

Kara Snyder 0:00

Hello and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host Kara Snyder and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the College and today we have a chance to talk to Tori Smith. Tory is an alum of the Department of Agriculture and currently serves as the commercial project specialist for con skilled industries. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

Tori Smith 0:30

Hey, thanks so much, Kara. It's a pleasure.

Kara Snyder 0:32

It's gonna be fun. So I'm so excited to hear your story. Let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose ISU?

Tori Smith 0:39

So I had toured multiple universities across the Midwest with a very open mind, what drew me to ISU the most, it really boiled down to that professor to student ratio that I knew I could get once I got to my major courses. I liked the intimacy of it. And overall, the involvement opportunities were attractive to me as well. But that's definitely what led me to ISU.

Kara Snyder 1:06

Well, and I was lucky enough to know you while you were a student on campus, and I know that you were very busy and involved while you were here. So tell our listeners, how you were involved on campus, what activities you chose that sort of thing.

Tori Smith 1:20

Yeah, so I was involved in six different registered student organizations, I'll touch on a couple of them that made the most impact on my life. First one would have been national agri Marketing Association. And that was an incredible opportunity where every year with a group of diverse students from the Department of Ag got together and we got to market a fake product or service that we thought could benefit the agricultural industry. So we had to come up with a in depth marketing plan, even get like a model of that product to take with us to the competition. You've worked very closely with other students in all facets of marketing, I loved that experience. And another one was agriculture future of America, that was a conference that I was able to go to because of other clubs I was in. And I was given the opportunity to lobby out in DC on Capitol Hill on National Agriculture day with the ag policy institute that they had in place. So opportunities like that are few and far between, but they're definitely there. I attended 13 different conferences within four years of studying at ISU across seven different states. So I traveled I was a busy bee going everywhere. If there was an opportunity. I did not say no, I was going to milk the college experience for all that it was worth. And I can confidently say I did exactly that.

Kara Snyder 2:53

13 different conferences. Oh my gosh, story. I feel like we would talk to some professionals today that don't do that much professional development in the span of four years. That's amazing.

Tori Smith 3:03

It really was. And some of those consisted of competitions as well, speaking engagements, similar to that marketing competition. So all of that, I mean, a wealth of knowledge, a wealth of networking opportunities that with individuals across the country, within my industry that I still stay in touch with today.

Kara Snyder 3:22

And when you think back on that time, what do you miss the most about your time on campus?

Tori Smith 3:28

Two things. The first would be my close access to all my friends, you don't realize it. And I know everyone says it. But until you leave the university life changes. People go in different paths and just grow into adulthood. And it's just so much harder to get everyone together. So I've really missed that. And another thing, it's so simple, but just walking around campus, once anyone with a desk job can probably relate. But boy, I missed sitting in class for 15 minutes getting up walking across campus to the next class in the beautiful weather. I missed that part of campus too, because Illinois State is so beautiful.

Kara Snyder 4:09

That's a great answer. And all those things we do tend to take for granted for two to four years or however long you're here and then all of a sudden, it changes quickly once you're in the quote unquote, real world.

Tori Smith 4:21

Yes, it does.

Kara Snyder 4:24

So tell us about that initial job search. What was that like for you? And where did you end up? What was that entry level job.

Tori Smith 4:31

I took my four years at ISU pretty seriously. I had part time work experience, internship experience, enough community and academic involvement that really set me up for success. I had made an effort to network my way into some of those key opportunities and conversations that would you know, kind of pave the way and make that job search process much easier for me in the future. So I had graduated in May of 2016. In less than a month later in June of 2016, I started my first full time career at GrowMark in recruiting marketing recruiting administration.

Kara Snyder 5:10

Tell us, how did you go from GrowMark to com scale? What did that path look like for you?

Tori Smith 5:16

Yeah, so my next career move was actually to a marketing agency that specializes in agricultural clients, I knew I wanted to really embark on more of a marketing career. So I started there, and I worked with clients that were in Mexico, the US, Canada, anything from scheduling media plans, booking digital marketing efforts, coming up with campaigns, helping them move the needle with their marketing needs. I was the Director of Public Relations and media for all clients that we had. But being that account manager for those agricultural clients was really where I thrived. I loved that client interaction. And then from there, actually, one of our clients was calm, skilled industries, I got to know them quite well from the marketing agency. And after just a handful of interactions with them, I knew they were special. For me that transition to palm skilled industries, aside from marrying my husband, has been the best decision I've made in my 20s.

Kara Snyder 6:22

That might be the most important caveat I've ever heard. But I'm so glad to hear that story. And you know, I know from knowing you, and also the information you shared about your time on campus, that relationship building is so important to you. And I see that show up in your story over and over again. And how that's benefited you could you give a piece of advice for someone looking to start strengthening relationships.

Tori Smith 6:50

First and foremost, you have to go through awkward to get to awesome, there's no way around it, you have to go to the length of doing the awkward networking, the reach outs that make you uncomfortable, putting yourself out there is a non negotiable, you have to do it. And I guess always reminding yourself the worst they can say is no, you know, just always ask for the opportunity. I tell students all the time, you know, I have the chance to come back to ISU on occasion and for different things. And I always tell students, put yourself out there, ask you know, if they don't have the perfect internship for you, no big deal. Ask if you can come job shadow, the worst they can say is no. So that's my biggest piece of advice.

Kara Snyder 7:34

Go through awkward to get to awesome. That is amazing. Thank you for that. So I want to know a little bit more about your current job, what is your favorite part of your current role?

Tori Smith 7:46

Oh, my goodness, I love so many aspects of my current role. But it really boils down to the people. And with it being a global company, the mix of cross cultural education and knowledge that I've been given has just been so eye opening to me, it's really unveiled opportunity. And I'm learning something new every single day. And I think that's what I enjoy the most.

Kara Snyder 8:10

And on the flip side, what do you think the most challenging thing about your job is?

Tori Smith 8:15

Balancing it all. So I'm I'm in a role right now where I view myself as the liaison between the global sales team and the global marketing team. So trying to do lead generation efforts, a lot of behind collecting sales analytics, and looking for trends that the marketing team can then use to build effective campaigns, and put ourselves out there in a way that makes sense for our business and the direction that we're trying to go. So I'm kind of missing link between the two major team, which makes my role unique, and I cross paths with a lot of different people. So just trying to stay ahead and keep everybody happy, really is the hardest part.

Kara Snyder 9:02

Well, if you find the secret to balancing everything and keeping everyone happy, please come back and tell us all about it.

Tori Smith 9:11

I will do that.

Kara Snyder 9:12

So despite your busy schedule, you are able to find time to give back to your community. Tell us about your community involvement and why you think finding time for service is so important.

Tori Smith 9:25

Service has always been top of mind for me. I think part of is the way I was raised. I was always shown an example that that was something you did in something to prioritize as well into adulthood. So one of the groups I'm part of is Bloomington Normal young professionals. And I mentioned earlier how difficult it is to stay in touch with friends post college. And that's so true but having organizations like this young professionals group I'm a part of makes it so much easier, where I can go talk to like minded professionals, we can discuss you know how we define success. Tell us what growth looks like for us what are the pain points were encountering, and really just can't feed off each other in that way. And that's a monthly engagement that I take part in. And we do service opportunities and all kinds of things through that group. Another initiative I'm part of is Big Brothers, Big Sisters. I've been matched with the same little sister, as her mentor for the last seven years. And she is such a big part of my life. I cannot say enough good things about my organization, I got to a point where post college, all my friends have either moved away or accepted, demanding careers that took them in other parts of the world. And I was left here in Bloomington, feeling a little bit alone for the first time, my then boyfriend, now husband had accepted a job out in Iowa. So he was no longer close to me. And I needed a way to get involved. And I found Big Brothers Big Sisters, I went to an informational night and I never looked back. It's been a great organization and highly encourage others to look into it.

Kara Snyder 11:02

And what would you say to someone who is the kind of a young professional like yourself, trying to figure out maybe a way to get involved in a new community or see the community that they're

in in a new light? How do you recommend they go about finding some of those involvement opportunities?

Tori Smith 11:20

Ask colleagues, Google is also another great resource. I mean, there's always someone that needs help in your community, I don't care if it's organizing a team event to go volunteer a couple hours at a food bank, or giving back to the youth in your community here at Christmas time. You know, we're approaching the holidays. There's all sorts of great ways to give back donations to collect, et cetera. There's always something nearby, you just got to look for it and ask around. And Tori,

Kara Snyder 11:48

I think about you giving back I think about you working and navigating your work relationships. And I'm just curious, how would you describe your leadership style.

Tori Smith 11:59

Simply put, I strive to be a servant leader. So not just seeing leadership as an opportunity to serve myself or have some kind of rank. Instead, it's complete opposite. It's seeing leadership as an opportunity to serve others. I hold on to that. And I take that seriously. And something I hope I can say for the rest of my life that I'm a servant leader. And that's not just in the workplace that's just in life in general.

Kara Snyder 12:25

That's a great perspective. Thank you for sharing. And Tori, we are going to finish up with a speed round. So just go with your first instinct on these questions. What? To lazy dinner.

Tori Smith 12:38

Oh, goodness, I have this for lunch today. But salad kids, they're so easy to go in a bag. It's a salad mix, so that any of the kinds of goodies that you put on top of the salad, the dressing, it's all in there, you just open the bag and mix it up. And that is the easiest lazy girl dinner I've ever encountered. But I love it.

Kara Snyder 12:58

I do too. All the portions are ready to know exactly. What's your favorite holiday tradition

Tori Smith 13:06

Might not be as much of a holiday tradition as it is a family tradition. But I wish that I would say my grandmother's apple pie, which shout out to Grandma today is her 86th birthday. But in our family, it was always the Fourth of July, apple pie. First Days apple pie Christmas apple pie. So that recipe follows me everywhere. I have it framed in my kitchen in my grandmother's handwriting. And she's taught me how to perfect it over the years. So I would say that pie that follows me around to the holidays is just the sweetest thing, and definitely something I cherish. Oh,

Kara Snyder 13:40

I love that. Well, happy birthday to grandma. And I bet that just like home anytime you have it. Yes. What is the most used app on your phone?

Tori Smith 13:52

Aside from just, you know, messenger, or texting or making calls, I would say Duolingo is probably my most used app on my phone. After my very first trip to Denmark with my current company. I was fascinated by their culture. And there's a lot to respect from their culture. And I was up for the challenge. You know, less than half of the population of Illinois speaks Danish. Everyone's like why would you learn German? Why wouldn't you learn Spanish better? And I just drawn to this language. So I have over a 300 day streak on Duolingo learning Danish, so that's probably the most used app on my phone. That

Kara Snyder 14:32

is awesome. Can you give us your favorite Danish phrase?

Tori Smith 14:38

Oh goodness. If I say that, some Danish colleagues are gonna make fun of me. So I'll stick to an easy one and just say VCs, which is for you. See you later. Thank

Kara Snyder 14:52

you for cheering that's awesome. What are you reading or listening to right now? Anything you'd recommend?

Tori Smith 15:00

I recently finished Tomic habits by James clear, if you have not read that book, definitely put it on your must read. I absolutely loved it. It's kind of changed the way I think about how I structure my day to day and enabling better habits and how to dismiss poor habits from your life is a really great read. As far as podcasts go. My favorite all time podcast is a bit of optimism by Simon Sinek. I'm a routine listener to that. So if you haven't heard of that one, definitely check that one out, too.

Kara Snyder 15:33

Oh, I'm gonna add that to my list. Thank you. Yes. And Tory, I asked everybody who comes on the podcast Avante is gondola or pub to cheese balls.

Tori Smith 15:43

I have to go with the gondola.

Kara Snyder 15:45

I think the gondola is winning. I need to go back and tally it up. But I think it is the front runner at this point in time. One last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student what would you say?

Tori Smith 15:59

Wherever you go, whatever you do, go with all your heart. I think you know we sometimes separate ourselves from being human so often and try to be perfect in everything we do. And when you just really centralized, bumping your heart in everything you do you show up authentic, you show up with empathy and everyone around you benefits from that.

Kara Snyder 16:20

Great advice. Thanks again for being here. That was Tori Smith, the commercial project specialists for con skilled industries. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni.