



CompTIA Articles & Feature Stories

Abigail Bornstein Shares Her Experience as an IT Instructor

By Rachel Fabro, staff writer



Abigail Bornstein was working in a non-IT position at a hard drive equipment manufacturer, but she spent her break time with the engineers. Occasionally, they would let her into the clean room. Her inquisitiveness and determination to break into the industry drove her to go to night school. Along with her Masters degree, Bornstein eventually earned her CompTIA A+ and CompTIA Network+ certifications. It was then that she became fully employed in the IT industry.

She enjoyed working in the IT industry, but she still wasn't totally satisfied

"Although I liked working in the IT industry, I realized that some of my colleagues were absolutely passionate about their work," Bornstein said. "I wanted to have that same sense of passion for the thing I spent most of my day doing."

Bornstein took some time off and went overseas. When she returned to the States, she knew what she wanted to do.

"I wanted to share my IT knowledge and industry experience in a way that would open up opportunities for others," she said.

"Teaching is a perfect medium to do this. I really enjoy sharing my knowledge and I find it tremendously rewarding, especially when I see my students' efforts rewarded with well-paying jobs."

Bornstein now teaches at City College of San Francisco in the Computer Networking and Information Technology (CNIT) department. She teaches basic computer concepts, Microsoft Office, CompTIA A+ courses, internet technologies, and HTML.

Bornstein enjoys the diverse group of students in her classes. Some have four-year degrees and are making a career change. Some are new to the States and are struggling with the English language and learning the technology at the same time. She appreciates the challenge of presenting the technical material in a way that all of her students can understand and benefit from.

"Each time one of my students passes the CompTIA A+ certification exam or gets a well-paying job, I feel good knowing that I had a tiny part in his/her success," Bornstein said. "The time spent with me had a positive impact on his/her life."

She teaches both face-to-face and online courses. This combination provides her with a lot of flexibility with her time.

Like any instructor, Bornstein faces challenges. Her biggest challenge is staying up-to-date with current technologies, not only

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because she needs to teach the latest technologies, but because she needs that new technology to deliver the course content to her students. There are more classroom techniques available besides PowerPoint, but sometimes staying up-to-date isn't as easy as Bornstein would like it to be. Bornstein is sometimes limited because the latest software and teaching tools are not always designed to be ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant, which is a requirement for public institutions.

Bornstein is able to stay current with technologies and trends by using the resources she does have available. She said that living in San Francisco has benefited her IT knowledge because many IT conferences are held downtown. She spends her time on the exhibit floor checking out the latest software, gadgets, and services being offered. Product demos and devices are usually available to try out.

Bornstein also subscribes to several trade publications and she belongs to some technical organizations. She also said she tries to take at least one new technology course every year, and she tries to obtain a new certification, or update a certification she already has, every other year.

Bornstein believes that IT instructors face some big challenges.

"Instructors face the same challenge that people on the frontlines do becoming obsolete, Bornstein explained. If an instructor does not update his/her technical skills, he/she will no longer be qualified to teach the subject matter. Word travels quickly on the Internet and soon your enrollments decline."

She also explained that hands-on experience is very important, but some IT instructors' classrooms lack the space and equipment for students to practice on.

Her advice for other instructors: "Stop lecturing about the new technology and role it into your courses. Make the students use the technology."

Bornstein encourages other instructors to utilize different types of technology, for example podcasts or vodcasts. She teaches the traditional courses tech-enhanced, meaning that every assignment can be picked up online, discussed with her or classmates online, and submitted online.

She also warns instructors not to forget about soft skills.

"Insist and expect that students come to the classroom on time. Homework should be completed on time. Have them work in groups to solve a technical problem," Bornstein said.

Bornstein is CompTIA A+ and CompTIA Network+ certified. She also has various Microsoft Office Specialist certifications.