

Marc Young, DeVry University's Keller Graduate School of Management

If he wanted to visit the old neighborhood, Marc Velez Young could easily head down California State Route 180 and drive the 20 minutes from his office at the County of Fresno, where he's the Accounting and Financial Division Chief-Treasury Manager, to Tarpey Village, a county island between the cities of Fresno and Clovis. But that's not a road this Keller graduate wants to take.

"It's been a long road to get where I am, so I try not to look back because that gets me thinking about how much I took for granted," Young said. "Instead, I focus on the good – my son, my family, the opportunities I've had and giving back to the community."

What Young recalls from childhood is an abusive mother, his father always gone, his parents getting divorced and his family getting evicted. Again. Young's attempt at finding some stability and support led him to gang life, but the all-for-one brotherhood he yearned for always turned out to be every-man-for-himself.

"I thought they'd take care of me, but I learned the hard way there's no true loyalty in that," Young says.

It wasn't until getting robbed at gunpoint one night while working as an assistant manager at McDonalds that Young had an awakening. Running with a gang, committing violent acts and selling (and taking) drugs were all leading him one place – an early death. A trip to the Navy recruiting station put Young's life in a new, positive direction.

"They were the first ones that made me think I could do something different with my life," he says.

Young aced the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and qualified for the Navy's Nuclear Power School, but he lost his nuclear qualifications and was bumped down a grade after leaving the base on an unauthorized absence. While in the holding cells, Young got involved with others who were being transitioned out of the Navy and found himself back into his old habits. On April 16, 2003 – a mere four months into his military career – the then-21-year-old Young was discharged.

Fast forward five years, and Young found himself a single dad after his son's mother left them both.

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"Was learning how to be a single dad tough? Oh my God, yes," Young says. "I had just stopped using drugs, and I had a decent job that helped us survive, but I didn't know what to do next."

Before his son was born, Young had responded to an advertisement for a lot attendant at a small car dealership. What started as a job gassing up and detailing cars turned into Young selling cars and eventually taking over the dealership's bookkeeper position. "It was then that I first realized I had a knack for being organized and keeping numbers," he says.

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Convinced by the dealership's owner to pursue education so he wouldn't get passed over for future opportunities, Young earned his bachelor's in Business Administration before enrolling at DeVry University in 2010, which was right around the time he started as a "grunt accountant" at the County of Fresno. Young's goal was to become a CPA, so he decided to pursue a Masters in Accounting and Financial Management at Keller. He graduated in December 2012, and soon thereafter was promoted to his current role.

"Keller taught me that there is no credit for just showing up," Young says. "You either put in the work or you don't. I was working two jobs and was a single dad, so it wasn't unusual for me to be doing homework at 11 p.m. or midnight to meet deadlines. By offering online classes and giving me this flexibility, Keller made it possible for a single dad to go to school and earn his degree. Life taught me that there would always be struggles – Keller helped show me that focus and determination pay off."

Now, he's managing the banking, investment and bond financing functions of the County, running a successful tax and accounting corporation and volunteering with charitable and youth organizations to help others overcome some of the same struggles he faced. He's most proud of how his son has grown into a happy, healthy, straight-A student who's involved in extracurricular activities at school.

"I've made some mistakes, but the struggles I've faced, the reputation I've built and the unconditional love from my family will continue to push me to effect positive change in my life and the lives of others," Young says. "In the words of my mentor, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, 'We are not defeated by adversity but by the loss of the will to strive. However devastated you may feel, so long as you have the will to fight on, you can surely triumph.' My greatest wish is to continue to inspire in others that will to fight on."

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