



Women in Leadership Case Study

Myrian Lazo, Corporate Planning & Performance Manager

My career journey started at an early age. I left school with not a single qualification to my name at 15 years old. This was not through my own doing, but from a result of my parents deciding to sell everything we had and move from the Falklands to Australia. Six months later we returned to the Falklands. I really wanted to go back to school, but this was not an option, and I had to find work and a place to stay because we were homeless. I went from place to place, and had three jobs (waitressing, childminding, cleaning) on the go to pay my rent.

It was during these early years into adulthood, whilst working several jobs and lacking direction, that I realised I wanted to progress and improve my life. I was determined - saving money to pay for evening classes, I gained 3 GCSE's in English, Maths and Spanish within a year. At the age of 16, I achieved a pool bronze medallion and qualified as a lifeguard at a local Leisure Centre. This was my first foray into academic studies and my first taste of what progression felt like - and what it could do to improve my life.

A few years later, I worked as an Auxiliary Nurse and I absolutely loved it. I did this for three years and it felt like my vocation. I had plans to go on to study and become a qualified nurse. Unfortunately, this ended abruptly due to an occupational injury (sciatica), which ended that career path. I now live with sciatica. I was devastated that this career path I had envisaged for myself – my path to a better life – had just disappeared. Thankfully, I got a job as a Head Cashier at a large company, which brought about new learning experiences in finance. A year later, I felt it was time to move on and progress my career to something more aligned to my interests.

“My job needs to challenge me, push me out of my comfort zone and broaden my thinking. I want to use my experience and knowledge to make a difference, whilst continuously learning – and applying that wherever I am.”

I digressed from Head Cashier to Learning Support Assistant, working at a Secondary School, supporting children with disabilities and additional support needs. I was there for a couple of years and I absolutely loved the role. I found my vocation again. I felt value in the difference I made and loved to see the children develop and grow in self-esteem. In 2000, I left the Falklands and moved to Scotland to start a new life. One of my first jobs was as a Recruitment Assistant for Fife Constabulary. I enjoyed the role, gaining new skills, expanding my experience and knowledge. In the back of my mind I wanted to return to education, so I handed in my resignation and embarked on to full-time HND in Childcare and Education course with Lauder College - with the ambition of opening my own nursery. Unfortunately, after completing the first year, my marriage ended and I had to return to full time employment and find a place to live, resulting in that career path coming into disarray.

Always an optimist, I saw an opportunity and applied for a post with Victim Support as a Diversity Co-ordinator, supporting victims of hate crime, in 2005. I thoroughly enjoyed the role and my career progression within the organisation. Over the course of eight and a half years I progressed from Diversity Co-ordinator to Regional

Manager, which unfortunately came to an end in 2014, due to redundancies. During my time with Victim Support, I studied Health and Social Care with the Open University, always believing I would return to the Health or Care sector role - in one form or another. In hindsight, the redundancy was a blessing in disguise, as I was becoming too comfortable in my role and wasn't feeling as challenged or working outside of my comfort zone.

“Work is like life, you have to roll with the punches. I've had a number of things happen that have set my career back – my physical health, relationship breakdowns and redundancy – but each took me in different direction - and each prompted me to think more creatively and pushed me out of my comfort zone. I'm now always thinking about what I can do next. Career resilience has been really important in my journey and this is where transferable skills and a thirst for knowledge set you apart from others. This mindset will challenge you and unsettle you – and that's what makes you take a leap of faith work-wise – don't just settle because you feel comfortable, there is so much more out there.”

I quickly moved into my next role as an Advice Services Manager for Citizens Advice. I enjoyed the role job, it challenged me and I embraced it, learning so many new skills, including people management, and also learning more about the person I was developing into. Although the role was interesting, I wanted to progress - but career progression was limited within the organisation. Never one to sit back and relax in my career or learning, in 2015, I embarked on a Leadership Management course with the Institute of Leadership and Management, which gave me a new appetite to embark on an online MSc in Business Management with Napier University. It was a challenge, working full time and studying for my masters during evening and weekends, it took over my life for 18 months – every spare minute would be spent studying, preparing assignments and eventually my dissertation. I basically didn't have much of a social life between work and study. I don't believe in doing anything in half measures, and I graduated from Napier University with an MSc in Business Management in 2018.

“I really do believe that attitude is the most important thing when it comes to career progression. Opportunities didn't just fall at my feet, it's was to me to make things better for myself. I focus on making positive choices, choices that will develop my skills and knowledge and spark my interest. My whole career has happened through sheer determination, hard work and mental strength, even when things elsewhere in my life aren't going to plan. You really have to want it. You have to work damn hard for it. You have to earn it. It doesn't happen any other way.”

I stayed with Citizens Advice until I saw the post of Corporate Planning and Performance Manager at SCRA advertised. This was everything I was looking for and fitted the bill with my experience, qualifications and where my passion was perfectly. I was completely delighted when I got the job in December 2019. Since starting with SCRA, I have embarked on obtaining my PRINCE2 practitioner project management certification – I must be a glutton for punishment!

My path to where I am today is not straightforward and probably quite unconventional. It is a progressive meandering road, and I am so grateful that has been case. Whatever has pushed me back has also propelled me forwards. Where do I see myself in future? Well, at the moment I am embracing my role within SCRA, enjoying every day and every new challenge. In the future, I'm striving towards director or equivalent level, hopefully within the next five years. I know I can't stay



static; I need to challenge myself. I love working in SCRA and there are definitely opportunities for career progression. I am open minded about where my career might take me next. I don't like to pigeon-hole myself and, as much as I like variety and change, I am also very loyal. I don't move from organisation to organisation easily, there has to be something considerably different for me to make the decision to move. My niche is most definitely in strategic planning and performance, I visualise the bigger picture and enjoy putting all of the pieces together to make sense of it all. My main working goal is to influence positive change and contribute to continual improvement, whilst always feeling like I am making a difference is paramount for me. I see strategic posts as a way that I can really tangibly influence widespread impact.

“Career progression to me doesn't mean promotions, it is about what I can contribute. It's not only about my own personal development – although that's important – it's about how I can make a difference. Whatever I do – in the past, now or in the future – has always, and will always be about where I can add value and social contribution. It's not about progression per se, this concept of climbing the ladder doesn't excite me as much as the opportunity to make a real tangible difference to people's lives.”

Currently, in SCRA, I am keen to learn more about CSAS and how this works. I think having this understanding would contribute to my overall thinking about what it is that SCRA does and how it works on a daily basis. One part of my job that I really enjoy is working with all the different areas of the organisation and learning what they all do and how they operate. That is so important when it comes to strategic planning and decision making. I genuinely believe that understanding operations enables a more grounded approach to strategic planning. The human element is vital to understand the impact decision making has on all people across the organisation, regardless of role. Taking a holistic view, is the most important element in ensuring sound strategic planning; otherwise you're planning without understanding the effects on people or the organisation as a whole.

“All experience is learning experience; there's useful learning in every opportunity. So put them all to good use. To progress you have to start somewhere, we all do. And if you don't like it, change it. That's the way I've approached my career, and so far it's worked for me.”

