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SCHOOL WAS DONE A LONG TIME AGO



By Marissa Tiano and Allison Li

Twenty-nine-year-old Stefen Hakim opened David Turnbull's Wednesday afternoon Media Relations course with an air of surety and personal success. Currently, the Communications and E-commerce Manager at RacquetGuys, Stefen's guest lecture was a nod to life after graduation and his career accomplishments since. He graduated at the age of 26 from Seneca's Public Relations – Corporate

Communications (<http://www.senecacollege.ca/create/media-communications/public-relations-corporate-communications/>) program in 2014 (formerly the Corporate Communications Program). His career highlights include working in sales at The Beer Store for seven years and as the communications manager at FC Barcelona Canada for a year.

Stefen pursued History and Philosophy in his undergraduate studies at the University of Guelph. He expressed gratitude towards his History background as it allowed him to understand his audiences — a major component of Public Relations (PR). This ultimately gave him greater initiative into researching the history behind any project at hand. His education in Philosophy guided him to think outside of the box and to not question things argumentatively. However, his background also held him back in some aspects. He recounts an incident with Professor Turnbull, in which he handed in a paper full of the flourished writing style he used in his undergrad, which was ripped up in front of his face — half an hour before the assignment was due. Stefen recalls having 15 minutes to rewrite this assignment. Professor Turnbull denies this, claiming he gave him a more generous 20 minutes. This experience ultimately altered his writing style to become tailored for communications. Stefen recognizes his initial writing style as one of his biggest hindrances upon entering the program, a problem shared with some of the peers in our class.



“When he talked about flourished academic writing and how it needs to be tossed out the window — when you approach writing for PR — that’s a personal challenge,” said Sierra Dibiase, a current undergrad in the PRCC program with a shared background in History, “his advice to keep it simple and accessible for everybody and not an academic audience is something that will help me improve my writing.”

Speaking about how passion correlates with successful networking in the PR industry, Stefen recalls how his involvement in Munk Debates at the University of Toronto is a passion of his. This passion contributed to his success in making new connections. His take-aways there were that volunteering with where your passion lies is critical, and you can get ahead as a student in the industry through volunteering. Another helpful insight was that some people are more natural at communication and networking while others have to try harder. He used the analogy of Bill and Hillary Clinton — the former who could captivate the whole room with his charm, and the latter, whose natural cold front prevented her from exhibiting the same charisma. Above all, he stresses authenticity in one's communication and learning about other's interests to maintaining connections.



Stefen stressed that this program was not school, asserting that, "school was done a long time ago," and making it clear that this program is a job. He loved working every job, including as a consultant with organizational development, and writing Human Resources documents, despite the seemingly boring nature. He also warned that PR is a 24/7 industry, not a nine to five job. "When things need to be done, they need to be done."

During Stefen's presentation, there was a large emphasis on networking and making connections with everyone from guest speakers to our peers. This is but one of the pieces of wisdom he offered us. Other advice that he divulged, included: taking "like" out of your vocabulary, engaging with guest speakers, asking for informational interviews as they can lead to a job, and not going blindly into said interviews. You need to be willing to find ways to make yourself a desirable candidate, such as looking for jobs you're not qualified for, which will show you what you need to learn. "Think of things that will make you a desirable candidate — like your willingness to learn. The most important resource you have is your connections. This program has a lot of clouts. Knowing you're a student of that program will help you," Stefen says when asked about ways to stand out among the competition.

The key message to his lecture was simple: love the job you work. And Stefen's most important piece of advice? "Take opportunities when they come to you."



Marissa Tiano is a PRCC student who sells liquor on the side.

Allison Li, also a PRCC student, is a registered nurse who sometimes likes to write.