

Fostering Friendship through Mentorship

Megan Hannah

The UC Graduate School of Business



RACHEL BUSH

MotionMasters CEO Diana Sole-Walko reviews the work of MBAL candidate Dekonti Morkonmana.

Completing high school is no easy task. Going on to graduate from a rigorous university is even more challenging. Now imagine completing all of this while enduring a 14-year ongoing civil war in your country and being completely displaced from your home for 10 years due to political unrest and turmoil. Sounds impossible? The story gets even more astonishing. Next imagine moving to the other side of the world to complete the Master of Business Administration and Leadership (MBAL) program at the University of Charleston. The word “impossible” does not exist in Dekonti Morkonmana’s vocabulary.

Dekonti is nothing short of driven. She is reflective about where she comes from and optimistic about the challenges and opportunities ahead of her. A native of Liberia, Dekonti was encouraged by her parents to come to the United States to pursue a master’s degree. Her uncle, who practices as an emergency room physician at Charleston Area Medical Center, suggested she come to Charleston, W.Va.

“I was not familiar with any colleges or universities in West Virginia when my uncle encouraged me to come here,” Dekonti said. “I went online and searched for colleges that began with the letter ‘C’ because my undergraduate was at Cuttington University in Liberia. The University of Charleston was the first one that popped up, and I was impressed by the MBAL program.”

The MBAL program focuses on professional practices and mentorship to prepare students for life after graduate school. These experiences distinguish the MBAL program from other MBA programs.

“Professional mentoring is a one-hour credit that is required each semester,” Dr. Bart Morrison, dean of the

MBAL program, noted. “It’s a required experience, but it becomes so much more. Students often credit their mentor experience as the most beneficial aspect of our program. It helps them achieve networking and career development skills that go far beyond what they learn in the classroom.”

When talking with Dekonti, she praises the MBAL program. She credits the professors for helping her adapt to life in the United States, as well as helping her shift gears from her undergraduate work in public administration to a more business-minded focus. However, her biggest advocate and supporter has been her program-assigned mentor, Diana Sole-Walko, CEO of MotionMasters in Charleston, W.Va.

In September, Diana worked with program administrators to help Dekonti attend the Africa Policy Forum convened by the Leon H. Sullivan Foundation in Atlanta, Ga. During her time at the conference, Dekonti formed valuable relationships with many of the foundation’s top officials. So valuable in fact, that she recently received a job offer from the foundation to begin work on their biennial Summit to be held in Casablanca, Morocco.

“If it were not for Diana’s help in getting me to the conference and helping me with my resume, I would not have been offered this exciting opportunity,” Dekonti said.

While Diana has been influential in Dekonti’s professional career, their relationship goes far beyond job skills and networking. “Dekonti comes to my daughter’s volleyball games. She was at my house on Christmas Eve. We’ve formed a lifelong relationship, and I fully expect to see her leading an entity of her choice some day,” Diana added.

Morrison agreed, “Diana and Dekonti have a model relationship when it comes to our mentor program. It’s not just about forming a professional relationship; it’s about helping our students shape the next phases of their lives.”

As far as the next phase of her life, Dekonti is excited about her opportunity with the Leon H. Sullivan Foundation, but she also looks forward to helping with business development in Liberia one day. “Education is the main thing I would like to focus on in Liberia. The country is lacking public libraries and peer educators, and I want to have an impact on that,” Dekonti said.

“Nothing intimidates her,” Diana added. “She has so much courage and perseverance. She will be able to accomplish anything in life.”

For more information on the University of Charleston’s MBAL program, visit www.ucwv.edu/business/mbal.