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SCC498

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Informational Interview Assignment

As I approach the culmination of my undergraduate studies, it is more important now than ever to take advantage of the connections provided by Chapman. More than 85 percent of job postings are filled through networking (Belli 2017). The recent pandemic has also caused a recession which makes job opportunities more scarce and the hiring process more competitive. Networking plays an important role in the hiring process as well as expanding your network of influential contacts. Employers who prioritize hiring people they have networked with often results in them choosing candidates with a similar background or perspective as opposed to facilitating diversity (Schnalzer 2020). In an interview with Marcia Ballinger, a co-founder of Ballinger | Leafblad, Los Angeles Times editor Rachel Schnalzer discovered that networking can lead to a job where you are one of few candidates which gives you better odds. Ballinger recommended spending eighty percent of your time networking, ten percent of your time calling recruiters, and ten percent of your time looking at job postings online. For students, Ballinger mentioned that students and young people should take advantage of people’s soft spot for helping them and that they can network through online groups, writing blogs or simply participating online. Using this methodology, I browsed through the Chapman Alumni page of their LinkedIn, hoping to find a weak tie who had graduated from Chapman either this year or in the years before. I wanted to find someone in the field of writing, whether it be for business, marketing or journalism.

While going through the Chapman Alumni page on LinkedIn, I came across Siya Rajan’s LinkedIn profile and noticed that we had both majored in strategic and corporate communication. Since we had 10 mutual connections, I requested to connect with her. I decided to message her personally to ask if she would be willing to do an informational interview with me, to which she responded with her email. We then scheduled an informational interview to be conducted through a phone call. Siya completed her undergraduate degree in strategic and corporate communication in 2015 before returning to her home country in Dubai for a couple of years. She decided to return to Chapman to obtain a Masters of Business Administration with an emphasis in Marketing. Not only did we both work for The Panther, she also worked for Chapman Magazine as a Communications writer. Some of her positions in the past few years include being a digital marketing director, copy editor, digital content editor and most recently, a community engagement specialist. Siya had had the opportunity to write for both businesses and publications, with which her major in strategic and corporate communication helped with, she said. She chose to major in strategic and corporate communication because it “combined everything she liked about business, like marketing, public relations, creating messages and design.” Her biggest takeaway from her coursework at Chapman was “learning how to tailor your writing for a business.” When it came to special advice for a person like myself who is entering this field, Siya recommended that I find a mentor in my field. At her first job, her boss tried to assign her tasks related to what she wanted to specialize in as well as inviting her to sit in on a variety of different meetings. Another skill that Siya had that I wanted to get better at is search-engine optimization; I took my LinkedIn Learning course on this but I still feel rather novice at it despite the course. She recommended courses from an individual named Neil Patel that she had taken to improve her ability to utilize search-engine optimization when it came to her digital marketing endeavors. To stay motivated to keep applying to jobs, she encouraged me not to give up hope but instead, to reach out to people on LinkedIn to connect with and network. When I asked what I can do on my own time to better prepare myself for the job market, Siya recommended Hubspot courses which she started doing in graduate school and wished she stuck with. She highlighted courses like inbound marketing, messaging as well as digital marketing. Recruiters on the search for new employees in this field look out for several characteristics in potential new hire candidates: first and foremost, Siya emphasized the importance of quick thinking and one’s ability to find solutions. To “train your thinking to a solution-oriented mindset” would be most helpful when in any position. She reiterated that everyone makes mistakes and said to “avoid dwelling on what went wrong; instead, try and focus on how you can fix the situation or what you could possibly do better next time.” Finally, when it came to general advice for undergraduates who are about to embark on the job search, Siya told me to keep my head up and also not to necessarily take the first job I get: if I’m excited about it, I should go for it; but if it doesn’t feel right, I should go with my gut instinct. She also said to try not to get into a funk when it comes to job applications and rejection. Luckily, there is a lot she said I could find in writing. Not only did she tell me to keep reaching out, but that the right thing is waiting for me to come along. At the end of the interview, Siya offered to take a look at my resume or refer me for any jobs at companies she had connections with. A day after, I sent her a follow up email thanking her for her time as well as a copy of my resume and the link to my digital portfolio for her to review. I look forward to her response!

The second Chapman alumnus I interviewed was Blue Kim, who graduated in May 2020 with a degree in strategic and corporate communication and a minor in entrepreneurship. Like Siya, I found Blue through Chapman’s LinkedIn alumni page and messaged her in hopes of being able to conduct an informational interview with her. Since Blue is currently in Korea, I wanted to be sensitive to the time difference as well as what was on her schedule. Blue took the same senior seminar course and was more than happy to help. When I asked her why she chose strategic and corporate communication as a major, she said that although she started as a communication major, she “loved business,” and she “knew that that was what she wanted to do.” Through her previous internships at Sony Entertainment and Fabletics, she realized that she was less interested in public relations and more invested in diversity and inclusion. Blue’s biggest takeaway from her coursework at Chapman was the senior seminar for strategic and corporate communication because of the informational interviews. “I knew they were important,” she said. “I just didn’t always have the motivation to do them.” I was recently interviewed for an internship that I didn’t end up getting, which was what I shared with Blue later on in the interview. This prompted me to ask how she stayed motivated to apply to jobs and internships, because it is difficult to keep the momentum after several rejections. “It’s all about developing these genuine relationships - that’s what really motivates me to work.” She emphasized the importance of following up after interviews whether or not you get the job you get the job that you apply for because you can make a connection with that person. Blue mentioned how she didn’t get her internship at Sony on the first try; she didn’t get the position she wanted right away but the interviewer ended up connecting with her to the point where she reached out to Blue for another internship opportunity. “Even through all the positions that I don’t get, meeting people is truly the biggest takeaway. Every rejection and every acceptance is an opportunity to learn something new.” Blue said that she still conducted informational interviews and she owes a lot of the connections she has to the interviews. When it comes to not having as much professional experience, Blue said that the senior seminar helped her “self-reflect and think deeply about what you’ve done even if it’s not technically work experience.” She also emphasized the importance of identifying achievements numerically; in my case, it would be how many articles I’ve written or how many views a certain piece has gotten. Given my background in writing articles, Blue encouraged me to post some of my writing to LinkedIn. For my class called business and professional communication with Michael Ross, I wrote an informative briefing about how COVID-19 has affected business communication, and with Blue’s suggestion I decided to post it to LinkedIn! In regard to specialized advice for recent graduates entering the field, Blue warned me not to burn myself out. “It’s important to not be so hard on yourself. That’s something I constantly have to hear because I’m always so hard on myself.” She said people’s value is so much more than who they work for or what they’ve accomplished; instead, it comes from who you are. Another important point Blue made was not to compare your accomplishments to that of your peers because everyone’s journey is different. We were able to bond over our Asian-American identities and how that led us to put a lot of pressure on ourselves to succeed. “People only talk about their failures, only about their successes - especially on LinkedIn.” This helped me realize that seeing others succeed doesn’t discount all the ‘no’s before hearing a ‘yes.’ In the last couple of minutes of the interview, Blue reminded me to know my worth and be aware of what I really want to do in my career.

My biggest takeaways from my two informational interviews would be the positive affirmation and mentorship I gained with these two inspiring women. Although I didn’t know them until roughly a week or so ago, I felt really close with them after speaking for just half an hour. These informational interviews set a precedent for future networking connections I look forward to making in my career. I hope to connect with more writers like Siya and more advocates of diversity and inclusion like Blue.

References

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