

**LESSONS AND INSIGHTS FOR STUDENTS AND MENTORS
FROM MINNESOTA PRSA'S
Pro-Am Day Friday February 26, 2016
Helping PR Students Get Ready to Find Their First PR Job**

**From Joel Swanson, APR, Dave Folkens, Michelle Peterson,
Maggie Tompkins and Jim Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA
Risda! Marketing Group**

Risda! Marketing hosted six students on Friday, March 27th, 2015 for the annual Pro-Am Day put on by the Minnesota PRSA and PRSSA. We also spoke with eight students during the Speed Networking exercise. Here are some of our impressions of these young and eager professionals and maybe some additional insights for mentors at future Pro-Am Days:

1. It was exciting to see passion and interest in the profession.
2. Fewer than half of the students in our group took any notes.
3. Most are waiting until after graduation to begin their job-finding process.
4. Most seem to assume that the world knows they're coming.
5. Participating students were very open to feedback, positive or constructive, as a whole.
6. Some have already done a lot of internships and other forms of practical experience.
7. They are eager to learn what life holds for them after graduation.
8. They are more natural networkers and comfortable with the concept than when I began my career.
9. They were genuinely enthusiastic and grateful.
10. They were interested in practical connections – from what they've learned to what they'll be paid to do someday.
11. They were well dressed and professional.
12. Very few students took notes of the information being shared.
13. We emphasized that this was the best time to find a job and start a career in public relations; channels are exploding.

Some Things We Noticed That Students Might Want to Change or Sharpen Up:

1. About half have sent a thank you note – we notice and remember those things.
2. Always bring something to write on and a pen. Interviewees who fail to take notes will not be invited back by prospective employers, including internships.
3. Be conscious of becoming too casual or close too quickly in a professional setting. Some professional environments may view that as a negative.
4. Bring writing samples!
5. Come prepared with questions – it's your time!
6. Do your homework on our agency before coming.
7. Include volunteer and campus organization work that uses your communications skills on your resume.

8. There was little knowledge of the variety of public relations opportunities and careers outside of an agency, such as nonprofit or corporate careers.
9. They generally had a very sketchy knowledge of the profession as a whole.
10. They were possibly too focused on social media as a public relations tool.
11. Think of how to frame your current experience. There was some great experience in the students but many of the stories or references on resumes didn't focus on the impact or outcomes of the experience.

The Most Frequently Asked Questions Seemed to Be:

1. How did you get into the companies you've worked for?
2. How did you get into the PR field?
3. How do I get the practical experience you say you want on my resume to get that internship?
4. How do you decide who to work with/what to work on?
5. Resume review
6. What are the differences between corporate settings and agency jobs?
7. What is it like to transition from college to your first job?
8. What is the easiest way to get started job hunting?
9. What sort of clients do you work with?
10. What was your plan?
11. What's typical day like?
12. Why wasn't some of the information we're getting today actually taught during our college coursework?

The Top 22 Things Students Should Be Doing Right Now:

1. Applying for internships.
2. Applying for jobs.
3. Attending PRSA and IABC (and other organizations) meetings.
4. Building a LinkedIn profile that can serve as a foundation for a professional profile in the coming years.
5. Building their resume(s).
6. Building their writing skills.
7. Clean up your questionable posts on whatever platforms you have been using.
8. Conducting informational interviews – building a network.
9. Continue to meet and reach out to professionals throughout the year. Most successful PR pros are very willing to help students learn more about our industry.
10. Drafting a 15-second introduction that articulates their “super power.”
11. Find a mentor/positive support.
12. Find ways to apply your past experience to the future jobs you want.
13. Gain writing experience.
14. Gaining experience everywhere they can.
15. Gathering portfolio materials.
16. Improving your verbal skills. Generally you will talk your way into a job rather than write your way into a job.

17. Practicing for the interview process.
18. Reading industry professional publications and business news.
19. Research on industries (health care, consumer, etc.) and types of PR settings (agency, corporate, government, nonprofit) they might want to work in.
20. Research on specialties (events, crisis, social media, media relations, etc.) they may want to work in.
21. Take the first meaningful job opportunity. Get your career started. Odds are you will have several jobs in your career. If you wait for the perfect job, you could be 40 or older before it finds you.
22. Writing, writing and writing. Demonstrate the ability to write well in a variety of settings (class assignments, blog posts, internship roles, etc.).

The Top 10 Things Students Should Avoid or Stop Doing Right Now:

1. Avoid internships that will give a bad experience. I've heard stories where businesses looking for interns think, "Let's get on social media and start a blog. I'll hire an intern so the work is free." But neither the business nor the student knows the time and experience required to make these activities successful. An internship like this will leave a bad reputation for public relations work in students' minds.
2. Don't apply for every job you see – be selective.
3. Forgetting to include outcomes/results for each entry on your resume.
4. Giving up on finding a job.
5. Ignoring your advisor – they have connections!
6. Posting anything embarrassing on social media (we can find it).
7. Posting personal stuff. Employers will be searching every platform, looking for what's there about you.
8. Putting your hopes on only one job opportunity.
9. Scheduling too many big life changes at the same time (weddings, children, moving, etc.).
10. Using the same resume for every position.

The Top 10 Myths We Heard About Job Seeking:

1. Applying for jobs without networking will get me a job.
2. I don't need to be involved in a professional association.
3. If I haven't had a paid position, I won't be marketable.
4. Include a career objective, even if it's generic.
5. Put education at the top of resume. (Your education is over. Life is beginning for you. Talk about life.)
6. Relevant job titles for me are all under "PR" designation.
7. Social media skills are a given; don't call them out.
8. The more information I can pack into my resume, the better my chances are to be hired.
9. There's a right way to write a resume.
10. Writing skills are becoming less important.

Top Nine Surprises to the Students:

1. Employers pay more attention to what you've posted than your resume.
2. Everything the student has done or learned, and will do or learn in their lives, will become a part of their public relations professional activities at some point.
3. How hard they are going to have to work to find a job.
4. How little they actually know about the profession they are entering.
5. How long it will take to find a first job.
6. Most careers are the result of being in the right place at the wrong time, the wrong place at the right time, pure serendipity or luck.
7. Presentation skills will be critical to a successful job search.
8. Resumes are scanned by computers first.
9. The world does not actually owe them a job.

We have some very special help. Get your free copy of [*Getting Your First Job in PR*](#) (67 pages) [here](#). This publication has several job descriptions, explanations of the different kinds of public relations practice, preparation tips for interviews, cover letters, and a special section on developing a Marketing Resume. This is a special resume that helps those interviewing you, or considering meeting with you to understand what you know how to do that they might want to buy.