
From Expert to Novice or Expert to Expert? The Transition from Practice to Academia

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In 2016 I would never have guessed that a year later I would encounter a significant career change. Since the age of 17 I was incredibly passionate about the Ambulance Service and I was overjoyed when I got my Paramedic registration, aged 20, after two years training at university and in-service. The sense of achievement was astonishing and since then I have enjoyed every minute of being a Paramedic. When I began my development into management with Great Western Ambulance Service (as it was at the time) my passion grew and I knew that I was able to make a larger difference than operating solely as a Paramedic. In my final year with the NHS I was extremely proud to have led a fantastic team in the Ambulance Service and to have been involved in significant projects and change, where I could visibly witness the enhancement the care delivered to patients. As a senior leader for a number of years I have always enjoyed supporting the development of my staff and there's no greater privilege than to be a part of someone else's development. That's when I noticed an opportunity with Coventry University. I spent many hours deliberating what was the 'right' option for me, at that moment in time. I opted to take a chance, after all my career plan led me to academia in later life anyway. Then just before Christmas 2016 I received the call that would change my career, the decisive moment of what I was going to do next. I took the chance!

Three months later I went from expert of an organisation to complete novice in my new organisation. The feeling was bizarre, I was the person people used to come to, I struggled then finding myself having to seek that person in my new place. Did I make the right choice? I asked myself this every day for the first two weeks, each time answering "yes". Whilst processes, culture and the environment are different, there are many similarities that add reassurance and comfort. Many people reassured me that despite feeling like a novice in the organisation, I was actually the expert of my field. This small sentence changed the way I thought about my new job, with the added reassurance that it will all *fall into place* once I have completed a cycle of the academic calendar! Sometimes it's difficult to recognise your own transferable skills but there are so many from practice that are highly relevant in academia. For example, the similarity between 'staff' and 'students'. As any good leader should do; you get to know your staff, you support them, direct them, coach them and discipline them if required. The same applies with students, the only difference being they've paid to be at the University!

The crucial test of my decision to move came during the horrendous terrorist attacks around the UK. Previously I would have been acting in some manner, despite not being in the area of the attacks, however I found myself unable to assist or act. This created a sense of unease within me. Had I actually made the right choice? What could I do to help now? Needless to point out, my mind was in active all night. My training had kicked in but I was helpless. I quickly realised the link of what I know about these circumstances that could support students in their future careers - I discovered how I couldn't be so helpless. I remembered that I was the expert of my field, I began to tweet and utilise the scenarios in my next teaching session. I'd done it! The transition was complete for me at that point. All of my skills from my previous senior leader positions fell into place - so from then I became an organisational sponge! Absorbing all the information I could gather on processes, the culture and the environment so that I didn't feel like a 'novice' anymore. I recognised that I won't get back to the level I was at previously, with the decision making responsibility and staff management, knowing the details of how the organisations operates - but that was all partly why I left the NHS in the first place. At times it has been difficult not being the decision maker, when it's been a key attribute of my working career so far, but I've not let that restrict me. In fact it has been encouraging as my managers have been extremely supportive. They have assisted my transition incredibly well. Remembering this sentence really helped me in academic culture; *you only know what you know*. It may sound cliché but it's entirely accurate.

Coventry University has been extremely welcoming, friendly and supportive. I have not worked for an organisation who are *really* interested in you. Some ex-managers have been, I can't fault them, but never an entire organisation who wants to support you and develop you. I feel extremely privileged to be a part of such a collaborative team, which recognises individual strengths, the expertise that you offer and support you with your development.

I've gathered quickly that moving into a new organisation we are always novices, and perhaps this stays with you through time in organisations, no matter what level you work at - the added benefit of academia is that from day one you are the expert of your field!

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Published on : Mon, 24 Jul 2017