

The AMS Board for Early Career Professionals wants to highlight members of the weather, water and climate enterprise who exemplifies the AMS Mission just a few years into their career. Our "Perspectives from Early Career Professionals" segment aims to highlight early career achievements in multiple sectors of meteorology, including academic, government, private and broadcast.

This segment features Becky Elliot, meteorologist for AccuWeather Enterprises in State College, Pennsylvania. Graduating from the University of Northern Colorado, Becky has moved up the ladder in her forecasting career. Starting at a small weather company in Cheyenne, Wyoming, she then moved on to a Storm Warning Meteorologist position at AccuWeather in Wichita, Kansas. After two and a half years later, she then relocated to their headquarters in State College.

BECP: What was the interview process like?

BE: I felt like the process was easy and straight-forward. The phone interview consisted of regular interview questions (name a time you were a team player, what's a weakness, etc), along with detailed meteorology questions. These questions included radar, the impacts of severe weather and short term forecasting. I traveled to Wichita a few weeks later for an in-person interview... to say I was nervous was an understatement! What helped ease my nerves was the advice of a friend and my sisters: They told me to be myself, which may seem like a simple, obvious thing, but it truly helped. You only have a few hours (at most) to make an impression during an interview. Your potential future employer wants to know the real you and assess how your skills, strengths and personality will mesh with the people you will be working closely with. The in-person interview consisted of meeting with meteorologists there and observing their work in action, as well as further interview inquiries and questions to review my depth of meteorology knowledge. Interacting with the meteorologists at the office was a very important aspect of the interview. It allowed them to get to know me, find out things we had in common and get a glimpse of what working there would be like. Your job can be like a second home, so it's important to know what to expect, should you receive and accept a job offer.

BECP: Do you have any helpful tips for someone going through the job search right now?

BE: Learn as much as possible about the job you are applying for. Research the company, review their social media accounts and find background information on people who work there. Study the LinkedIn profile of who you'll be interviewing with, if possible. Be sure to go into the interview knowing what the company does and how your skill set will lend itself well to the job. You have about a minute or less to make an impression with your resume, so put the most important and relevant items at the top, ensuring they stand out. Also, never underestimate the power of social media. It can be an extremely valuable tool to interact with other professionals in the field and make your name, interests and skill set known. Seeing how you present yourself on social media, including what you post and who you interact with is very telling to potential future employers. Be sure to review your online presence with a critical eye to put your best foot forward in managing your image (your personal brand and reputation).

BECP: What is it like to be an early career professional and work in the private weather industry?

BE: The rewards are huge – knowing that what I do has an impact on someone's life is very powerful. We help our clients and the public prepare for high impact weather events, when it matters most. We ensure the forecast that goes on AccuWeather's digital and traditional media platforms is up-to-date and actionable, with meaningful impact statements to help users' lives. Sometimes shift work can be challenging with varying hours and working holidays and weekends, since weather forecasting is

a 24/7 need. Our forecasts can sometimes get questioned and there is always the “it must be nice to be wrong at your job 90% of the time and not get fired” line. At the end of the day, the passion I have for the weather outweighs everything else. Working with meteorologists who have 40 or more years of experience under their belts is truly a unique situation and the opportunity to learn about pattern recognition, forecasting techniques, regional nuances, and so much more is a once-in-a-lifetime career opportunity. Working as a team to forecast the weather and make a difference is more rewarding than anything else.

BECP: What advice would you give to an early career professional starting in this field?

BE: Keep an open mind and don't be afraid to try something new, or something that you might not have considered. I know so many meteorologists who are not doing what they thought they would be doing when they first got into the field. I never thought my career would take me to Pennsylvania, but now I couldn't be happier that it did. You never know when your skill set might apply, so don't sell yourself short. Also, network, network, network! Go to conferences, introduce yourself to people, reach out to people on social media and get to know more about their role in the field. Get your name out there early and in a positive light and you will be surprised at how many doors open up.

BECP: Who do you seek out for advice and why? To whom do you routinely provide advice, if anyone?

BE: I often seek out advice from those with more experience at AccuWeather. People in managerial roles for broader, career-based advice and experienced meteorologists for weather questions. The weather community on Twitter is often a place where advice can be gained as well, though usually in a more general sense on various matters. I'm also very fortunate to have a fiancé who is also a meteorologist, working in the Research and Development department at AccuWeather. We have discussions about our individual jobs, the field as a whole and ways we can both continue to grow and improve our contributions to the field.

BECP: Whom do you admire in our profession? Why do you feel that way?

BE: Ginger Zee. She has done so much for women in meteorology and has shown how far you can go if you work hard. I listened to the Weather Brains episode back in 2013, when she was a guest, and have been amazed and impressed at everything she has accomplished to get to where she is today. She was persistent in pushing for what she wanted, always working hard and focused on improving. Her advice to students was to allow yourself to make mistakes and learn from them, and I couldn't agree more. She is a fantastic role model for women in this field - driven, down to earth, relatable and credible.

BECP: How do you feel the field has changed?

BE: I feel that a lot more attention is being given to how we are communicating weather messages to the public. The chatter isn't dominated by just the science of weather anymore; it's shifted to be nearly as equally about how the science is being presented. We are working hard as a field to determine the most effective means of conveying high-impact forecasts. The messaging, graphics, color scheme and how the forecast is delivered all influences whether or not people take action. Meteorologists still shoulder a lot of responsibility for the actions of the public during severe weather events, so there is a strong need to not only get the forecast right, but present it in the most compelling and actionable way, saving more lives.

BECP: What do you want to be doing in 5 years? Why?

BE: I want to be in a position that allows me to work closely with both the meteorology community and the public, helping enhance weather preparedness, safety and response. I became a meteorologist because the weather was utterly fascinating to me and I wanted to know everything I could about it. There have been several severe weather events over the last 10 years that changed my focus to be more on the impact side of weather. I want to know how people react to different types of weather, why they do or do not prepare, or evacuate or take shelter. I want to make sure every single person is equipped with the knowledge of how to take personal responsibility in their reaction to the one thing that impacts us every second of every day. I'll be obtaining a Master's in Emergency Management in the next few years, and this will serve to broaden my knowledge base and ability to help the public even more.

BECP: Talk a little bit more about going back to school. What made you decide to continue your academic career while at the same time maintain a professional career.

BE: The decision to go back to school was not made lightly; still a bit surprised I'm actually doing it! Weather is, without a doubt, my first passion and I have learned an incredible amount in my 6+ years working as an operational meteorologist. However, I came to realize that I wanted to expand my skill set beyond forecasting. I asked, what could I see myself doing that combined forecasting with public outreach? That answer came pretty easily: working directly with and helping people learn more about the weather and staying safe during significant events. Since 2008, when my hometown was hit by an EF-3 tornado, my focus within meteorology has centered largely around weather safety. With the intersection between weather, communication and disaster research continuing to evolve, getting a Master's in Emergency Management seemed like a logical way to go. Plus, I love being challenged and staying busy! While a career and school may be challenging to do at the same time, I believe it will help keep my meteorological skills fresh while also being financially prudent for my situation.

