

1-27-2020

God Led Me Back to UD'

Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina

eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "God Led Me Back to UD" (2020). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 203.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina/203

This Blog is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in President's Blog: From the Heart by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlange1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

'God Led Me Back to UD'

 udayton.edu/blogs/president/2020/01/mba_graduate_essay.php



Monday January 27, 2020

By Eric F. Spina

(I recently received a heartwarming email from Michael Nichols '98 '19, who wrote about how the University of Dayton's MBA@Dayton program changed his life, teaching him some unforgettable lessons in servant-leadership. After I shared his story at winter commencement, I asked him to offer a longer reflection. Here's his essay.)

One of the great mysteries of life is how we learn — and learn anew — its greatest lessons.

My journey with the University of Dayton began nearly 25 years ago when I traveled from my hometown of Cleveland to live in Marycrest Hall and start classes as a biology major. I returned to my alma mater in 2017 as part of the inaugural cohort of the online MBA@Dayton and am now the proud recipient of two degrees from this great institution.

Though both programs gave me a strong educational base of knowledge, sustaining friendships and top-level leadership skills, it was my most recent experience that truly drove home for me what it means to be part of the Flyer community.

This is likely more my fault than anything else, but I missed the “spirit” piece when I was younger. And I never anticipated learning it through an online program, where people assume that it is challenging to build a sense of community because your classmates are scattered across the country. But UD’s program is different.

When I returned to campus for the program’s servant-leadership immersion weekend, I discovered what it means to serve first and lead second. I don’t want to take away from any of the other courses I completed, or the tremendous business knowledge I gained from the many excellent professors — but this weekend was truly a game changer. Through classes, executive panels, a poverty simulation, service projects and reflection, I saw firsthand how impactful one person can be when he or she seeks to serve others.

Leadership authority Stephen Covey talks about the necessity for a ‘paradigm shift’ that allows us to understand the perspectives of others in an empathetic way. This weekend did that for me. It shifted how I looked at life, business and my interactions with those I have the honor of leading. Leadership in business doesn’t have to be exclusive of empathy, vulnerability and faith. Exhibiting these traits actually makes you a better leader.

Though every well-rounded executive needs to know finance, marketing and analytics, true leaders serve others. The tragedy is that this isn’t a revolutionary thought. I’m sure I could have discovered this at UD when I was an undergrad, but I simply wasn’t at a place in my life to fully understand the lesson.

As I left Dayton that weekend, the words of business dean John Mittelstaedt keep coming back to me: “You cannot lead what you do not love, and you cannot save what you do not serve.”

God led me back to UD to build upon my education, but more importantly to fill in a missing piece — a sense of community, that endearing love for what this university family and its founders emulate.

— Michael Nichols ’98 ’19 splits his time working as a physician assistant in anesthesia in Atlanta and running a small management consulting firm that develops healthcare education programs. He’s the married father of two boys with a third on the way. As part of UD’s servant-leadership immersion program, he visited the student neighborhood with his teammates to see his old house at 36 Evanston, where they met “an awesome group” of roommates — all born the year he first graduated from UD.)