

How an Open Mind Led to Open Doors

Most of us can reframe our personal stories to identify a High Impact Practice that affected our lives – whether we knew it at the time or not. At any life/career stage, it is still possible to make conscious choices that will give us joy, enhance a work-life balance and make us better humans. These HIPs come in many forms: Collaborating with co-workers. Being kind, grateful and positive. Stopping and smelling the roses. Watching a sunset. Creating and sustaining healthy habits. Betting on yourself. Knowing that asking the right questions and truly listening to responses can be life-altering.

For Emily Hamilton '18, her open-mindedness and willingness to learn led to the HIP that changed her career trajectory.

Hamilton grew up in Buhl, Idaho, the youngest of three children. Her great-grandfather, J.C. Hamilton, was one of the principal founders of Farmer's Bank. Emily Hamilton expected that she would go into the family business, the first woman in her family to do so, joining her father and brothers. "My career path in my mind was very black and white," she recalled. Her education choices reflected the planning for that outcome. Hamilton was set on The College of Idaho for a liberal arts education with an emphasis in finance. It was a crucial choice in Hamilton's career path.

The College requires all Business Administration seniors complete at least one, two-credit internship. Hamilton had already met the requirement the summer before her junior year, working as an intern in the family bank, as well as completing a summer school session abroad at the National University of Ireland in Galway the summer before her senior year. She had the ideal spring semester planned for her senior year: 12 credits, no classes on Friday, and no plans for another internship. She knew she was going into banking. Accounting and Finance Instructor John Danielson '76, who was head of the College's Business Advisory Council (BAC), persuaded Hamilton to go out to lunch on a Friday with Jon Bunten '06, co-founder and managing partner of RecorGroup, an Idaho-based food broker, to discuss an internship opportunity with his firm.

Hamilton was hesitant about the idea. She didn't need another internship to graduate. A career in banking was a guaranteed certainty. Her plan was to work 5-10 years in Boise for a larger bank and then return to the family bank and work for her father. This was RecorGroup's first internship for a College of Idaho student. Danielson urged her to apply, saying "It's only for three or four months. It's a good experience. You won't know if it doesn't interest you unless you give it a try." Hamilton said she'd think about it over the weekend.

Like Hamilton, Bunten was a business administration major with an emphasis in finance. However, he had spent four years in the military before joining the College. Those years taught him lessons in hard work and leadership. When he arrived in Caldwell, his original intent was to study biology with the goal of advancing to medical school. However, through a job he worked at St. Luke's Medical Center, scribing for doctors as they completed their rounds, he learned he did not want to go into the medical field. Rather, the finance industry was more interesting to him. And thanks to the critical thinking skills he was already honing at the College, he knew it was time to change direction.

"A liberal arts education, done right, allows for introspection and personal growth," Bunten said. "You can learn for the sake of learning and feed your soul. It allows you not to be pigeonholed. It gives you

opportunities to open your mind to new things and take risks in learning that help you grow and find fulfillment in life.”

Those were just some of the pivotal lessons Bunten learned before graduating in 2006. By the time he was having lunch with Hamilton and pitching the internship opportunity, he had spent more than a decade in sales and finance and was now several years into his career managing RecorGroup. Hamilton knew Bunten through her work with the College’s Business Advisory Council and had a good rapport with him. As she considered the opportunity, she felt this internship was a chance to try something new and develop a different skillset to add to her business tool kit, which appealed to her. Importantly, she also knew that banking would always be there for her. She thought about the opportunity all weekend. And on Monday made the call to say “yes.”

The RecorGroup internship experience represented an absolute right turn in her career path. All because she was open to an unexpected opportunity and was willing to learn something new.

Her internship didn’t lead to a career at RecorGroup right away. After graduation, Hamilton began the officer training program with Idaho Independent Bank, per her original career plan. Two-and-a-half months later a position with RecorGroup opened and Bunten gave Hamilton a call to offer her the job. She said “yes” again to RecorGroup and has not looked back. Hamilton has worked for the company for a little over four years and has been promoted twice. She loves everything about her job: her co-workers, the clients she interacts with, and especially, the travel opportunities that come with the job. In thinking about it, Hamilton said, “if I had said ‘no’ to that internship, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Hamilton offers up this advice to others looking to blur the lines between college and career, as she did. “Listen to all ideas,” she said. “At the end of the day, I was glad I listened to different ideas. From a young age, my parents instilled in me the value of personal connections. Sit in the front row, ask questions, listen. Build relationships and take every opportunity you can to learn something through those relationships.”

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