

CAREER CUES

The Leadership Lesson That Helped Me Make Waves in Fashion and Consulting



[Alvarez & Marsal](#) (A&M) is a global management consultant firm that specializes in providing leadership, action and results for clients facing complex business issues. Client teams face a variety of diverse challenges and are charged with finding and delivering solutions that can be implemented and result in driving value. With a team made up of a mix of career consultants and former business operators/leaders, A&M differentiates itself by delivering actionable solutions based on a strong understanding of how specific industries work.

The firm has expertise across various industries — and recently launched a Consumer & Retail vertical to address the dynamic change that is occurring in the consumer and retail space.

We spoke with Kristin Kohler Burrows, a former Consumer/Retail Operator, about her career path to A&M, leadership insights and advice she would give her younger self.

Tell us a little bit about how your career in retail/consumer began?

Oh, it gets back to that proverbial question: “What am I doing to do when I grow up?” As a Political Science major, I thought I was going to go to law school — but quickly realized while studying for the LSATs that, as an extrovert and someone who gets energy and inspiration from discussions, law was probably not for me.

So, instead, I went to graduate school (for the first time!) for a degree in Marketing Communications and while there had to do an internship as part of my curriculum. I thought to myself: “I love sports. I love fitness. Maybe I mix that with business?” So, I applied for an internship at Reebok, located nearby, got the internship and fell in love with the pace, culture, and business of the athletic footwear and apparel space. “It had me at hello,” so to speak!

How did you find your way to A&M?

Well, it wasn't a quick path to A&M! I had another career path first with a few stops along the way. I ended up spending the first 20+ years of my career in the athletic footwear/apparel and fashion space, growing up as a merchant and then taking on more senior level roles within the athletic footwear and apparel industry. (I ran the second-largest global category at Adidas (Cross Training), ran the Chuck Taylor business at Converse, and was President of Keds and President of GH Bass). I was attracted to each role largely because each business needed to be fixed and faced declining sales and profitability.

After my last role as a CEO of a small consignment retailer (2nd Time Around), I made the switch to management consulting and A&M because I wanted to consistently be working with companies that have problems or opportunities to be solved. I am driven by making an impact. (I must earn my glass of wine each day!) I love the diversity of challenges we see, and our process of breaking down problems and solving them.

How have you built your career and your business at A&M? What's your advice for others looking to grow a successful career at A&M?

I have found that it is critical at A&M to stay connected and be involved with as much as possible. Raise your hand and offer to do projects beyond client projects — whether it is to help do a pitch, admin projects or even to help on a project and not be billed if it is something you are interested in. Reach out and connect to people you don't know but are a part of your larger team. Speak up on group calls.

A&M is an entrepreneurial place. Manage your career here like you are responsible for building your own business. I would also recommend that you develop a "specialty" or a specific "superpower" — develop strengths in a space so that you are a "go-to" person when those projects come up!

What's one key leadership lesson you've learned along the way?

The biggest leadership lesson I have learned is that you don't have to have all the answers. Instead, you have to know how to ask the right questions and have the humility to recognize if someone else has a better answer or better idea than you. The adage "you have two ears and one mouth for a reason" is true.

What is the one piece of advice you would give to your younger self?

Live intentionally and with a plan about what you want the outcome of that meeting, that interview or that presentation to be — but simultaneously, be open to opportunities. And, if one comes along, be ready to leap — and believe that the net will be there if you need it.

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