

So, you want to be a product manager? Podcast Transcript

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Shradha Acharya:

Greetings everyone. My name is Shradha Acharya and I'm a second-year MBA student at University at Buffalo School of Management. I would like to thank you for listening to our podcast featuring Tejaswini Kumar, a former UB student who graduated in 2022 with Master of Science in Management Information System. Tejaswini is now a product manager at Walmart, and in this episode, we will delve into her experiences, knowledge and perspective during her time here at UB while pursuing her MS and MIS. We will also discuss how UB helped her achieving her career goals.

Hi, Tejaswini, and welcome back. It's nice to see you around. So I'll be asking you a few questions. Feel free to just have an answer in a brief way or maybe a line or two. So we will cover not almost all the questions, but then we'll cover maybe five to six or seven question. It depends. Okay?

Tejaswini Kumar:

Awesome. Thank you, Shradha. Yep. [inaudible 00:01:00].

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah. So what did you pursue immediately? I mean, we all know what did you pursue, but just to have a brief, what did you do after that? So after graduation specifically from UB, and how did that lead you to the current position? How UB have helped you to lead to your current position right now?

Tejaswini Kumar:

Oh, sure. So thank you for having me here and for this beautiful question. Very well-framed. So I think, when I signed up for my Masters in Management Information System at the University at Buffalo, I was pretty sure that I wanted to land a product management or a product marketing management role. I was so sure about it. So all the steps that I took even at UB, including selecting the electives or taking up certain projects, I did it with that in mind. And definitely, I think the staffs and even my professors have pushed me a lot. And I am here in the same role that I wanted, and that is my current role. I'm a product marketing manager with Walmart.

Shradha Acharya:

Amazing. Amazing. Yeah. So you might have faced a lot of challenges. So what were some of the challenges you faced during your studies or in early career, and how did you overcome them?

Tejaswini Kumar:

Oh, that's again a great question. So I think a couple of challenges that most students go through, the first one being that I moved to a totally different country with a totally different culture. The scenario was very different. And I wouldn't call it homesickness, but I definitely did miss mom and dad so much and overcome that. And to make Buffalo my home, it took me a couple of months, I can say, but I found great friends, touch wood, that worked out.

And I think another important thing is time management, because to be MS-MIS, a short course, but you have to submit your assignments on time, you have to make sure... At the same time, I also wanted to have a good social life, so managing both was a little difficult. But yeah, I mean, you'll get to know the tricks and tips around it. You will look at other people, you will learn.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

So yeah, that. And the third thing is definitely, during a job search, that anxiety and if you land a job or not, but if you follow the right strategies and networking is the game-changer here.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

Just networking. Or even now you can learn, even if you're not good at it. I think that really helped me overcome my fear of not landing a job.

Shradha Acharya:

Exactly. I totally agree with you. Having said that, even time management, I have learned after coming here in UB, in my course, MBA, and it's really game-changing. How you do it, how you approach. And

networking, as you mentioned, I feel like that's the main thing once you landed here in United States, or maybe in any country. Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

Totally, yeah.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah, absolutely. I know our skills are totally different. We have gained a lot more skills after coming here in UB, but what are the skills or knowledge do you think are most important for the success in your field right now?

Tejaswini Kumar:

And can I also add about how UB helped me get through-

Shradha Acharya:

Exactly. Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

I think, currently in my role, there are three or four skills which are super important, and those are management skills that I would not have learned in tech school or undergrad. And at UB, because of my Masters in MIS, and every course and every assignment has actually pushed me to gain these skills-

Shradha Acharya:

[inaudible 00:04:40].

Tejaswini Kumar:

... that the number one thing is prioritization. Now, if you say, even during my course at UB, there were so many things that were coming at me, right?

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

There were assignments, and then I was also part of clubs. That, and my student assistant role. And then there were so many things. And at the same time, I wanted to go out, party, socialize. So much.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

But at the same time, I knew what I had to prioritize. My grades came first to me, so I put that first. So just like how I learned the skill and I started getting better at it at UB, right now in my job, it's helping me so much. You won't believe it. Even all the emails that I'm getting, I make a list. I make a task list. That's also a skill I learned at UB just to stay organized. It's really helping me at my job because I know that, depending on the deadline, what to put first, which is more important than the other. So that's definitely one skill that I learned at UB.

And other skill definitely that is helping me with the job other than prioritization is time management. That also I learned at UB, and my communication skills. I think, at UB, there's this other practice of culture. I think, with every subject, you are asked to present or deliver a case study or a presentation, so that definitely encourages you to talk more. You won't have stage fear by the time you leave UB.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

That you can make sure of. They make sure of it. And I think these are definitely some of the things that have helped me land my role also.

Shradha Acharya:

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you have covered a lot more questions in that the educations, how MS-MIS have helped you to gain those skill, how professors, and also... Moving to next question, you mentioned networking is the most important thing, so what resources or networking opportunities do you recommend to the future students who are willing to join UB for some kind of MS master program and who are looking to break into their field?

Tejaswini Kumar:

Right. So I definitely think, even at UB, there are multiple networking opportunities. I was part of one, I think. I attended the entrepreneurship bootcamp was organized by Blackstone LaunchPad.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

Yeah, over there. Actually not just by going there, but even staying back and networking after the event, I got to meet so many interesting people who had so many ideas that were simply bomb. And the best part is we are friends still date after that event. Because a lot of like-minded people you work.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

So that was one of the events. And another one that I was part of was Product at UB. So we had a conference kind of a thing which was yearly, which was a two-day event. And our seniors were the ones who helped us organize it. That also helped me build contacts, product management-related contacts. Actually, and even around the US.

So that networking opportunities were definitely helpful. And it's not just about networking on LinkedIn, right?

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

Person meeting face-to-face is definitely a big plus. So other than conferences, by resources do you mean what I prepared or how I prepared for my role?

Shradha Acharya:

Yes, like the resources you used to land up getting your job maybe? Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

Yes. So for product management, I would specifically recommend Exponent, our platform where you can go and practice your skills. There are so many questions. They even teach you how to answer these product questions. There's strategy. Just depending on your role, if you're getting into product marketing, there's coaching for that. And then there's estimation questions. Totally depending on what you want to practice. And you can give and receive mocks, interviews. So Exponent definitely helped me in my studies.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah, perfect. I mean, you actually have combined all my questions in one. And you answered the skill, the knowledge and how important to gain those skills prior going to any professional and working environment. And people who not having much of experience, especially in that industry, so what kind of knowledge, what platform they should use.

I would just ask you the last question. What advice do you have for those, actually, who are considering a graduate management degree, especially from University at Buffalo?

Tejaswini Kumar:

This might be cliché, but just clear your eyes and go for it.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah. That's very short and sweet.

Tejaswini Kumar:

Yeah, I mean, definitely I don't think no other course or... I'm not sure if there's no other course. There might be other courses, but at UB, you get what you want. You can choose whichever track. You want to get into product, you can get into product. You want to get into cybersecurity, there's a field for that.

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

[inaudible 00:09:48] graduated with me have landed such diverse roles. I can't even begin to wrap my head around it. I'm like, "How many roles? Just watch," right?

Shradha Acharya:

Yeah.

Tejaswini Kumar:

So choose your path, choose your elective. So I think MS-MIS at UB is definitely a go from my end. Yeah.

Shradha Acharya:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you so much. Thank you, Teja, for this wonderful session, and we'll be in touch later-

Tejaswini Kumar:

[inaudible 00:10:13]. Thank you so much.