Returning to school is daunting for just about anyone who considers it. The time commitment, expense and inevitable bouts of test anxiety are often enough to squelch any whispers of possibility that brought the idea into play in the first place. But having gone through it herself, Janet Deatherage does double duty for those who dare to dream. As the associate dean of the School of Continuing and Professional Education (SCPS) at Loyola University Chicago, she preaches the gospel of continuing education to all; as the administrator of the SCPS Women's Leadership program, she's an advocate for the advancement of women.

Like many women, Janet started college fresh out of high school but put plans on hold to marry and start a family. But even without a degree, she found success in convention and meeting planning, tourism and travel. "I just didn't like the idea that I didn't have a college degree," she recalls. "So I went back to school in my late 40s." The school of her choice? Loyola.

Janet earned a B.A. in history and followed it with a Ph.D. in history from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. And while her original goal was to teach at the university level, it changed as she faced reality. "I'd crossed the 50-year mark," she muses. "My chances of getting into a university on a tenure track were slim to none. So I decided that administration was the way to go because I wanted to work for a university."

When the assistant dean position arose at Loyola in 2006, Janet took her shot. "I had defended my doctorate in May, this position opened up that summer, I applied and got it." It was a custom fit. Not only had she gone through the process she would be overseeing, but she also had the business acumen to understand its commercial essence. "We have competitors in the other universities in the city so there's an entrepreneurial spirit that's required," Janet explains. "This is running a business. So I was able to take all my sales, marketing and management experience and put it into the job."

When Janet was hired, SCPS was launching its Certificate in Women's Leadership program. A non-credited continuing education opportunity for women in mid-to-upper-level positions and entrepreneurs, the program consists of five three-day seminars aimed at improving participants' leadership skills. With offerings such as "Reflections in Leadership" and "Power and Politics in the Workplace," it's one part "I'm Okay, You're Okay" and one part "The Art of War."

Janet played a lead role in the program's inception and now serves as its administrator and staunch proponent. "[Women] think, 'They'll notice how good of a job I'm doing. The recognition will be paid.' No it won't! They'll just keep making you work harder for a 2 percent raise every year. That's the kind of thing we teach in our leadership program. Now, we're not going to turn everybody into a bunch of ball breakers, but you'll have a better understanding of yourself, an appreciation of what you bring to the table. Your negotiation skills will be better, and you'll have a better understanding of the concepts of leadership and power."

Along with the certificate program, the Women's Leadership program hosts an annual Women's Leadership Conference—a one-day event with a keynote speaker and workshops. And this fall welcomes a new series of after-work workshops called Detox After Work. At the core of every event in the Women's Leadership program is the message of women's empowerment in the workplace.

Loyola's head cheerleader for continuing education, Janet was promoted to associate dean in 2008. Yet her message remains clear and consistent. "It's never too late to go back to school. My kids were older when I decided to do it but I was still working full time. I used to write papers in hotel rooms because I was on the road with my job. You can do it. The bottom line is your education."

And as a true champion of women's advancement, Janet couldn't be more passionate about spreading the word. "It all stems back to the salary issue and bringing women up through the ranks," she asserts. "We've got to grow our backbones and get it done!"