

***The AMS Board for Early Career Professionals wants to highlight members of the weather, water and climate enterprise who exemplify 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.***

***This segment features Dan DePodwin, a Meteorologist with AccuWeather. Dan provides great insight into his role as the Director of the Core Weather Content Team, his job in the private sector and being an early career professional.***

BECP: Where do you currently work and what is your position?

DD: I could not be where I am today without the varied experiences in college and my first several years at AccuWeather. Understanding how our business works was critical to my journey to my current role as Director of the Core Weather Content Team. In this capacity, I lead a team of seven whose focus ranges from continually enhancing our forecast systems that form the core of our business to collaborating with government and private industry partners to access and integrate new data sets. It is a challenging and fast-paced role that requires strong meteorological knowledge, communication skills, and organization.

Transitioning from a tactical role to one that is more strategic has been one of the biggest differences. As an “executor” in a tactical role, you carry out day-to-day tasks that support the larger strategic picture of an organization. Now, managing a skilled and well-rounded team, it takes a different mindset to set strategy and put forth the path where we are going and then delegate to various team members to achieve that goal, all the while ensuring forward momentum and managing competing priorities.

As you evolve in your career, understand that with new roles come new ways of thinking. While it is imperative that knowledge of previous responsibilities be maintained, new opportunities require new skills and the ability to critically assess success and failure. Just because something worked previously, doesn’t mean it will work again. Each organization, each team, each project is different.

BECP: What path did you take to get to the position you are currently in today, and how important were internships early on to get where you are today?

DD: Although it's hard to believe, I graduated Penn State 7 years ago this month! In those years, I have been fortunate enough to build a successful career with AccuWeather which has included three different roles and numerous areas of focus.

My path from school to a career was typical for a graduating meteorologist with a bachelor’s degree. I was hired as an operational meteorologist with AccuWeather in 2011 and spent three years serving our clients and users. Whether it was broadcasting the weather on radio, writing weather stories for [AccuWeather.com](https://www.accuweather.com), or predicting and communicating the weather to clients, this operational, hands-on experience was critical to future roles.

The path to my current position would not have been possible without the knowledge I gained, the people I met, and the hard work I put in at the earliest stages of my career.

One of the earliest phases of my career was an internship with Mars Chocolates North America after my junior year of college - I admit I indulged regularly in the free candy and ice cream. This was and continues to be one of my most rewarding yet challenging professional experiences. College (at least not meteorology classes) does not prepare you for a business setting as a rising senior. I had to learn business norms, terminology, and procedures on the fly while also performing my everyday responsibilities of combining weather prediction and commodity market information to develop

informed purchasing strategies. To say this was an eye-opening experience is an understatement - but I wouldn't have traded it for anything.

To this day, I use my experiences at Mars to bring new ideas to my current role and organization. Don't hesitate to try an internship that might be outside your comfort zone. You will be able to view future challenges in a new way and develop new tools for your future career.

Eight years removed from my Mars experience, I have transitioned from an operational meteorologist to the business side of AccuWeather. My first role in this area was in 2014 when I led efforts focused on our forecast systems and ensuring the processes and data involved were optimized.

This experience working with all parts of AccuWeather allowed me to expand my skill set, hone my communication skills, and take on new responsibilities. Recently, my role has taken a significant next step, leading a team of seven people.

BECP: Is there anything you would have done differently in college knowing what you know now about your job?

DD: As a weather technology and media company, AccuWeather has a wide range of talent skilled in technology. Throughout my career with AccuWeather, I have been fortunate enough to learn much about computer programming, networking, cloud computing, and databasing despite not having a lot of formal training in school.

If there is one thing I could have done differently in college it would have been included at least one if not two more classes in computer programming. The need for computer knowledge continues to grow rapidly and I am glad to see some universities have increased the required computer courses for graduation. I can't stress enough how helpful it would have been if I had learned how to write in Python for instance.

BECP: To reach this point in your career, what role have mentors and advisors played?

DD: Along with such skills as communication, organization, networking, and hard work, having a mentor is one of the most important pieces to growing your career. No matter the stage of your life, mentors can provide direct feedback, point you in new directions, and assist with challenging situations. I have had a number of mentors throughout my life that have each made a positive impact. Whether it was my dad providing resume tips in college, David Robinson at Rutgers University who gave a young high schooler his first opportunity to work a weather-related job, or my manager at Mars Chocolates who provided some of the best but toughest feedback I've received, I couldn't be where I am today without the guidance of others.

I want to expand a bit upon the feedback I received while at Mars because it was a great learning experience. During one of my sit-downs, he provided me specific feedback that it would be valuable if I improved my active listening skills. I remember at first feeling defensive and then angry that I had a flaw that needed to be corrected. However, he went on to provide specific instances where this would have benefitted me and how I could work on this particular area. After further reflection, I realized how right he was and to this day find it to be one of the best pieces of feedback I've ever received. Listening intently, not just hearing in order to respond, has no doubt made me a better communicator.

Not all mentors are bosses though and a mentor can come from inside your field or outside. What is important is that the mentor has your best interests at heart, wants to see you grow, and can offer honest advice.

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

DD: Although I did not touch on it directly in other responses, the importance of networking cannot be overlooked. Even as someone who enjoys speaking with people, it can be tough to network and get to know others in the field. However, practicing this early on, in school, allows you to grow a network early and feel more comfortable doing so. Networking also hones your communication skills which are always important when applying and interviewing for jobs.

I also can't stress how being well-rounded helps you when looking for a job. As someone now in the position to hire, I look for candidates who have had a variety of experiences. How did you set yourself apart in school, even if it was not in your area of study? Did you start a club? Did you volunteer with a local charity?

If you are already out of school and in your early career, my biggest advice is to continue to say yes to opportunities. There is a fine line between taking on too much and burning yourself out and getting involved in different projects or accepting an opportunity when presented that will yield large dividends down the road. As an example, I became proficient on nearly each forecasting schedule at AccuWeather during my time in operations. I was then presented with an opportunity to lead a new team. This leadership experience helped me grow and also showed others my capabilities.

You never know where an opportunity might lead, even if you think the opportunity isn't directly related to your interests. It may help you learn something new that will benefit you later on or open other doors.

