

Taking the long road to your goal

At the age of 28, RUTH CAMERON decided she wanted to work in a library. She didn't know it then, but it would take another 18 years before she stepped into a paid position in the industry of her dreams. Here's a timeline of her career trajectory.

What was your first job?

My first job was as an office assistant with a small legal firm. I progressed to the position of legal secretary, but I was bored. All my friends were at uni. I thought that I would go to uni too.

What was next?

In 1994, recently graduated, newly-married and looking for a house, I had to find a full-time paying job. I went back to secretarial work.

What inspired you to work in a library?

In 1996, my sister moved to Oxford University on a Kobe Scholarship. We visited her and she took us on a tour of one of the libraries at Oxford where she worked part time. It was beautiful; here were people who wanted to learn and other people who wanted to help them. (Why hadn't I seen this when I was at uni?)

How did you start moving towards achieving your dream?

I enrolled part time at TAFE and then in the Graduate Diploma of Applied Science (Library and Information Management) at Charles Sturt University.

By this time I had two kids under five, and a husband who was often away for work and the Army Reserve. Living in a regional centre with a dial-up internet connection, doing a correspondence course and trying to contribute intelligently to the online study conversations – in between kids' naps, daycare and my part-time work – was a real challenge. But it was great. I was learning.

What happened after you finished your studies?

I graduated (again) in 2004 but couldn't find a job. So ... back to work as a legal secretary. But I also volunteered one day a week at a local public library. I was interviewed for a full-time position there and just missed out by 1.5 points.


In 2013, nine years later, one of my friends mentioned that there was an administrative job going at the local university. It wasn't library work, but I would have my foot in the door. I got the job and spent the next 12 months learning the glorious bureaucracy that is university administration.

How did you finally crack it?

A casual university library position was advertised. I was asked in for an interview and was given a lending team job for three days a week. Of course, I was only on a short-term contract. But the next January I got a call to ask if I could start work the following week. It was in a smaller, more specialised library that was undergoing renovation and transitioning to a new service model, so I would be learning from the ground up.

I have now been here for two years. There are working groups to volunteer for, hilarious and dedicated colleagues and, of course, I'm contributing to the education experience of students from Australia and all over the world.

What would you like others Members to know about achieving career objectives?

My message to you is don't give up. It does get frustrating and depressing, but keep your eyes – and your mind – open. The job I applied for, which led to this one, wasn't even in a library. The struggle is worth it. 

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