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CAREER STORY

This is my career story to show we don't all set off with clear career pathways, not many people do.

As a determined and stubborn 16-year-old, I made it perfectly clear to my Mum and Dad that although I did not have a clue what I wanted to do, the one thing I knew for certain was that I didn't want to stay on at school. The thought of doing A Levels and Degrees just meant another 5/6 years without working or earning any money and was not for me.

So, in August 1988 I started on a YTS (Youth Training Scheme) at a Solicitors as an Office Junior, being paid YTS rate of £28.50 a week. This lasted about 4 weeks, before the Accounts Manager decided she wanted a trainee just for Accounts (team of 2) who she could train. Well, that person became me, my pay doubled, I left the YTS and became a full-time employee. The celebrations around my improved financial situation didn't last long, my Mum and Dad gave me 2 weeks grace before the housekeeping charge was introduced and my Dad signed me up for a Private Pension at 16 years and 5 months. Surely, I can afford to retire now!

I wanted to share my studying story, hopefully to inspire others to either start, resurrect, or keep motivated with the challenge. There wasn't any financial support or release time from the Solicitors for accountancy exams, so in 1990 I signed up for 2 nights a week at Bolton College of Higher Education to complete the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT). I still didn't have "my car" so I had to trudge to college 2 nights a week after work. Fortunately, I had Dad's taxi to pick me up at the end of a long day.

With the first two years completed, and just before the start of my final year, I got a new job and joined the NHS finance family as a Band 2 finance assistant, raising invoices to GP Fundholders. There was still no financial or time release support with my new role, so I then made the crazy decision to study the final year as distance learning, it took two years rather than the planned one year, as too many other distractions in my life but eventually I qualified in 1994.

Head down in my new job, AAT behind me, I then cracked on and managed to get a promotion into the Management Accounts team at the Children's Hospital (Band 4). I'd had a break of about 2 years then and the studying conversations/thoughts started again. I began studying for CIMA in 1996 with financial support from the Trust and ½ days release – fantastic.

I worked hard with my studies and gained more work experience, progressing through the Management Accounts structure with some challenging internal interviews up to a temporary Band 7 Finance Business Partner role covering for Maternity leave. I loved my job, but my career was stuck at a ceiling as I stumbled over one final exam that I just could not pass, so I decided to pay for a paper review. This was the funniest thing I've ever read, because you got your exam paper back with the examiner's comments on it (I still have this in my loft) and it quotes "you're writing about the right topic but not getting to the point and/or answering the actual question".

My lesson was learnt, and I managed to pass my final CIMA exam in the summer of 2000. I then got a new job at Greater Manchester Ambulance Service in the Autumn of that year...done.... a qualified position as Head of Management Accounts.

The ambulance trusts merged and North West Ambulance Service was formed. The finance team got bigger, along with more opportunities.

I have never actually had a career path or goal; my priorities have always focused on:

- what is right for me and my family.
- Feeling happy, fulfilled, and challenged in my work.
- aligned values/purpose of the place I work and the type of people I want to work with.

Whenever I talk to anyone about my job and the role finance plays in the NHS, my primary message is around how we support our clinical and non-clinical colleagues, so they can give the best care to patients. I am extremely aware of the pressures the emergency and front-line colleagues are facing, for me, it is fantastic to work as part of a team that can use their finance and analytical skills to help make the best use of public resources.

I love working for the NHS, and I love working in finance. It is such a varied role and you work with so many different people, but they are all driven by the same motivation around caring about and a desire to improve the NHS. The last 32 years have flown by, and I remain extremely proud of the work I do.

Two Steve Jobs quotes:

"You cannot connect the dots looking forward, you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust something, your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever."

"Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition, they somehow already know what you truly want to become."