



Meet Joel Gratz, Meteorologist and Modeling Analysis at ICAT Managers, Boulder, CO

Perhaps this is not for everyone, but I crammed as much schooling as I could into 24 years. It started with meteorology at Penn State with minors in business and weather communications. I then headed west to the University of Colorado, where I earned a masters in Environmental Studies and Business Administration. I then found a home at an insurance company – this employer was not the plan from day one, but it worked out very well.

How did you first get interested in weather?

I loved snow and clouds ever since I was in elementary school. By high school, I loved snow and clouds just as much as I did in elementary school, which made it easy to come to two conclusions:

- 1) I really love the weather.
- 2) I should become a meteorologist.



Figure 1. This me doing what I love to do in Colorado!

And that was about it. The weather was always something special to me, and after spending much of my childhood loving the weather, my mom suggested I keep loving the weather right into college and major in meteorology. Like most motherly advice – it sounded pretty good to me. And I have absolutely no regrets.

How did you find your first job, and what was it like?

I interned at a television station in Philadelphia (NBC10) the summer after my sophomore year, and I participated in a severe weather field program (IHOP 2002) the summer after my junior year. While both of these experiences were fun, I realized I wanted something slightly different, but wasn't sure what it was. I continued my education the University of Colorado, studying everything from policy to business to the climate of Greenland. Luckily, I could study all of these things at one school and under one dual-degree (M.S. and MBA) program. When it came time to work during the summers between graduate school, my advisor helped me find jobs in Boulder. My job during my second graduate school summer was with my current company as an intern. What's great about being an intern? Usually, you don't get any health benefits. Second, you usually have a pretty good shot at landing a full-time position when you finish school. This was the case for me.

How would you describe your current job and how is it different from a forecasting job and other jobs you've had?

My company is a hurricane and earthquake insurer, and they ask me to do a little bit of everything. I analyze raw data. I run computer models. I use GIS mapping programs. I forecast and explain the weather when we have an active hurricane in the Atlantic or Pacific. And I was also tapped to design a hurricane damage estimation website and manage the team of web developers in India who wrote the code for the website.

In short, I need to write well, speak clearly and confidently, and know a decent amount about a lot of different subject areas, from engineering to software to meteorology.

What would you say to those interested in working in the private sector?

Do what you love, try new experiences, keep your options open, and specialize in something in addition to meteorology.

- Do what you love. You'll hear this from everybody, but it's true. You'll work harder when you are proud of what you do and who you are working for.
- Try new experiences. Move to a different city, try out a new industry, or take a position that stretches your skills. You can always go back to what and where you are comfortable, but the further you get from school, the more responsibilities you have (family, financial) and the harder it is to take a chance and switch jobs or move across the country.
- Keep your options open. Network through the AMS and other professional organizations, and find a school or job that allows for you to grow into new areas. Often, interests change over the course of years, and if you're at a school or organization that offers many different types of majors or jobs, you'll have plenty of room to shift to new areas of focus.
- Specialize in something in addition to meteorology. Very few people can make a career based primarily on weather forecasting. Usually, people branch out into "meteorology +", meaning that they have an additional skill that compliments their knowledge and passion for meteorology. This additional skill could be computer programming, or graphic design, or education, or...the possibilities are endless. Just remember that your chances of success increase as you bring more skills to an organization and can help them in multiple ways.