

Kara Snyder 0:00

Hello and welcome to the podcast a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host Kara Snyder and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode we're sitting down with an alum of the College and today we have a chance to talk to Kiara Daniel. Kiara is an alum of the Department of Agriculture and currently serves as the product manager RTV accessories for Kubota Tractor Corporation. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

Thank you so much for having me. Well, let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose to ISU?

Kiara Daniel 0:37

Well, I feel like I ISU to kind of chose me is close to home. I'm originally from Chicago. But it's also far enough away where my parents can come down every weekend. And I also attended, I believe it's called first look or preview, I can't remember the name of the program. But they set up where we had a bus come pick us up from Chicago and took us to the campus. And we had the opportunity to stay overnight, and also meet with some potential students and attend I think on campus concrete scenes. So I think that aspect of allowing me to stay on campus and get a feel for the university really helped me make my decision.

Kara Snyder 1:14

Yeah, that immersive experience would be, you know, priceless in that regard. So, tell us how did you choose agriculture? You know, you said you're from Chicago. So you're not from a rural farm? Tell us how agriculture spoke to you.

Kiara Daniel 1:30

Yeah. So actually, when I was a young girl, I woke up and I just said, Oh, my God, I want to go into ad No, that's not how it went. I actually, when I was an elementary school, I was good in science. And so I had a science fair project, and seventh grade and eighth grade, where I became the first person from my school Mr. region to ever go to the state science fair, which is the Illinois state science fair. And with my project I did does microwave radiation effects, see girls, and then that kind of alluded to the next year where I use miracle row to see if that can help the microwave radiative seeds. And while I was doing that, I had research with the University of Illinois, and they have an extension program. So a high school called Chas, which is Chicago High School for Agriculture Sciences. So I want to go into that high school, which then tripled to me majoring in agriculture. Originally, I was interested in business. And my guidance counselor in high school said I should consider ag business instead of regular business, since I did have the chess background with me. So that is how I got chosen into agriculture.

Kara Snyder 2:39

That's a great story. I love picturing you with your science fair project and how that created such a trajectory for you. That's awesome.

Kiara Daniel 2:48

Yeah, because I mean, being in the city of Chicago, I knew nothing about AG, I didn't know where my food came from. I just know you go to the grocery store that is supposed to be there. And so learning about agriculture, and being from a large city put a lot of things in perspective.

Kara Snyder 3:03

So once you chose to major in agriculture, you chose to come to LMI state, tell us how you were involved on campus while you were here.

Kiara Daniel 3:11

So I'm a busy bee. And I like to get my hands and everything. So I was quite involved on campus. I was first in agriculture department, a part of Alpha Zeta. I was the vice president that is the agriculture fraternity for men and women in agriculture. Then I was also a part of Nammo, which was one of my favorite organizations, which is the National agri Marketing Association. And then I eventually became the vice president of promotions and publicity for that organization. Then outside of my department also became involved in other aspects of the university. One of my tried and true favorite idols, which I'm still a part of today is my sorority, which is Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. And then I eventually became the financial secretary for that organization. And then lastly, one of the organizations I remember being a part of was profound pioneers Entertainment Group. So it was a group for people to get together to have fun. And they used to have poetry night and different things of that nature, but then also do things around campus. And I was like a volunteer coordinator for that where we did volunteer things once a month.

Kara Snyder 4:19

So what's interesting to me to hear you talk about these activities is it seems like such a great mix of social yet also, you're getting these hands on skills that have probably been transferable for you afterwards. Tell us a little bit about that and how some of these skills you learned in your extracurriculars have been valuable in your career.

Kiara Daniel 4:40

Yeah, definitely. I always when I'm talking to younger people, or people that are in school or going to college, that it's very important to you know, get involved and you don't necessarily have to be the president of every organization. But being a part of those organizations, even as a member. It helps you to communicate with people Making decisions, creating events for those different organizations involves planning, time management, also, being a part of those will help you balance like your schoolwork versus when you have meetings for those organizations. So I definitely use those skills today as a working professional. By being involved. I'm still active in my sorority, where we do community service, and we have events. But then I'm also you know, involved in work, and I have to manage my time, I have to manage my skills with people I work with. So it was very helpful.

Kara Snyder 5:36

That's great perspective. When you think back about your time on campus, what comes to mind? What do you miss the most about your time as a student at Illinois State.

Kiara Daniel 5:46

The responsibility of being an adult I miss living in the dorms, I miss having a meal plan and going downstairs and swiping my ID and not having a cook. Life was very simple and easy when you're a college student. So I think that those are some of my tried and true favorite things is just going downstairs swiping my meal plan and having my closest friends living in the same building as me was very key.

Kara Snyder 6:12

Great point. So as you wrapped up your time at ISU, tell us about what was the initial job search like for you, and where did you end up.

Kiara Daniel 6:21

So after I graduated from Illinois State, I actually had the opportunity to study abroad while at Illinois State. So I got to go to France. And I also got to Argentina and Chile. So I had a passion for international travel. And initially, I thought I wanted to work with USDA, or something of that nature. But I was also an ADM scholar, and I was interested in working with them as well. But when I started looking online and applying, I really didn't see anything that like felt like I wanted to go right into the job market. But I did find some grad school programs that did resonate with me. And so one of them was the Peace Corps has a program as a master's in a national program, where you would do two years of the Peace Corps, and then two years of your master's program. And then you can probably land a job with the US government like the USDA. So I was originally going that way. So I enrolled in grad school first. And I went to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University for my master's program. But fast forward, I didn't do the Peace Corps part because, you know, I had been in school a total of six years and I was kind of ready to make money and stop being a poor college student. So I had opportunity to get an internship while I was in grad school with a John Deere. And so after that internship, they offered me a full time position upon graduated with my master's degree. So that was the first leg of like my initial job search decided to go straight from ISU to a grad program. And then I had an internship while in grad school, and then landed my first job with a John Deere.

Kara Snyder 8:07

And so if I'm tracking you went from Illinois to North Carolina, back to Illinois for John Deere, right?

Kiara Daniel 8:15

Well, actually no. So my internship with John Deere was actually in Olathe, Kansas. So in during that internship, one of the reasons why I accepted a role with John Deere was I traveled so I think 13 different cities and states during that internship opportunity program. So it was a heavy travel Job was a lot of exposure to agriculture and different things. And I was doing real. It wasn't like shuffling papers or add me at work. My project helped to contribute to the business of John Deere. So it was very influential. So I interned in Olathe, Kansas, and then I went back to North Carolina, then my first job with a job there was a rotation program. So it was a marketing rep program that they have and I did six to eight month rotations in different places. So my first

placement was in North Carolina. Then I went to Dallas, Texas for a rotation. And then after that program ended, I started my full time position back in Olathe, Kansas. So a little bit of traveling there.

Kara Snyder 9:23

What an awesome opportunity for you to see so much of the country.

Kiara Daniel 9:28

Yes, I told them I like traveling. They took it to a whole nother level.

Kara Snyder 9:33

I know now you're back in Dallas, Texas. So how did you get from John Deere in Kansas into your current role in Texas?

Kiara Daniel 9:42

Yep. So I worked with John Deere for a total of six years in my roles there after the marketing rotation program. My first full time job with them was a sales promotion coordinator. So I coordinated a shows events and sponsorships for five different states. So I covered Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa. So any regional events that they had, I was responsible for coordinating, getting the equipment to those shows and events, also organizing any contracts that they had. And then working with different local associations, like the Farm Bureau's relationships that we had. One fun part of that job is I did get to work with some sports teams we had sponsorships with. So I got to work with the Rangers, I got to work with the Cowboys, and also the Kansas City Royals while I was there. So that was quite a fun job and a very interesting aspect of my role there. And then after being in that role for about three years, I kind of wanted to expand and you know, see what else was out there. And so I started looking for different roles. And Kubota had just moved their headquarters from California to Dallas. And I had Texas as a territory. While I was with John Deere, I was already familiar with the area. So there was a new role that they had created in the turf department. So I applied and I actually got it. So that was one of the hardest things in my career was quitting a company that was well renowned and steady, going into the unknown and actually going to their competitor, which was like, you know, a scary kind of transition. But for my career and where I was, it was a great transition for me to do that.

Kara Snyder 11:30

Yeah, and I commend you for being able to, like you said, just step into the unknown and try something new. But sometimes that's the best thing for us, right is to be able to push ourselves out of the comfort zone that we've created. So congratulations to you on that.

Kiara Daniel 11:45

Thank you.

Kara Snyder 11:46

So what would you say your favorite part of your job is?

Kiara Daniel 11:50

Okay, so since then, I've had two roles with Kubota. I've been here for a total of five and a half years, my first role was assistant manager for turf business. So I worked on commercial turf. And as of April of 2023, I started my new role, which is the product manager for RCB accessories. So in this role, I get to work with the fun equipment. So not saying that tractors and server equipment is not fun. But utility vehicle side by side UTVs, as they're called, are fun. Everyone can drive them, everyone kind of knows what they are, and would like to have one. And I get to travel a lot in this role. But my team is very fun. So shout out to my manager and my co worker, they definitely make it fun to work with on this team. So I think the people that you work with can definitely impact you know how you do your work.

Kara Snyder 12:44

Absolutely, good coworkers make all the difference? That's for sure. On the flip side, tell me what is the most challenging thing about your job.

Kiara Daniel 12:52

So with my role is very cross functional. So I'm in Product Marketing, also work with our marketing department, I also work with supply chain, I work sometimes have to visit our factory, I work with outside suppliers that supply accessories to us. And so sometimes Decisions have to go through several steps in several departments before getting finalized. So sometimes that can be challenging and frustrated, because what's the priority to me may not be a priority to someone else in their department or high on their to do list. So just having a balance of what my priorities are finding the most effective way to keep things moving. When it's multiple parties involved, will it be difficult?

Kara Snyder 13:38

That's a great point. How would you describe your leadership style?

Kiara Daniel 13:43

I will say my leadership style is I tried to, if I know how to do something, instead of just automatically given that information to the next person finding the best way to show them how I got where it is I got like if it's a document or if it's something located somewhere, show them the source if they have access to it so that next time, they don't necessarily have to go to me to get that information, that I'm showing them how to get it. So I try to lead by example. If I want someone to be nice and kind I try to be nice and kind, but also making sure that people know how to get information that is readily available to them if I'm not, you know in the way per se so kind of a servant leader I will say.

Kara Snyder 14:31

Yes, really empowering others. That's awesome. So Kiara, we're going to finish with a speed round. So just go with your first instinct on these questions. It'll help us get to know you just that much better. What is your morning routine?

Kiara Daniel 14:44

My morning routine is I'm a person that says Bell five alarms. So I hit the snooze button a few times and then I lay in bed and I try to think through my day. You know I'm a spiritual person. So I say a prayer stretch I get up, I make my coffee. And then I get ready for work. Typically, you know, it depends we're at work, we have flex, if I'm not traveling, you know, I could put on a Kubota shirt or I can put on a suit, it just varies or I might have to grab my cowboy boots if I'm going to be out in the field. And then I have a about a 20 minute commute to work. So I'm pretty lucky than most I know, some of my co workers have about an hour. And then I typically grab a protein shake, and a cup of coffee. I'm not big on a breakfast person. So that's kind of how my morning routine is listen to some great music on the way to work to get me motivated for my day.

Kara Snyder 15:38

I love that I always love hearing how people start their days. So thanks for sharing. So I'm curious, do you make New Year's resolutions?

Kiara Daniel 15:46

I used to. And actually, quick story, one of my New Year's resolutions have stuck with me to this day, which actually started back in I issues. So I think in 2011, I made a New Year's resolution not to eat beef or pork, and I still don't eat beef or pork. However, I've shifted from those. And that's one that I keep, but not too often I just try to be a better person year after year and just continue to improve.

Kara Snyder 16:11

What is the most used app on your phone?

Kiara Daniel 16:15

Ooh, that's probably going to be I love music. So it'll probably be Pandora or Yeah, that's that's really good. Or Yelp. I travel a lot. And so I use Yelp to find new restaurants and check reviews with things before I go. So I will say Pandora, yep.

Kara Snyder 16:33

What are you reading or listening to right now anything that we should add to our list?

Kiara Daniel 16:37

Actually, I'm in the midst of reading, I have a friend that gonna try to see if I can pull up the correct name of his book. But he wrote a book about diversity, equity and inclusion in project management. Quincy, right. And so it is a really short, it's a short read. But it's taken me a little bit long. But I'm a person that likes to use the audio book and the written copy of the book, but it's talking about different project management styles. And then also talking about, you know how project managers need to think about diversity, equity inclusion when making decisions, bringing the correct stakeholders to the table, and then also making sure that you are managing projects, following through with our own time and in budget projects. That sounds like a great read. It is what is your favorite day of the week? Hmm. That's hard. Let's say Saturday, is

sometimes you know, Mondays get a bad rap, but like you know, if you start off the week, good, you know, you can possibly make it good. But Saturday is a good day for me just because it's in between, you know, going to work and you know, get a little time off.

Kara Snyder 17:51

And I ask everyone that comes on the podcast. ivanti is gondola or pub to cheese balls?

Kiara Daniel 17:57

I'm gonna have to say Papa John's pizza with the garlic sauce. That was my go to when I was at ISU. Like, I don't know if I just didn't do a bomb tease. But me and my friend. We ordered a lot of Papa John's. And so that is the memory that sticks out to me. But you have to have the garlic sauce like I don't know.

Kara Snyder 18:17

Oh, yeah, that's critical. Absolutely. I have one last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say.

Kiara Daniel 18:27

I would say, have fun, get your work done. Get involved on campus, I think that you meet a lot of great friends and a lot of people, you never know how your paths will, you know, crossover again, agriculture is a large industry, but also small. And so you never know who you may run into who you could network with in the future if you're switching careers. So I would say you know, just do a balance, have fun. Those are some of your best times that you're going to have, you know, you don't have real bills and real you know, things to do. But it's so much to just enjoy your college time. But it definitely is a good foundation for the real world interacting with different people, you know, and just having that experience but you get to do it in a nice environment. So have fun, get your work done, get involved on campus. And yeah, that will be my advice.

Kara Snyder 19:23

Thanks again for being here. That was Kiara Daniel the product manager RTV accessories for Kubota. Tractor Corp. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni.