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### **Informational Interview Executive Summary: Commonalities in Strategic Communications**

I am at a crossroads with regard to my professional career. There are various paths I could take. I could work as a social science researcher for a scientific organization. I could continue working remotely as a graphic designer and multimedia content creator for a PR firm and live abroad. I could even take a leap of faith and enter the entrepreneurial world to start my own mission-driven company. In order to get a better idea of which path I should choose (at least for the time being), I interviewed 10 professionals about their career journeys.

I started by interviewing my bosses and supervisors at work because of their exceptional experience, but also because they too share many passions and skills that have led them on very non-linear, yet successful, paths. I then moved on to interviewing people racing along the various paths I am interested in: research, multimedia content creation, and entrepreneurship.

From these interviews, several similar themes emerged among the careers across the various fields, including the importance of networking, adaptability, passion, and perseverance.

#### **Honesty, Vulnerability, and Effort in Networking**

All of my interviewees stressed the importance of networking and making connections between people- no matter what industry they may be in. There are lessons to be gleaned from every interaction and every connection. My superiors at work, who are extremely well-connected due to their time working in the Obama administration, emphasized that you never know when you can be helpful to someone else and when someone else can be helpful to you. Therefore, you've got to make the extra effort to maintain the connection and keep the "bridge" up and running.

As I mentioned before, I am currently in the process of creating my own metaverse application, and while at first glance, it didn't seem like my superiors have any connections that would be relevant, by being open with them about my process, we found out that two of my superiors are extremely close friends to the Director of an incubator I am applying to. If I had only focused on work and hadn't made an effort to build strong relationships with my superiors through leading vision-boarding activities where we were honest and transparent about our goals and challenges, "watercooler" team calls where we learned about each other's passions, and virtual happy hours where we relaxed and decompressed together, we would have never come to the realization of that potential connection.

One of my superiors, Deb Eschemeyer, stressed the importance of networking in order to build your "personal board"- a roster of connections from different industries who advise you, support you, and give you different perspectives. She explained that the scariest part of networking is

just taking the first step of reaching out! People who are extremely passionate about what they do have so many insights and experiences that they'd love to share- you just need to ask! It may seem daunting, and you don't want to be a burden, but you have to remember that most people you reach out to have been in your situation at one point or another- they know how scary but important it is to reach out to people who may be further along in their careers than you. They too had mentors and people who have helped them throughout their journeys. My other superiors echoed that lesson and their advice on networking can be boiled down to: Send that email to the CEO of the company you admire, have those informational conversations with the people you look up to, and one day you will be able to pay it forward and be that person for someone else.

I found the same to be true in Academia. By being open and honest with my professors about my work and the projects that I am passionate about, I would not have been connected to or even made aware of the Entrepreneurs in Residence program at Georgetown. That is how I met most of my other interviewees. The entrepreneurs in Residence come from a variety of industries within entrepreneurship. I was first connected to Dave Terzian because of his knowledge about the overall EIR program. After discussing my passions and entrepreneurial interests, he was able to connect me with other EIRs in the network who could be interested in/helpful to my work. More than anything, I am grateful for Dave's kindness. Before entering entrepreneurship I was terrified of it due to the perception I developed from popular media (i.e. The Social Network), however, Dave's kindness and the kindness of the EIRs have dissipated many of my fears. He told me about his own experience with entrepreneurship and assured me that reaching out and making connections, especially within the Georgetown community, is not only safe but also the best thing you can do for your development as an entrepreneur. Without Dave and the other EIRs' enthusiastic support, I would not have been able to have the confidence to enter the GEC pitching competition- which further propelled me down the entrepreneurship path.

## **Adaptability**

Adaptability or scrappiness, as Kelly Miterko and Joanna Rosholm would call it, is key to being successful in any career, especially those in more fast-paced environments. They spoke about how scrappiness is what got them noticed in the White House. Both of them started as interns and were chosen to be promoted because of their adaptability and scrappiness. Not only were they personable and good at connecting with their colleagues and superiors, but their adaptability also made them shine amongst the other interns. If they needed to pivot strategies and take on new work they had never done before, they would do their best to learn even if it wasn't in their area of expertise. This openness to learning and the ability to adjust is instrumental in startups as well.

Khuram Zaman and Ronald Santa-Cruz spoke about the importance of adaptability within the context of entrepreneurship and startups. Khuram stressed the importance of learning how to pivot the development of your product in order to best meet the needs of users. Ronald echoed Khuram's guidance by explaining that beta-testing features prior to fully developing them will

help you adjust more easily (and not break the bank) if the feature isn't as useful as was intended. Peter Reznik also detailed his experience with entrepreneurship and attributed the failure of his startup to not following this kind of guidance. He had fully developed his own software before making sure that the software was really needed by his target market. He put in a huge amount of work, spent a lot of time and money, and created a really great product that just wasn't needed enough at the time. He said that many times entrepreneurs can lead with their ego and that can sometimes be their downfall because they become less scrappy and adaptive.

## **Passion**

Many of my interviewees spoke about passion. Passion is what psychologists call intrinsic motivation. It is a motivation that is derived from within you, not outside of you. Extrinsic motivations are what we call the motivations that are derived from anything outside of you, i.e. money, fame, promotions, etc. Studies show that people who are more intrinsically motivated, are more likely to be successful in the long-term than those who are extrinsically motivated. Alexandra Doten spoke about the importance of pursuing your outside-of-work passions as well. "I want to talk about space all day," said Alexandra. When the pandemic hit, she couldn't present and speak at schools so she got on TikTok to educate people on her favorite topic: space. Although she works for the government and can't monetize her social media (or talk about any of the work she does), she has grown a very large Tiktok following because of her palpable love for space education. It may not give her extrinsic rewards, but her TikTok account is what keeps her excited and motivated about life in general- which then helps her do better at her day job. Although Alexandra didn't immediately realize it, she had made connections between her passion and work, even when it didn't seem like there was one. Being able to explore and nurture her passion had a direct impact on her career, even though they could not be explicitly connected.

## **Perseverance**

Perseverance is the final theme that I found strung throughout all of my various interviews. You could argue that perseverance is heavily intertwined with passion, adaptability, and the networks/support systems we construct, however, it still warrants its own analysis. Many of the interviewees spoke about being scrappy and fueling yourself with your passions in order to persevere even when it feels like you have every obstacle blocking your way- which according to many of my interviewees, while navigating the path of an entrepreneur, that feeling can arise very often. Kelley McCormick stressed the importance of boosting morale and reminding clients (many of which are top CEOs) of their passions/missions, or as she likes to call it, their "north stars," in order to help them persevere. She explained that even those who lead and are seen at the top of their field need to draw on their passions and support systems/networks in order to adapt and persevere.

## **In summary**

I have always resigned myself to being a renaissance woman- decent at everything but not exceptional at anything. For much of my life, I believed that this would put me at a disadvantage when it came to finding a career or being successful, but through these interviews, I have found that the opposite is true.

Attending Georgetown University and being in the CCT program has taught me that being able to identify the connections between different industries, skills, events, people, etc., and being able to utilize those connections to provide a unique perspective and solutions can be an exceptional strength. I have found that while expertise is valuable, we do not live in a vacuum, everything around us is interconnected and in order to be successful, we need to see the connections between, connect and work with those around us, adapt to any changes, and persevere when it comes to the things we are most passionate about.

### **Addendum:**

#### **Appendix: Interview Summaries** (interviews listed in order of occurrence)

#### **Kelley McCormick: Founder, Original Strategies | Chief Communications Officer | Storyteller | Crisis Management | Strategic Communications | Public Affairs**

Kelley McCormick has built her career and expertise by executing complex campaigns and corporate programs for brands, social causes, and organizations including Under Armour, Starbucks, Kaiser Family Foundation, Malaria No More, and Fortune Brands. With more than 20 years of high-level strategic experience in well-respected public relations firms, consulting agencies, and multinational brands, she has built and led corporate affairs programs, advised executive leaders, and managed the reputations of leading organizations.

Kelley McCormick is a people person through and through. She is able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of anyone she meets and crafts strategies on how to make them shine. After my conversation with Kelley, it was clear that one of her greatest strengths is individualization. Whether it be in networking, media training, gift-giving (unsurprisingly, one of her main love languages is gift-giving), or being an amazing mom to four boys, she is able to read and analyze the people she interacts with and find the best way to make each and every one of them feel special, assured, and cared for. She is the ultimate hypeman and an exceptional role model.

#### **Debra Eschmeyer: Founder & Partner of Original Strategies | Entrepreneur | Policy Enthusiast | Perpetual Student | Human Exclamation Point**

A social entrepreneur with a relentless passion, Deb Eschmeyer has dedicated her career to the betterment of society. Deb served in the Obama White House as Executive Director of Let's Move!, a public health initiative created by First Lady Michelle Obama, which focused on supporting healthy kids and families. She also was President Obama's Senior Policy Advisor for

Nutrition focused on improving the federal nutrition landscape. She has extensive experience in communications, entrepreneurship, and policy, however, her various experiences are connected by her passion for working with mission-driven clients that create a positive social impact on their communities.

Deb has had tremendous success and has attributed much of that success to the “personal board” that she constructed for herself through networking and relationship building. She is a big proponent of fostering and maintaining symbiotic relationships and building strong and healthy communities. She follows her passion for creating positive impact, and it has led her to be incredibly proud of the work she is doing and grateful for her network of like-minded, mission-driven individuals, or “originals” as she would call them.

### **Joanna Rosholm: Founder & Partner, Original Strategies | Communications & Marketing | Former Press Secretary to First Lady Michelle Obama**

Joanna Rosholm is strategic communication and marketing leader with 14+ years of experience working in government, non-profit, tech, consumer product, entertainment, and media industries. She is a proven expert in reaching audiences of all ages and demographics, from Sesame Street to AARP. With a focus on creativity, style, and strategy she is a problem solver at heart and has an intuitive ability to create authentic, relevant moments that breakthrough.

She spent nearly seven years in the White House, serving first as a spokesperson for President Barack Obama and the final three years of the administration as Press Secretary and Deputy Communications Director to First Lady Michelle Obama. As the creative lead and communications strategist at the center of Mrs. Obama’s global and domestic brand management, content partnerships, and social media virality, Joanna built robust and adaptive strategic communication plans that brought headlines and most importantly, measurable results for the First Lady’s many initiatives. She dreamed up some of Mrs. Obama’s most stand-out moments, including dunking on LeBron, dancing with a turnip (#TurnipForWhat), and convening break-through international girls’ education events around the world from Cuba to Qatar. Joanna has received an Emmy nomination and won Webby awards for her work during her time in the White House.

Joanna has been able to deal with the pressures of working in such a high-profile position because of her scrappiness and adaptability. She takes every challenge as an opportunity to adjust and shine. She is also scrappy in that she will take any and every opportunity to make a connection, no matter how out of her league that person may be. She recommends that all grad students take advantage of their grad student status to reach out to those people they admire that may seem untouchable. She says that many times, these people are incredibly open to talking with grad students, and the worst that can happen is that they don’t respond. If you’re in an internship, don’t be afraid to reach out to the CEO and other higher– to foster a connection with them. It may seem daunting at first but they’ve all been there at some point or another, so they’re usually a lot more understanding than you would think. Joanna explained that at the core

of being scrappy and adaptive, is not wasting the opportunities that come your way- say yes and take those leaps of faith.

**[Kelly Miterko](#): Director of Operations and Client Engagement at Original Strategies**

Kelly Miterko has spent her career focused on communications and policy to improve public health and well-being working at various levels of government and with some of the nation's leading organizations and brands. She most recently served as Director of Policy for the City of Rochester, New York, working with city leaders and community members to pursue policies to reduce inequities and improve the lives of residents in the areas of food and nutrition, transportation, and housing.

Kelly is incredibly hard-working in all areas of her life- known on the team as the “mom who loves power tools”, she will not let expectations dictate her life. She is an incredible mother, team member, DIYer, and much more. In the same vein as my conversation with Joanna, we talked mostly about the importance of being scrappy and not pigeon-holing yourself to one idea, project, or industry. Everything is connected, therefore, there is a special strength to being able to navigate those connections and perform well in a variety of roles, responsibilities, and industries.

**[Alexandra Doten](#): Senior Consultant for Organization Transformation and Change at Booz Allen Hamilton | Viral Space Education TikToker**

Alexandra is a Vanderbilt University graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Human and Organizational Development and specializing in Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness. She previously worked at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as a space programs system analyst, where she assisted in running two federal advisory committees and worked on multiple United Nations projects. Her fields of particular interest include marketing strategy, organization consulting, space exploration, international business, environmental sustainability, and strategic communications. She brings her enthusiasm, hard work, and a get-it-done attitude to the workplace.

Alexandra explained that she has been always interested in science and loved astronomy. She found a great mentor who helped her decide which path to choose when it came to her career development. He encouraged her to follow whichever path was led by her passion for space exploration. That mentor in college was instrumental in helping her learn the basics of astronomy and helping her navigate how to pursue it. In our conversation, she coined the term “emotional support professor” to describe him which I absolutely loved. She also explained that curiosity and bravery are key to networking. It takes that curiosity and bravery to ask for help and opportunities, but it's worth it- best case scenario you get to meet someone who will change your career for the better.

**[Dave Terzian](#) Entrepreneur | Consultant | Mentor**

Dave is the Managing Partner of Brand Strategy Partners, LLC, a boutique consulting group that specializes in the quick service and fast-casual restaurant segment, with extensive resources to assist managers and entrepreneurs with brand development strategies and execution. He is an experienced foodservice executive with expertise in brand development, franchising, and franchise management. He also mentors students thru the Georgetown Entrepreneurship program at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business.

I was introduced to Dave Terzian by Professor Turner. Although he didn't have direct experience in an industry that my application could benefit from, Dave does have extensive experience in entrepreneurship in general. He also is extremely knowledgeable about the Entrepreneurs in Residence program and would know of other EIRs that could be relevant and/or helpful to my own entrepreneurial journey. The greatest takeaway I had from our conversation was just the genuine connection we made. He was so kind and we had a wonderful conversation- this connection helped assuage my fears about entrepreneurship.

My conversation with him is the main reason I took the leap of faith and competed in the Georgetown Entrepreneurship Challenge pitch competition. Although we spoke in early February, I kept him updated on my progress and when I notified him that I made it to the finals, he made an effort to attend the competition and cheer me on. Although I didn't win first place, I still decided to apply to the Georgetown Summer Launch Incubator. When I updated him about that, he reached out to the head of the Summer Launch Incubator to give a recommendation for me without me even asking. Dave is a wonderful person, and I am extremely grateful to have been introduced to him by Professor Truner. When I had the opportunity to, I paid it forward by informing the head of SIPS about the EIR program and connecting her to Dave.

### **[Payton Iheme](#): Global Senior Policy Head of Bumble | Former White House Senior Policy Advisor**

Nkechi "Payton" Iheme is an accomplished public policy leader with over 20 years of experience in the field. She currently is the Head of Public Policy for Bumble Inc. At Bumble, she lends her expertise to focus on issues overlapping with community building, online safety, diversity and equity, data privacy, the digital economy, small business, and public/private partnerships.

Payton was extremely helpful in honing my message for my application, LUCIO. She stressed the importance of painting a picture for the investors in a way that they could understand; i.e. Lucio is a metaverse but it is badass and better than all the other metaverses because... She was super approachable and friendly. I found that I did not get too nervous with her because of her candor and openness. She is a great contact for constructive criticism on pitches and liability considerations once the app is live. When preparing for the GEC competition, she was excited to meet with me again and work on my pitch. She even contacted me during the competition to cheer me on.

### **[Khuram Zaman](#): Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Fellow | Entrepreneur in Residence at Georgetown University | Forbes Contributor | Certified Agile Scrum Master**

Khuram Zaman is a digital strategist that empowers clients by launching and optimizing online marketing as measured by brand awareness, traffic, leads, conversions, revenue, and profit. With deep expertise in analytics, client relationship management, and marketing, he leads not only with strong technical capabilities but also with a strong work ethic. He is extremely passionate about building platforms and launching brands online.

Khuram is simply the best! Not only did he meet with me for this interview, but he also had multiple working sessions with me in the days leading up to my pitch at the GEC finals. Although he has a newly born daughter, he took the time to work through the presentation with me and make sure that everything was as good as it could possibly get with a time crunch. I was notified only a week prior to the competition that I made it to the finals, and even so, he took so much of his time to help me. During our initial meeting, he was extremely supportive and enthusiastic about me pursuing entrepreneurship- he emphasized the importance of mentorship and networking and really demonstrated it when he helped me prepare for the GEC. He doesn't just talk to talk, he truly walks the walk. He is going to be a mentor for the Georgetown Summer Launch Incubator, and because of my great experience with him in preparing the pitch, he is my top choice for my program mentor.

#### **Ronald Santa-Cruz: Strategy Manager at Sony PlayStation**

Ronald is a Georgetown MBA Alum who currently works in the gaming industry. He is a strategy manager at Sony Playstation, and although he is more passionate about the film industry, he is using this position as a stepping stone to what he truly is passionate about. I was connected to him by [Valentina Olivieri Puentes](#) because of his experience with the gaming industry and our shared Latino ethnicity. The majority of our conversation was about the importance of beta-testing and adjusting- he had a more practical perspective on the career journey and explained that you can't always follow your passion- but you can take steps towards it.

#### **Peter Reznick: Startup Entrepreneur**

I was connected to Peter Reznick by Professor Minnig. He is a 32-year-old startup entrepreneur living in New York City. We had a virtual call in March and discussed his entrepreneurship experience in New York City. He also relayed to me all of the failures he went through and what he learned from them. We had a great conversation and he connected me to entrepreneur friends of his who are operating in industries that are more relevant to my application. Over Easter weekend, we connected in person since he traveled back home for the holidays. We got coffee and spent three hours discussing the principles behind my application and brainstorming ideas. It also became an informal consumer interview since I was able to get his perspective on an application like LUCIO as someone who could be a potential user.