Had you asked Dani Korman while she was a student at Kenyon College if she would be in her current position as MIT’s head coach, the answer would most likely have been a resounding “no.” But things just kept falling into place.

“I never envisioned myself going into coaching,” Korman said.

While still in school, Korman began coaching at the Total Performance camps at Carthage College and was offered a graduate assistant position there in 2006.

Two years into her time at Carthage, Korman was offered a job as the interim head coach of the women’s team. She went on to lead the team to its first national championship berth and never looked back.

From Carthage, Korman moved to Johns Hopkins, where she worked as an assistant coach for the men’s and women’s teams for about four years under the longtime head coach George Kennedy. The allure of Division I then took her to Yale, where she remained for three years as an assistant coach for the women’s program.

When the head coaching position at MIT opened up, Korman had no qualms.

“That was a good learning experience, working with the men’s team and sort of getting them an identity,” she said. “That involved emotions, but how could we make those emotions something that are positive and helping us and empowering us, not just overwhelming us and making us so nervous that we can’t function.”

As the head of her own program, Korman strives to be efficient while dealing with the unique challenges at MIT, whether that’s her swimmers’ academic stress or extracurricular activities that impinge on practice time; she understands that swimming should complement school life.

“That’s a lot more quality over quantity, since we don’t have a lot of time for extra stuff,” she said. “It is pretty direct, getting down to the point and moving onto the next thing.”

She added: “Especially being STEM-focused, a lot of their work is ‘process’ work, so they’re used to kind of doing research and things that take time and not seeing immediate results, so that helps us in terms of the pool.”

Evidently, the process is paying off — her women’s team cruised to its best-ever NCAA finish last year (fifth), and her men have racked up a handful of individual podium finishes and are poised to rise in the team ranks.

“I’ll be honest: For myself, I would love to be the first female head coach in Division III to win a national title,” she said. “It’s a lofty goal, but it’s something that I think about.”

Meanwhile, Korman encourages women to take up coaching and rely on others in the field.

“It’s fun to coach, so hopefully women pursue it more and will not be afraid to ask another female coach who’s been in it for a while,” Korman said.

“The male/female side of things can be intimidating,” she said, “but I think if you can find a place you’re comfortable in, you’re going to get buy-in from your athletes, regardless of your gender.”