Snapping Back: Alumna is HP’s guardian against disruption

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Mary-Ann Anyikam (BSM '99) is head of Global Resilience for HP, where she leads company-wide efforts to safeguard operations, personnel, and assets worldwide against potential disruptions.

Mary-Ann Maidoh Anyikam (BSM ’99) invokes a simple metaphor to describe her role at HP.

“When you pull a rubber band apart, what do you want it to do?” she asks. “You want it to snap back, right?”

As HP’s head of Global Resilience, Anyikam leads enterprise-wide Business Continuity and Crisis Management functions for the tech giant, ensuring that the company is able to snap back from any disruption it might face.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s Hurricane Beryl or the Middle East crisis or the recent H-1B proclamation,” she says. “Whatever the disruption, I’m responsible for making sure that HP as an organization is able to anticipate the impact, prepare for it, respond to it and, at the end of the day, recover from it.”

Anyikam’s current role is the culmination of a nearly 25-year career in risk management. A native of Nigeria, she began that career path as an undergraduate at Tulane, with a little nudge from her brother. Originally intending to major in English with law school in her sights, her brother convinced her to switch her major to something with better career prospects in case law school didn’t work out. She chose accounting, but with a caveat.

“I knew I did not want a traditional accounting path of audit or tax,” she says. “During my junior year internship, I had a mentor who introduced me to a guy who was part of the Dispute Analysis practice at PwC. I went through a day in his life and loved what he did, so when I started interviewing with Big Six firms, I asked to be referred to their New York offices and their Forensic Investigation practices. So that’s how I started.”

Anyikam spent more than eight years with PwC’s Dispute Analysis and Investigations practice, specializing in forensic accounting and litigation support and leading investigations into financial irregularities and fraud. Among the cases she worked on was a fraud investigation involving a major publicly traded company. What she thought would be a quick two-week engagement ended up becoming a nine-month investigation that ultimately led to the conviction of two company executives.

“It was very satisfying, because it took my love for numbers, added the legal component and gave me the variety I was looking for,” she recalls.

The analytical rigor of that investigative work ultimately laid the groundwork for her later career.

“In the field of forensic investigations, the attention to detail, the level of due diligence, the communication and leadership skills required, they’re so intense,” she says. “Every critical skill I leverage today, I built in the early part of my career.”

Eventually, Anyikam transferred from New York to PwC’s Houston office, where she gained experience in a different type of forensics — Foreign Corrupt Practice Act investigations.

“My New York connections helped,” she says. “Many FCPA investigations are run by law firms in D.C. and they hire accountants in New York. Because PwC had me in Houston, I was there to help when oil and gas companies were notified of DOJ investigations. So that’s how I got into bribery and corruption.”

Anyikam eventually got married to Charles Anyikam (E ’99) and started a family in Houston, a decision that led her to take a job that promised less travel, but a few years later, HP reached out to her when it was going through a bribery investigation.

“They needed somebody with my skill set, so that was how I joined HP,” she says.

After starting in Global Legal & Regulatory Compliance, she worked her way up through North America and Latin America Channel Compliance to her current role in Global Resilience.

“My career has always been around risk management in one form or the other” she says. “It doesn’t matter if it’s an investigation or crisis management. It’s ensuring that at the end of the day, my clients — internal and external — walk away with peace of mind.”

Anyikam’s career path from accounting to the top of HP’s risk management function offers an abundance of insights for students. Today, as an Industry Expert-in-Residence at the Freeman School, Anyikam advises students interested in building careers similar to hers.

“There are those who advocate depth over breadth and those who advocate breadth over depth,” she says. “I chose depth for a long time because my plan was to do forensic until I made partner, but coming into industry, industry advocates breadth,

so now if you look at my profile, you would notice that I started building out my breadth but still kept risk management as my core. So decide if you want to pursue depth or if you want to pursue breadth. There’s no right or wrong answer, and you can always pivot.”

While every student is different, Anyikam offers them all one piece of advice.

“Figure out what you don’t like,” she says. “I chose forensic because I didn’t want predictability. I wanted variety. I wanted excitement. I wanted to feel challenged. So my advice to students is to first figure out what you don’t like, which can be just as important as figuring out what you like.”