

May Van M'89

Please provide your biographical information.

I have lived in West Chester since 1982. It is where I spent most of my adult life so it is home to me. We moved from Toronto when my husband was offered a job here. I decided to pursue an MBA degree after working for several years. I wanted to advance my career at a faster pace. I started the program with Villanova but transferred to WCU after one semester. As a working mother, fighting with the traffic on Route 30 to get to school after work was not the most effective use of my time. At the time, WCU just established its MBA program. I am one of the graduates of the inaugural class. I did take my time to finish the program. I received my MBA in Management from WCU in 1989.

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

I am the Founder of Brelyn Coaching and Consulting. After leading businesses and developing teams for over 30 years, I have the experience, skills and knowledge to make a difference in the lives of professionals and business owners. On the coaching side, I help clients with career management and transition, performance and skills improvement and leadership capacity strengthening.

What is a typical day like at work?

A typical day for me involves working with clients and developing network and business. I also try to take time on a daily basis to invest in my own growth, intellectually and physically. I usually start my day with meditation and working out.

What have been the biggest challenges at work?

Owning my business gives me the freedom to adjust my work and schedule based on my clients' needs. I enjoy working with my clients so it is almost stress-free work.

What do you enjoy most about your current position?

The most satisfying part of my job is making a difference in the lives of my clients. Nothing beats guiding a client to identify her true passion, facilitating a client to make a necessary career change or encouraging a client to create his own career future. Coaching is all about guiding clients to find their passion and fulfill their potential.

What skills, talents, and other traits are useful and necessary to do your job?

To be a good coach, one needs to truly care about his or her clients. In addition to coaching skills developed from years of mentoring and advising my staff and taking coaching training from a professional organization, I would say ability to be empathetic is another trait a successful coach needs to have.

Do you have a favorite or funny story about work?

I was supposed to start a new job based in Palo Alto, California on September 11, 2001 when the terrorists struck. I remember vividly the emotional response of the passengers when we landed safely a few days later on one of the first flights out of Philadelphia. For 18 months, I flew to CA to work. It was during the days when carry-on luggage was randomly selected for inspections at the gate. It was the most stressful and interesting period of my career.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I believe in paying forward. After achieving success in the corporate world, it is time to give back. I spend sizable amount of my time volunteering or serving on non-profit boards. My primary interests are social justice, education and combating racism and sexism. Because I have passion for these causes, I enjoy the activities associated with them. I also enjoy travel, 40 states and 40 countries and counting, and music. But most importantly, I love spending time with my grandchildren.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I see myself continue to guide my clients to be the best they could be so their professional goals become a reality.

How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

I was able to learn from several of my professors who clearly cared about their students. One professor, in particular, helped me realize that a great leader, first and foremost, helps others succeed. My MBA degree from West Chester also showed my commitment to self-improvement and my ability to persevere with many competing priorities.

What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments (both personally and professionally)?

When I first came out of college, I never thought I would end up running a large business with 1,200 employees or be a commencement speaker at WCU. I attribute what I have been able to accomplish in life to a desire to make a difference and working really hard to make it happen. I also encounter many people who helped me along the way. My accomplishments are theirs as well.