



NAME: Deshundra Davis ||| **COMPANY:** International Paper
TITLE: IT Project Manager
DEGREE: MS in Business Information Systems
COLLEGE: Mississippi State University

Q: How did you select your college major, certification program, or career path?

A: I received a Gateway G6-350 computer for Christmas when I was 14 years old. This was our first computer in the home, so I quickly became the resident Tech Support expert. With the help of Yahoo search and plenty of calls to Gateway, I learned how to repair computer equipment, apply patches & updates, and configure external devices. Also, supporting my parents' various PC issues taught me valuable lessons in patience and customer service. Selecting Business Information Systems as a major seemed like a natural choice for me since computers had already piqued my interest.

Q: What was the biggest influence in your selection of career path?

A: After graduating with my Bachelor's degree, I landed my first job as a Tech Support analyst for a local bank. While this job equipped me with fundamental IT skills, I wanted to learn more about the other sides of IT. I made the decision to go to graduate school to increase my knowledge and level of education in Information Systems. I heard feedback from several of my classmates that International Paper was an excellent company to work for and their IT department enabled college recruits with the opportunity to take on rotational assignments under various IT teams. IP was a perfect match for my growth & development goals!

Q: If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college/career, what would it be?

A: I would have taken Computer Programming courses in high school. When I got to college, several of my classmates already had experience with writing code and a good understanding of various programming languages. Had I taken that class in High School, I wouldn't have been at such a loss my freshman year.

Q: What is your favorite aspect of your job?

A: The best thing about my job as an IT Project Manager is that I get work on lots of projects and learn about business processes along the way. I have partnered with supply chain, human resources, and finance to gather business requirements, design a solution, and implement a system that meets the business's needs. This fulfills my goal of continual learning and new experiences.



Q: How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?

A: IP is involved with several different charitable giving initiatives both locally and globally that help leave our footprint. One way that I give back is by participating in College Recruiting. I work with a great team of people who are involved in speaking to diverse organizations on campus to encourage careers in IT, communicating with professors about workplace trends, and attending the Career Fair to recruit interested students. My involvement on campus also benefits IP as I help the company to remain competitive by recruiting the most talented students to come and join our team.

Q: What's the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your professional career?

A: Probably not the most interesting, but the most beneficial thing I have been able to do is to establish a good work-life balance. As a working mother, I am grateful that I work for a company that cares about its people and is flexible to life's needs. This allows me to prioritize my work, deliver value, and still have enough time to attend every t-ball game.

Q: What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?

A: Because IP is a global company, I get to work with people across the world on a daily basis. I have learned so many fascinating things about culture and customs from my co-workers in other countries.

Q: What advice would you share with K-12 students who are considering your profession?

A: Project Management is a rewarding yet rigorous profession. Project Managers need to be strong leaders, good communicators, and very organized to be successful in their roles. Obtaining a professional certification such as the PMP (Project Management Professional) can help to provide competitive advantage as it is considered the "Golden Standard" in project management.

My last bit of advice would be to never give up! Don't let your current situation determine your life's outcome. You may not be the fastest, smartest, wealthiest person right now, but it doesn't mean that you can't grow to attain that level in the future. I find encouragement in the quote from Colin Powell, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure." Good Luck!