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“Remember your roots and leave a legacy,” computer science graduate advises

Beth Burns thinks that not knowing what you want to be when you grow up is a blessing; not knowing provides an individual with a curious eye toward self-discovery and introspection.

Beth, who was initially from Detroit and has lived in Chicago since graduation, earned a bachelor's degree in computer science in 1986 from Michigan State University. She is proud that her goal of lifelong learning has held steady throughout her career.

She recently returned to MSU for the first time in three decades as a guest lecturer for the EGR 160 Academic and Professional Development class taught by Theo Caldwell and Kyle Foster of the College of Engineering’s Diversity Programs Office. She spoke on the need to be a good steward of your money.

“MSU is part of me – it’s part of my DNA,” she explained. “I graduated from a wonderful university, with a degree in computer science that taught me not just how to program a computer but taught me how to think. I quickly learned to do more than just study to pass the test, but study to learn how to think through processes. And that made all the difference.”
Beth Burns ('86)
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Beth graduated from Cass Technical High School in Detroit and came to MSU to be an engineer as her parents advised. “They said to me, ‘we would like you to major in Engineering, so you will always have a job.’ They were right. I had three job offers when I graduated.”

Beth began her career as a network engineer and progressed to sales for AT&T before redirecting her career toward the capital markets. Post graduate school, her capital markets journey began with Ameritech in mergers and acquisitions, which allowed her to travel to Germany and Denmark.

She then moved to Northern Trust Bank to work with high net worth individuals and small institutions. Her next step was that of a money manager for Fifth Third Bank, before transitioning to being an investment management consultant to large institutions. She now works for Aon, consulting to large institutions with pension assets.

“I loved my work as an engineer but was intrigued by the world of finance. So I decided to pursue an MBA from the University of Chicago,” she said. “A great education can make you a strong contributor for your employer – and if you’re a strong contributor, it paves the way to moving forward in your career.”

Her diverse career experiences, together with disciplined personal financial planning, are allowing her to focus on volunteering and giving back. She is particularly interested in helping women and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Life is not going to be a straight trajectory but a series of steps and a few speed bumps,” she continued. “Financial prudence can be a stumbling block that causes many to fail. Budgeting and not spending every dollar you make is pivotal. Learn to pay yourself first. To live an empowered life, you have to be a good steward of your money.”

Post 50 years of age now, her newest interest is that of a behavioral life coach and national speaker. She is presenting her viewpoints on living a happi(er) and more financially empow(er)ed life with her new start-up, the (er) factor. Her first book, “Inner Strength, Outer Success: Practical strategies to being happi(er), healthi(er), empow(er)ed, strong(er), and wis(er)” was released in February 2017.

Beth is dedicating her future toward inspiring others to live a better version of themselves.

“I find myself with a desire to leave a legacy, an imprint on this world, my personal thumbprint,” she noted. “If I could leave this world knowing I’ve inspired others to be the best they can be, it would make me very fortunate,” she added.

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Related Website: (er) factor
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