

SLAM-DUNK: NETWORKING CREATES A CAREER

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When former Rivier basketball star Dan Caruso '02 was in the market for a new job, he took an assist from a past connection.



(PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH)

Technology has created a host of different ways to make professional connections, but in the end, few can match the success of old-fashioned, face-to-face networking. **Dan Caruso '02** knows how important it is to keep up with contacts; someone from his years at Rivier helped him find a job in which he is thriving. Says Caruso, “Staying in touch with [men’s basketball] Coach Dave Morissette after graduation really paid off for me.”

Caruso, 31, was a three-sport athlete at Rivier, playing first base on the men’s baseball team and running on the men’s cross-country team for one season. But it was in basketball that Caruso truly excelled; he was a forward and three-year captain on the team and is a member of the 1,000-point club, one of only 10 Rivier student-athletes to reach that scoring milestone in team history. As a business management and finance major, Caruso was amenable to a number of career options. “At the time I was in school, I was pretty much open to anything,” he says. “I just focused on doing the best I could and I figured the rest would take care of itself.”

However, like today, the economy was uncertain in the spring of 2002; PBS’s “Newshour” reported in its June 12, 2002 broadcast that new college graduates would experience a 36 percent decrease in job opportunities as they began their post-graduation job search. Caruso joined fellow job searchers in an effort that ultimately took six months, but he eventually secured a position as a moving coordinator at College Bound Movers in Amherst, New Hampshire, coordinating local and long-distance moves. But within a few years he decided to look for a new position and put the word out to his professional and personal contacts—one of whom was Coach Morissette. “He knew I was looking for change and a new challenge,” says Caruso.

In the summer of 2006, at the Rivier College annual Golf Classic, Morissette introduced Caruso to the owner of a distributor of wholesale industrial products and a corporate sponsor of the golf tournament. This introduction—facilitated by a member of the Rivier staff at a Rivier event—led to Caruso being hired in November 2006 as an account executive at Johnson Supply. He continues to hold that position today.

Caruso considers his participation in Rivier athletics vital preparation for every aspect of his career. “I believe you need to have a lot of discipline to be successful in anything in life, especially sales,” he says. “Being a student-athlete taught me teamwork, commitment and discipline. I also gained a great deal of leadership skills by being a three-year captain on the men’s basketball team.”

He finds that his athletic experiences mirror those of corporate life. “Being a member of an athletic team and a member of a company are very similar,” he says. “You need to be able to rely on and trust one another during both the good and bad times.” And his networking skills are still at work: “During my time at Rivier, I was able to form many lifelong friendships and relationships. I am able to do the same thing in my workforce, building relationships with customers and my co-workers.”

Today’s Rivier graduates are facing a job market even more challenging than the one Caruso entered; but he believes there is reason to be optimistic. “The advice I would give to any graduating student is to never give up,” he says. “The biggest problem I ran into was being told I did not have any experience. I sent out countless resumes and went on many interviews before I found a job.”

Caruso also stresses the importance of flexibility in a market where the perfect job may not be available. “I would tell a new graduate to keep an open mind when trying to find a job in these difficult economic times,” he says. “My first job was not what I had been looking for, but it gave me a foundation and experience that has helped me get to where I am today.” Where he is today is where he expects to be in the future. “In five years, I still see myself with Johnson Supply in the same career field. I hope to move up in the company as I build experience.”

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In his personal life, Caruso's present and future plans revolve around the Nashua area. A native of the area, he still lives in Nashua with his wife, Tricia, and their two sons, 3-year-old Joshua and 1-year-old Ryan. He says the family hopes to move to a town outside the city someday. In the meantime, when he's not working, Caruso continues the athletic tradition that has served him so well. He plays in a basketball league once a week and referees basketball for the Nashua Parks and Recreation Department in the winter. He also plays golf as often as possible, “although it's not that easy any more with two kids,” he says.

For Caruso, a college education and the contacts that education provided were unquestionably effective assets in launching his career. “The education I received from Rivier gave me a great foundation for what I am currently doing,” he says. That he has been able to leverage the connections he made and the knowledge he gained into a rewarding career is an outstanding demonstration of what a Rivier education can provide to someone with commitment, discipline and heart. ■

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