

**CIPR
Pride Awards
2014**

Individual Awards Outstanding Young Communicator

Gloucestershire County Council
Charlotte Merryfield



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

Professional Development

From the age of 14, when I first sat in a media studies class, I knew I wanted to work in this field. I went on to do a Marketing with Advertising Management degree and then a marketing placement at Southampton College.

I decided to move to Gloucestershire and began my career in PR as an Account Executive at 10 Yetis, a consumer facing PR Agency.

While there I worked across several accounts managing events, generating coverage in national, international and regional newspapers. I soon began to manage the internship programme, recruiting candidates and managing their workloads.

I left for a new challenge at GCC where I started as a Senior Communications Officer in September 2012 and took responsibility for delivering campaigns.

Working in-house gives you opportunities you wouldn't have at an agency and after firmly establishing myself in campaigns, I was ready for a new challenge. I was given a trial on the press desk, which involves day to day media management, providing quotes and press releases and the best bit - crisis management. I immediately felt this fast-paced, high pressure environment was right for me as I thrive on the short deadlines and difficult conversations you have when trying to convince a reporter that something really isn't worth running.

I quickly found the tough issues were most rewarding to work on and became the crisis communications lead for all safeguarding issues and the energy from waste facility.

Being ambitious, I also didn't want to let go of my campaigns so I'm the only press officer in the team who works across both media enquires and campaigns.

Why me?

Since starting in PR, I've had varying roles in private and public sector and I know I'm good at my job. But the thing I believe makes me outstanding is my thirst to always do better and to keep striving for more. Monday mornings don't bother me as my job is my passion. I know I'm privileged to work in an environment where I'm able to develop that passion so I always try to be the best I can.

My role in crisis communications is a great example of this. Since I started on the press desk GCC has featured in some of the most horrific court cases it's ever known, including child neglect, rape and sexual abuse of vulnerable people. Without question I took the lead, having had no previous experience. I developed media plans to manage each situation and we have come out each situation well. I've received praise for my role and the strategic advice I provided.

At the same time, the team itself was heading into a major restructure. During this time I alone acted as a sounding board for the team's manager – my boss's boss – and helped her to forge her plans around how the team should be structured, which demonstrates her confidence in my strategic opinion.

After the restructure we had a new member of staff on the press desk and without prompting I mentored her. I helped develop her confidence and supported her with difficult issues. She is now starting to thrive. We'll soon have another new starter and I'll give him the same support. I'm also going through the interview process to find a communications apprentice to mentor.

I'm hopeful that my behaviour will show my management team that I don't just do my day job, I want to go above and beyond. I've learned to rely on my imagination and trust my judgement and hopefully I can now teach the skills I've learned to an enthusiastic apprentice and soon other members of the team.

Achievements

- Providing 24/7 press office support for GCC and GFRS. Only press officer to also manage campaigns.
- Delivered high profile media and crisis comms support for several safeguarding issues including child neglect, rape and sexual abuse of vulnerable people
- Taking the media lead for the controversial energy from waste (incinerator) which gains national coverage.
- As part of a lobbying campaign to seek funding for flood damaged roads, developed a brochure to be presented to government to put forward our case
- Grow Gloucestershire, youth education and skills campaign – campaign to help find jobs for Gloucestershire's youth. To date I have delivered, several high profile summit events, a showcase award ceremony, two support booklets for 14-16 year old, a new website and gained significant media coverage.
- At 10 Yetis, gaining coverage on national and international news channels, including The Guardian, Metro, The Financial Times and Good Morning America.

Campaign

After launching the Grow Gloucestershire campaign and encouraging businesses and schools to promote work experience opportunities, I suggested we should congratulate those who already did.

The brief

Create an awards ceremony that celebrates young people in Gloucestershire who have been outstanding in the work place, through an apprenticeship, internship or work experience. To also recognise the work that businesses and schools/training providers have done.

What I did

- Developed an awards programme and put out a call for submissions on a limited budget (less than £5k).
- To target businesses, I arranged advertorial to be placed within the business pages of the local press. I also attended business networking events.
- To target young people I visited schools and colleges, speaking directly with students, lectures and teachers.
- I received approximately 40 nominations, allowing the judges to shortlist three candidates for seven awards.
- I asked BBC Points West presenter, Steve Knibbs to host the event, alongside the winner of BBC One Apprentice, Michelle Dewbury.
- I arranged an interactive video to be played which introduced the category, the nominee and the person who nominated them.
- I arranged for the food to be supplied, prepared and served by Gloucestershire College students to cut costs.

Evaluation

The Showcase Awards were held last October at Cheltenham racecourse and were a huge success. A total of 250 attended and the feedback from the winners was overwhelmingly positive.

All the local media covered the event and we're in the planning stages for a second ceremony later this year.

Ends

1042 words

Contact

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