

'A Day in the Life' of a Public Relations and Communications Adviser

1	<p>Please give a brief description of what you do & the company you work for?</p> <p>I'm a public relations and communications adviser, specialising in aviation, aerospace and defence businesses. I'm employed by Powerscourt Group, a financial, corporate and crisis communications consultancy.</p>
2	<p>What does your average day entail? Where do you work? (Environment - Office, home, studio etc.) What is your work pattern? (full time/part time etc) What are the main activities during your day? (i.e. meetings, emails, practical tasks, visiting clients etc)</p> <p>I travel to work by train to our offices in Blackfriars in the City of London. Most days are spent there but I also travel for work around the UK and abroad depending on where clients need us. My largest client is Airbus, the European aerospace company. I also work with Malaysia Airlines and a host of other businesses.</p> <p>Much of our work is organised by email and conference calls, with occasional face-to-face meetings. We produce communications plans to help companies tell their stories, we media train senior executives to talk to the press, broadcasters and other stakeholders like politicians and shareholders.</p>
3	<p>What skills and qualification are required for your role?</p> <p>I was a full-time journalist for 20 years at a variety of publications, mainly daily newspapers, and I finished up as the City News Editor of the Daily Mail until I left to move into public relations.</p> <p>Knowing what makes a good news story and how to communicate well in both the written and spoken word is essential for this job. Being comfortable speaking to senior people is also a must - everyone from the CEO of a global corporation to Prime Ministers, senior military officers right down to 16 year old apprentices - we deal with them all. Being calm under pressure, thinking on your feet and being able to focus on the task at hand are key, as is being totally professional in all circumstances.</p>
4	<p>What do you enjoy most about your job? What are you least favourite aspects of your job?</p> <p>The sheer variety is incredible. I might be flying to Asia to media train a CEO or driving to Oxford to meet a nuclear physicist followed by a black tie dinner with the Chief of the Air Staff in the House of Commons, next day visiting the London Stock Exchange to help a client celebrate floating the business they created on the public markets. It is a challenging but fun role and I meet plenty of interesting people. Almost every day I learn some-</p>

	<p>thing new.</p> <p>Least favourite aspect is occasionally being employed by someone to help them navigate a particularly tricky period in their lives and then having your advice ignored, only to then see the scenario you warned would happen play out. Sometimes keeping people out of the press is as important as boosting their public profile!</p>
5	<p>What were your favourite subjects at school? Why? Do these link/relate to the job you do now?</p> <p>I was a keen rugby player - still am on occasion - so loved any sports. I remain fascinated by history and wish I'd studied it to degree level. I also wish I'd studied economics and had financial literacy from an earlier age. It would certainly have made learning to read a balance sheet and profit & loss account for work much easier as well as handling my personal finances. I also enjoyed English of course and remain a keen writer, producing free-lance feature articles on aviation for various magazines.</p> <p>Although I am today a very keen private pilot, I was never much interested in sciences. Again when it came time to hit the books and study for the exams it was a struggle at first to motivate myself to do the learning afresh. But it was well worth it and I've never looked back. Flying a vintage aeroplane is what I do to escape from occasional work stresses.</p>
6	<p>How did you get to where you are now? (i.e. academic routes, professional development, career opportunities)</p> <p>I flunked an A-level, lost my offer to do Geography at Durham University on an RAF Scholarship and instead went through clearing to read politics at UWE in Bristol. I chanced upon a gig writing for the student magazine there which was my break into journalism. I then did a fast-track post-grad course to get shorthand, media law and other practical skills, including lots of work experience. I was offered a staff job on a small magazine straight from college and rapidly worked my way up to daily newspapers, working for the national news agency the Press Association, the Glasgow Herald and then was Chief Reporter on the launch of CityAM. I then joined the Mail to run the City News desk and spent five frantic years there.</p> <p>The key was working hard, never saying no to any opportunity and making sure you made the most of every chance. Covering the 7/7 terrorist attacks on London was a memorable - if horrific moment - as was getting to fly a Supermarine Spitfire over Duxford aerodrome while the Mail's photographer filmed me from another aircraft alongside. It was just one moment when all the hard work came together to make a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Journalism gave me so many happy memories which more than offset the long hours, bad pay and frequently difficult assignments. Above all it taught me self-reliance and resilience.</p>
7	<p>What advice would you give to our aspiring students who are interested in pursuing a career in your profession?</p> <p>If you want to be a journalist, be under no illusion that it is very, very hard work and the</p>

pay is appalling. And - it sounds obvious - you have to be able to write. I interviewed so many aspiring reporters that could barely put a coherent sentence together. Just embarrassing. To be a reporter you have to have no fear and no shame. You have to have an inquiring mind, be anti-establishment to a certain extent and prepared to go places you are not supposed to be, ask awkward questions and remember you are there to serve the reader. Another necessary trait is determination. As Churchill said, never, never give up. Too many youngsters I've given reporting trials to over the years fell at the first hurdle because they didn't appreciate how hard it can be to track someone down when you are on deadline at midnight, in a foreign country, when they definitely don't want to speak to you. When it all comes together and you have your story the feeling is magic!

For PR it helps to have a solid media background as you then instinctively know what makes a good story - we call it 'news sense' and how to relate that to normal people. Politicians have forgotten that simple message.

We actually employ all sorts of people from various backgrounds in PR from ex-reporters like me to former investment bankers, lawyers and even doctors and scientists. It is hard work but very rewarding. You get to set the agenda and make the news everyone else will be reading about tomorrow.

8 In your current profession what are the potential development and progression opportunities?

We take on graduates as trainees with progression to junior roles based on ability and work ethic. Consultants and senior consultants do the bulk of the 'process' side of PR. The ultimate goal as a Partner or Director is to be regarded as a subject expert or someone who is a senior counsel to the Chief Executives and Chairmen - at present it is still dominated by men in Britain's boardrooms I'm afraid, although it is changing - of Britain's biggest companies. These people call us to ask for advice on how to communicate during the good times and how to rehabilitate themselves when things have gone wrong.

The top people in our industry are paid very well indeed and there have been one or two owners of the leading City PR firms who sold their businesses for multi-millions of pounds. Those are the exceptions though! However, the bulk of the workforce are paid well above the UK average wage and progression is based on ability. Amongst agencies the most successful people bring in new clients, thereby growing revenues for the business. That comes from being very well connected in our various spheres of influence and people are known for their networks. I'm lucky in that I am regarded by colleagues as someone with a very strong network of contacts in the aerospace industry, amongst the media and in the upper echelons of military aviation. Plus as a pilot myself the people I deal with know I understand their business and treat me as one of their own.

The lesson here is to specialise and find a niche for yourself. THE best advice I ever had.