as a cohort, presenting our concepts and ideas, is critical to what I do today. I can see a gap between new employees who are a little green and people who have an advanced business degree. The gap lies in the ability to effectively communicate and get a strategic message across.”

For Michael, the cohort experience came with great ease. “It was a lot like my undergrad studies,” he relates. “A very hands on, problem solving, meeting of the minds type of environment that challenged everyone to put their best foot forward and glean from each other.”

“What I found over the course of my career is that the rest of the world doesn’t necessarily think the same way as I do,” Michael shares. “The cohort structure really helped me embrace this because everyone came from a very different background. I learned so much from those in other industries that I would never have known anything about.”

When he’s not executing strategies to expand business, Michael can be found racing mountain bikes, downhill skiing or playing soccer. He’s also very active in dog rescue, volunteering with a boxer rescue organization out of Philadelphia, helping find forever homes in the local area. In fact, he has two boxer rescues of his own, Potter and Josie.

Michael credits his husband Stephen Collins for not only helping him survive achieving his MBA while balancing a full-time career, but also for helping him manage life in general. “I met Stephen at the end of my first year in the MBA program,” he reminisces. “Over the course of the past 11 years, managing life would simply not have been possible without the love and support of Stephen looking out for me and life’s details.”

A school teacher in Queensbury, NY, Stephen has more time at home and makes sure everything is lined up for the couple’s success. Michael jokes, “Stephen often says, ‘I don’t understand how you manage multimillion dollar accounts but can’t manage to turn on the dishwasher!’ I am so honored to have him in my life. I would not be successful in life without him.”

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