Since graduating from Northeastern’s Master of Science in Project Management program in 2015, Dani Beckman has advanced from a junior project manager at financial services firm Wells Fargo to a senior-level portfolio manager at transportation company Amtrak.

“It took me three years to get my master’s, but all that knowledge I retained and used,” Beckman says. “It all starts with that foundation of knowledge. You have to prove your track record. Every role I’ve had, I’ve gotten promoted, and the knowledge I gained at Northeastern helped with that.”

It wasn’t until Beckman discovered Northeastern University—Charlotte that she realized project management was the career path she was meant to pursue. She had studied pre-law before switching to business, but once in an office, recognized the opportunities there were to do a little bit of everything. She enjoyed wearing different hats and being the one to keep people organized and projects on track.

“I had been constantly thinking, ‘What am I going to get my master’s degree in?’” Beckman says. “Then this light bulb went off in my head.”

When she saw that the Charlotte campus offered a master’s in project management, it clicked; that was an area she dabbled in daily without ever realizing it. After enrolling in classes, her decision was solidified. The lessons she learned on cost and budgeting she was able to apply to her day job and, although new to her at first, is now a skill she is training her other colleagues on.

Her coursework also better prepared her for her Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, which she later enrolled in prep classes for.

“The classwork helped me help my study group,” Beckman says. “I was able to explain the concepts behind why the answers were what they were.”

Since graduating, she’s leveraged her Northeastern network of classmates and professors to meet other project managers and advance in the field. Jennifer Young Baker, an adjunct faculty member at Northeastern University—Charlotte and director of Amtrak’s Project Management Center of Excellence, is now Beckman’s boss.

At Amtrak, Beckman is helping standardize the company’s project management practices. She’s created templates and written standards around topics like communication and quality management so that colleagues within Amtrak who might not have a PMP or other kind of credential can still manage their projects successfully.

For Beckman, enabling others to see themselves as project managers is critical.

“Just because your title is not ‘project manager’ doesn’t mean you’re not doing the work,” she says. “Anything you do is a project. If it starts one day and ends another and it’s different, it’s a project. If you have to take more than one step to finish it, it’s a project.”

After choosing project management as a career, Beckman realized how much the industry has also impacted her personal life.

“It has helped me see the world and my life in a whole different way,” Beckman says. “Now I break things out into smaller sections. Nothing looks big and ominous. You always get there in the end.”

Alumni Spotlight: Dani Beckman ’15

How a Master’s in Project Management Helped One Alumna Rethink Her Career Path

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