

LAURIE HOGAN AND THE PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECTRUM

This individual profile was written for the English course Writing for the Workplace and Public Audiences. Our assignment was to interview a professional in a career field related to our own and compose a feature article suitable for publication.

Laurie Hogan is an APR, a media and communications manager, and the powerhouse behind the public relations department of Creative Services in High Point, North Carolina. At this consulting agency that offers a variety of marketing related services, Hogan works with many clients of different kinds. Her education and experiences in the workplace provide her with a deep knowledge of the wide-ranging spectrum of public relations and communication.

High Point is Hogan's home town. Spending time with family is important to her; she has a three-year-old that claims her heart and a lot of her time. She likes to see the Greensboro Grasshoppers with her son, and she hosts a church group meeting in her home on Wednesdays. Cooking is something she enjoys, but she's not a "measurer" – she gets inspired by recipes then makes them in the most efficient way. Hogan has a full life in North Carolina, the state where she grew up and in which she began her college education.

Hogan attended UNC Chapel Hill. Originally, she didn't have her heart set on her current career in public relations, but hoped to work in the realm of news anchors and broadcasters. When she started to research classes for her journalism and mass communications major, however, Hogan "accidentally" stumbled upon public relations. When she saw how public relations was involved in many different parts of media, Hogan says that she "fell in love, and it made sense."

She had guidance along the way to help her streamline her career goals. In her freshman year of Chapel Hill, Hogan attended an advising session with a man named Bill Cloud, a now retired "hardcore" journalist. She recalls him asking why she had settled on public relations. Hogan relates laughingly that she gave a generic answer that was immediately shot down by Cloud, who told her that there was one correct answer to his question: "I love writing." Hogan describes this as her first "beat-down," but his advice identified writing as a major aspect of public relations that Hogan loved.

After she graduated from Chapel Hill in 2006, on the advice of her professors Hogan took some time to focus on working before continuing her education through the University of Missouri. There, she earned a master's degree in journalism with a concentration in strategic communication, balancing work and school at the same time. She soon had another pivotal

conversation with a woman well-versed in the field of educational public relations – her second “beat-down.” Over lunch, the woman told Hogan that she wasn’t “tough enough” for the trying field. In hindsight, Hogan believes that the woman was burnt-out after a long career, but her sharp comment lit a fighting fire in Hogan’s spirit.

Hogan jumped into public relations for education, working for Guilford County Schools in a variety of ways. Hogan calls this experience a “rollercoaster of emotions” with many “highs and lows.” With the enormous, diverse group of people that Guilford County Schools encompasses, Hogan says she always had situations popping up that called for public statements and communications. Hogan recalls a devastating death of students under horrible circumstances that shook the school system to its core. She had to write public statements for school leaders almost immediately. Tragic events like this required thick skin. In general, the nature of the field created a “reactionary” environment that was often stressful. Yet while there were trying times, there were also absolutely euphoric moments.

One such highlight that Hogan describes brightly was organizing a press conference for children whose science experiments were sent to the space station. She paints a dazzling picture of a panel of children dressed in lab coats while seated at a table behind microphones, surrounded by the press. Hogan was instrumental in bringing this about, and she found that working with the kids was rewarding. What she describes as her favorite project goes hand-in-hand with this event. Hogan oversaw the organization of a public event focused on an amateur radio contact between a student and the space station. She had a hand in all the aspects of public relations for this event, including writing the script and designing the presentation. There was a ten-minute window to contact the North Carolinian astronaut on the space station, and planning around such a small window was stressful! Yet bringing all the parts of public relations together successfully made the event a standout experience for Hogan.

Hogan identifies a sharp contrast in the work environment of educational public relations in comparison to her current workplace at an agency. She is now her own manager, a position that requires both organization and what she coins as “personal initiative.” Perhaps the greatest difference is that she now works ahead of the storm instead of reacting to fires as a soldier on the front line. She now acts in the role of “coaching” and “counseling” clients on what actions to take and how to communicate, a role that allows her to step back and help clients see the big picture. These clients are varied, but many of her steady coaching partnerships are with universities.

One school she works closely with is High Point University as support for their media team. Her work is multifaceted. Hogan writes their news releases and the content for the news section on

their website, plans the release schedule for their media, and writes feature stories for the HPU magazine. These feature stories are crafted from face-to-face interviews guided by questions that Hogan creates with her article's goal in mind. Another university client that Hogan works with allows her to engage her creative side a bit more. For this client, Hogan plans a yearly theme for media releases and coordinates a release schedule. She studies their data, considers how she can bring the data to life, and identifies what stories can she tell.

In a more analytical vein for still another university client, Hogan works on their communication audit. To complete this massive task, she looks at all the elements of the school's current communications and assesses their actual perception. To find out how students and professors interpret the university's communications, Hogan employs various methods of research, including small focus group interviews, surveys, and a close study of communication samples such as brochures and emails. She studies the samples focusing on design and clarity of their message. With a multitude of clients and different kinds of projects, Hogan is exercising many elements of public relations daily.

Being able to work on many different pieces of public relations is something Hogan loves. But the best part? For Hogan, it's the writing, even though she describes her relationship with the exercise as one of both love and hate. She hates the struggle of picking away at a single paragraph for an eternity when the creative juices just aren't flowing. However, when she gets in a solid chunk of time "when things click" and she is absorbed into the middle of writing – that's perfection. She relates laughingly that she has moments where she hates writing and other moments where she feels like she could say, "I want to do this everyday!" She wishes she had cultivated her talent more in high school, and sometimes she questions her writing, but ultimately she says that it is absolutely necessary to be confident in your work. With a history of success, it's clear that this ideology has worked well for Hogan.

With communication at the center of her career, Hogan has much knowledge to share. She says that much of communicating well in her field is learned intuitively through experience. Through her own experience, she has learned many things such as the best time of day to send emails, and what news is better shared in person rather than digitally. To communicate well, Hogan says it is most important to consider your audience and the content of your message, but sometimes the timing of your message can influence your communication as well. Overall, she said that keeping your word earns the trust of clients and the public⁶⁻⁸⁻¹⁷, and setting clear expectations for everyone prevents confusion and creates clarity. Credibility and clarity are important to what Hogan says public relations is all about: the relationship between an organization and people and determining the best way to communicate a message in that relationship.

To be in public relations and communications, Hogan says that you don't have to work in a big city or a giant agency; for her, staying small and local is her preference. "Writers are needed everywhere," she says. She believes in the value of words. In a fast-paced society with new innovations every day, Hogan says that no matter how much technology changes, words will always be a part of life. Communication is relevant whenever, wherever, and comes in many forms; Laurie Hogan shows us this through her accomplishments in the wide spectrum of public relations.