A Conversation with Lisa Hupf
IT Manager, Application and Development
Facilitated by Luke Auburn

Luke Auburn: You're listening to the RIT Professional Development Podcast. I'm your host Luke Auburn. Today's guest is Lisa Hupf, who works in RIT's Information and Technology Services Organization. She started her career at RIT in 2005 as a senior web services programmer and analyst and about a year ago, took over as applications development manager for RIT's enterprise business applications team. We'll talk about her journey and advice for others forging their own career paths. Lisa, thank you for joining me.

Lisa Hupf: Thanks, Luke.

Luke Auburn: So about a year ago, you made a career shift and took a new position at RIT. What was the inciting force for you to make the change, and how did you handle the emotions around making a career move?

Lisa Hupf: That's a great question. I would say during the last ten years, I've had the opportunity here at RIT to work in a variety of informal both project and technical leadership type roles. And, in fact, I always seem to gravitate toward those roles even before I came to RIT when I worked in industry. And I think it's because I really enjoy working with really energetic teams. I like the energy around building shared solutions with our customers. I really enjoy working with the students. So I started to work with my leadership about growing my management skills, I'd say, I don't know, several years before this opportunity came up. And because we're really invested in -- You know, there's a big investment in coaching and leadership. I did get a lot of -- I was given special opportunities to grow my skills, to grow skills around communication, resource planning, task allocation, project management. And I had kind of been doing that for a couple of years in different, you know, different jobs and different forms. So when the EBA management position opened up, it just felt like kind of the perfect time for this opportunity to kind of grow into a new role, so.

Luke Auburn: Interesting. So you made it clear with your manager that you wanted to develop that skill and they supported you in that?

Lisa Hupf: I did. You know, I had talked about it on and off for a little while, but I really wasn't committed. So once I decided that I was committed, I really did work with my leadership team to grow my skills.

Luke Auburn: And so now that you're in a formal leadership role as opposed to like project leadership, how does it differ and how is it still sort of the same?

Lisa Hupf: Well, I think it's really a very different role because you're responsible for people. And so, the skills that I focus on developing are really around creating a really, you know, kind of empowered culture for my team, you know, working with different team members' unique skills, and communication and coaching skills, being able to provide and receive direct feedback, and working with different personalities, kind of working with tools like DISC and conflict resolution and things like that. So it's really a more people focused change. So it's not just project and task focus, and I do think it's a very different role.

Luke Auburn: So at one point, you left RIT for a period of time and then ended up coming back. What was that like? What drew you back to this university?

Lisa Hupf: I did a move out of state with my husband. He took an opportunity out of state. And so I followed him to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And shortly after I had moved there, I actually had an opportunity to work remotely for RIT, to finish a large project that had been going on before I left. So I took that opportunity. And while working remotely, I really realized how much I valued that community experience that we have here at RIT. There's this real sense of shared vision, and there's a commitment to the students that I think is very unique to our culture. And I really felt that there was a lot of energy and opportunity to grow here, especially with the roll out of a new student system coming. So I moved back to Rochester really to be here for the start of the GeneSIS project. I really feel like this was a great decision for me, and it gave me a lot of new experiences and growth opportunities.

Luke Auburn: So what would you say have been the most important steps you've taken toward advancing your career?

Lisa Hupf: Well, first, I think it's being open and enthusiastic and positive about any tasks because you can learn very unexpected things from the most boring of problems. I really don't look at my career as climbing a ladder. I'm really focused -- In fact, I don't like to focus on formal structures. I really like to look at opportunities for how the experiences are going to help me grow as a person, but also what I can offer to the role or to the organization. So for me, the best way to grow is through new and challenging experiences and with the support of the people around me. And I do feel like if you're clear about what

your goals are, then you can always find coaches and mentors available to support you. And for me, that's definitely been true, and, you know, just kind of to look outside of yourself and find ways that you can help the organization move towards its goals and objectives. I think that's very recognized, and there's a lot of problems that need to be solved everywhere. And if you can identify them and try to help solve them, I think that people recognize it and help you grow.

Luke Auburn: So as a person in a highly technical position, how do you stay current in your field?

Lisa Hupf: Great question. In my role as an IT manger, I spend a lot more time looking forward to see where the industry is headed and what the strategic business needs will be of our customers so that our team can prepare for changes and continue to add value to our customers. And right now, we kind of are in this industry shift towards people purchasing Cloud and point solutions to, you know, kind of enhance the functionality of core enterprise systems. So we'll have to, as a team, be able to continue to integrate and support these new types of systems with our core system and that may require a different skill set over time. So I would definitely say looking at technical strategy and industry strategy and kind of bringing that into the role.

Luke Auburn: And throughout your career, have you had any key figures that you've looked to as mentors or role models? Like, who do you admire and why and how they help you along?

Lisa Hupf: Yeah. I'm very fortunate to be surrounded by a lot of great coaches and leaders who are very inspiring. Actually, it's really nice to be a part of an organization that kind of thinks strategically and has invested in leadership and growth. One of my first mangers that I had in industry -- I can think of two situations. So I'll give you an old one and then a current one. One of my first mangers that I worked with in industry actually wanted to move me into a management position with only a couple of years of experience and I was definitely not ready, but I had this great experience of watching a leader come in to a team where there was really a toxic relationship with the customer and a very unhappy kind of team that didn't have much trust for each other. And I watched this person kind of in a short period of time transform the customer relationship to a real partnership and then watched the team go from being very unhappy to being really proud of their product and what they delivered. And that early experience of just a few years of experience, I still go back to that experience a lot when I'm faced with certain problems. And even though it's from that time period, because I learned so much and had this great experience of watching a leader come in and transform -- You know, it was a relatively small team, maybe eight people, but it had a huge impact on me. A more current example I think would be working with Chris Booth on the startup of SITO, which is our student IT office. The student IT office, to me, was really a brand new model. First of all, the organization didn't exist. The ideas that the students would basically be self-managed, independent organization who could deliver enterprise applications for the institute. Their model was really for students by students. And I was able to see the development of something brand new from the ground up, almost like a startup because the students come out. They

done business development plans for their organization. They do their own marketing. They do their own hiring. They do their own software development. And some cases, they're finding their own customers. And I've actually spoken to some businesses who've hired students out of that program and I was so impressed. So just being part of that whole initiative from its inception had a huge influence on me. And I just think that that office can be a real differentiator for RIT. So it was very exciting. And, you know, I have so many experience I could talk about and so many mentors that I've worked with, but those are just two experiences that had a lot of influence on me.

Luke Auburn: Well, Lisa, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure. That concludes another edition of the RIT Professional Development Podcast. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit rit.edu/cpd.