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Embracing Lifelong Learning: Steve's Journey Leads to the University of Illinois

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How taking one course paved the path toward a master's degree

In today's ever-changing world, the pursuit of knowledge is a lifelong journey, and Steve Reeves' educational path is proof. At 67 years old, Steve is an inspiration, showing that age is no barrier to learning. His story that culminates with the University of Illinois Gies College of Business highlights the transformative power of education and its profound impact on personal and professional growth.

Steve's educational journey began decades ago at the University of Cincinnati, where he was just four classes shy of completing his degree. Life, however, had other plans, and it wasn't until many years later that he decided to return to academia. "I regretted every single day. I was mad at myself," Steve recalls, reflecting on the years he spent without a degree. Despite a successful career, the desire to complete his education lingered.

The turning point came when Steve discovered the flexibility of online learning through Coursera. "I got my bachelor's degree through Coursera, and it was the coolest thing ever," he shares. The ability to work around his schedule and the acceptance of his previous credits made the process seamless. With this flexibility, Steve could continue his education without sacrificing his professional responsibilities.

Steve's path didn't stop at a bachelor's degree. He was inspired to pursue further education. "I started taking classes from the University of Illinois, and I was working toward my Graduate Certificate in Strategic Leadership and Management," he explains. To Steve's surprise, his work in the Certificate program could count as progress toward Illinois' online master's degrees in business. He decided to stack his credits into the Master of Science in Management and went on to graduate in May 2024. Thanks to the online format, he was able to balance his studies while working full-time as a Director of IT, a position he has held for 19 years.

The impact Steve has made on his career with his education has been significant. "I use what I learned almost every day in my work," he states. Through courses in finance, marketing, and strategic leadership, Steve broadened his understanding and equipped himself with new skills. "I never took an accounting class. I never took a finance class. I never took a marketing class," he admits, highlighting the gaps that he's now filled. Today, he finds himself contributing to discussions and decisions in areas of his company where he once felt unqualified to participate.

Steve's story is not just about personal achievement—it's about inspiring others. He has become an ambassador for lifelong learning, encouraging colleagues and even his daughter to pursue their educational goals. "I help people," he says simply, embodying a spirit of mentorship and support.

"You're never too old to learn, and never stop learning," he advises. After all, Steve's experience with the University of Illinois on Coursera shows that with determination and the right resources, anyone can achieve their dreams.

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