

A Conversation with Ebony Miller, Urban Entrepreneurship Program Manager

Facilitated by **Luke Auburn**

Luke Auburn: You're listening to the RIT Professional Development podcast series. I'm your host Luke Auburn. Our guest today is Ebony Miller, program manager for the Saunders College of Business Center for Urban Entrepreneurship at RIT. She's responsible for research, development, delivery, and assessment of mission-related programming at the Center for Urban Entrepreneurship. She began her career at RIT as a senior staff specialist in the Kate Gleason College of Engineering's Office of Student Services before being appointed to her current position in 2013. We'll talk about her career path and strategies for professional development. Thank you very much for having us.

Ebony Miller: No problem.

Luke Auburn: So looking back, what were the most important steps you took towards advancing your career?

Ebony Miller: I would say the most important steps I took for towards advancing my career was making my manager at that time aware of my career aspirations and my interest in advancing with RIT.

Luke Auburn: So when did you know that you wanted to advance your career? What kind of motivated you to take action?

Ebony Miller: To be completely honest with you, when I first started at RIT, I started in a position that required an associate's degree, but I came in with a master's degree. So at the time I had just gotten laid off at the Urban League of Rochester, which was where I was previously employed before I took the job here with RIT, and I needed a job. So I applied to jobs that I knew that I was qualified for regardless of the career level they were looking for or the type of degree they were looking for. So initially, when I took that position, no, I didn't come in

the door applying for jobs immediately, but I knew RIT, for one, I wanted to be in higher education and, then, for two, I wanted to learn as much as I could learn in that position, and I wanted to grow, you know. I was -- I never wanted to be a career senior staff specialist. I wanted to -- I wanted more of a challenge.

Luke Auburn: Excellent. So that was kind of your foot in the door, and you were able to work up from there.

Ebony Miller: Yes. And honestly, I learned a lot in that position. I learned a lot about the student information system. I learned about RIT students that -- I had a lot of exposure to the students. I was the first point of contact when they entered the Office of Student Services with the College of Engineering, so I got -- I was able to develop relationships with the students and learn about their career aspirations, and also, a lot of the advising process, because a lot of the students that would approach me were there because they were -- they needed help with something, whether it be with getting their classes switched, whether they were having problems with their classes, or whether they wanted to change their major. So I learned a lot about the advising process by understanding their needs and helping to triage them. Because a lot of times they would come in and they wouldn't necessarily need to see their advisor; it was something that I possibly help them with to help ease the stress that was put on the advisor because they had a lot of students that they were working with. So I was able to learn a lot about RIT, a lot about RIT systems, a lot about the students, which helped me to be able to grow into my current position.

Luke Auburn: So who or what helped you kind of identify your direction? Where do you go for information, help, and support?

Ebony Miller: Honestly, I really didn't go to anyone. I kind of just paid attention to the type of positions that were being posted. I paid attention to my transferrable skills; I identified them, and I made sure that any positions that I was applying to were positions that were aligned with my previous work experience, my educational background, and my transferrable skills that I had identified.

Luke Auburn: So how did you establish your plan for career advancement? Was it formalized as part of your professional development plan in your previous position, or did it happen more organically?

Ebony Miller: I would say it pretty much happened more organically. Knowing myself, knowing what I'm good at, making connections, being parts of different committees so that, you know, people know who I am. You know, it's not always about what you know; it's also about who knows you and who you know. So being able to make those connections and letting people know that, you know, I have a tremendous willingness to learn.

Luke Auburn: What advice would you give to someone who wants to have a successful career?

Ebony Miller: The most important thing is to make sure you have good relationship with your supervisor. Make sure your supervisor is aware that you have aspirations to grow, because one thing that no supervisor wants is to be blindsided. You know, they want to be kept in the loop. And that way, if someone has to go back to your supervisor and say, "Well, what kind of employee was Ebony," you want them to be able to say good things about you. But if they're not aware that you have these aspirations, that's going to be kind of hard because they were blindsided. So keeping a good relationship with your supervisor and being open about your aspirations to grow.

Luke Auburn: And, finally, how do you stay current in your field today?

Ebony Miller: Well as you mentioned, a big part of my current position is the research development and delivery of mission-related programming. So to be able to do that, be able to identify programs that are needed in that area and that will work, I need to be able to know what's trending, what other entrepreneurial centers that have comparable missions to ours are doing. So constantly researching that, going to conferences, and just staying in the loop. Working with other organizations with comparable missions like the Urban League of Rochester, like SCORE, which is the Service Core of Retired Executives, the Rochester City

School District, and just making sure that we're catering to the needs of the community that we're serving. So staying current, staying connected and constant relationship management.

Luke Auburn: Ebony, thank you very much for having us today. That concludes another edition of the RIT Professional Development podcast series. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit rit.edu/cpd.

Ebony Miller: Thank you, Luke.

Luke Auburn: Thank you.