

***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 month’s segment highlights Dr. Michael Ventrice, Meteorological Scientist, Sub-Seasonal Forecasting Lead, Software Engineer at The Weather Company, an IBM Business. Mike is also the Chair of the [AMS Board for Private Sector Meteorologists](#). He provides great insight about working in the private sector, as well as advice for students and young professionals on the job search and interview process, and how to appropriately utilize social media.***

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BECP: Where do you currently work and what path did you take to get to the position you are currently in today?

Mike: I currently work for The Weather Company, an IBM business. The Weather Company helps millions of consumers and businesses make informed decisions based on weather data. You may be familiar with [Weather.com](#) or Weather Underground – all part of The Weather Company. It was a long and unpredictable pathway that led me to my current position in the company. In all honestly, attending graduate school at the University at Albany is a big reason why I am where I am today. At SUNY Albany Graduate School, I began developing what would end up be my PhD dissertation that tied to the prediction of Atlantic tropical cyclones at sub-seasonal leads (out 3-5 weeks). I presented my research at the AMS 2010 Tropical Conference in which I was awarded the Max A. Eaton Prize. This caught the attention of a prestigious financial institution that offered me an internship during my third year of graduate school. There, I was able to test my PhD hypothesis and make real-world decisions on my research. This internship, along with a University-sponsored webpage used for real-time monitoring of tropical meteorology, paved the pathway for a spot on what was formerly known as Weather Services International (WSI)’s Energy forecast team.

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

Mike: It’s extremely humbling to step into a forecast role at a company with little forecast experience and put your knowledge to the test. From over 5 years of forecast experience now, it’s clear to me that you only learn a small fraction of how to predict weather in academia. What your education does, however, is teach you how to tackle problems in the real-world and apply your knowledge to make an educated guess on an outcome.

It is also a great life experience to be an early career professional. You get to step into a new world that is filled with opportunity and innovation. You learn to work in teams that are working on challenging projects in which every single person on that team has purpose and a value. It takes time to prove your worth, so as an early career professional, you are always trying to go over and beyond. The older folks in the company will call you “green” to highlight your youth. I also get a lot of “millennial” references.

BECP: What was the most difficult part of the job search process for you?

Mike: Finding a job with just a Bachelors or Masters Degree with no internship experience. From the day I graduated with B.S. to the months leading up to my Ph.D., I searched for any type of meteorologist related job. It can wear you down sometimes as you see friends in other professions find jobs in a

location of the world that you want to live in, but there are no open meteorologist positions. My recommendation is to draw a fairly wide circle around a location that you want to live in for your job search. Since I grew up on Long Island, NY, New York City was the center of my circle. I extended my job search from Maine through the Carolinas and as far west as Ohio. Be ready to start your career in a location that you might not have ever thought you'd end up living there. For me, moving to Boston, MA as a New York sports fan was a challenging feat.

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

Mike: I probably would have taken some business courses in college looking back on it. But that's about it. Everything that happened while attending college or graduate school led to me where I am today.

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

Mike: Mentors play a huge role. I was lucky enough to in addition to my PhD advisor, to have a mentor in the private sector that was able to guide me towards my career. He literally called me a couple weeks after I informally accepted a position at a different company not to be named to say that a position at WSI was open and that it would give me tremendous exposure in the field. I am grateful for this person and we still communicate on and off to this day. I think this person also enjoyed mentoring me as he later went on with a select group of professionals to begin the AMS Board for Private Sector Meteorologist's Mentorship Program, which fast forward in time, I am now the chair for. You will soon find out that it's a very small world in the private sector of meteorology.

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

Mike: I don't mean to sound like a homer, but I really admire the people I work with at the Weather Company/IBM. Hey, I'm a company man (queue the ESPN theme sound bite #06010). I have recently moved off the Energy team onto a team inside the Weather Company called the Meteorological Analytics team. Both teams have had some of the smartest people I've had the pleasure of meeting. From running a business, to coding in Matlab, these folks are truly professionals and I've learned so much over the past 5+ years. I couldn't have been luckier to land a position on this team of professionals.

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

Mike: Be extremely cautious with social media and how you promote your personal brand there. I've seen too many times a student or professional emotionally post on social media and attack another person or organization. You need to keep in your mind that everyone can see this public post. It does not make you look good when you belittle another person or organization because they might not have your same view point on a topic. This is especially true if you are a student because there is a good chance that in the future, you will share a similar network. If you burn a bridge in your network, it could come back to bite you. Try to be respectful when providing feedback, as well as logical when feedback is provided to you.

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

Mike: Follow the @AMS\_BPSM twitter handle for job postings in the private sector.

BECP: Do you have any tips or advice to give to young professionals when it comes to applying and interview for a job?

Mike: One component of a job interview that is often not discussed in academia is that the interviewer is trying to figure out if you would be a good fit to their team. You can be the smartest person in the field but if you show arrogance or emotionally act up during feedback, you will not be selected for that job. It is ok to show your personality and to smile! People want to work with others that they feel they would get along well with! On one of my old job interviews for a Resident Assistant back in my UAlbany days, I literally sang a song and danced to it on my interview. The entire staff thought my personality would be a great fit for what they were searching for. I'm not saying try this stunt on an interview for a prestigious hedge fund, but try to be yourself on the interview!

BECP: What recommendations would you give young professionals to avoid becoming overwhelmed or burnt out?

Mike: Try to separate your home life with your work life. It can be difficult to do this but it will help you stay fresh in your career. If you are required to move to a new city, make a strong effort to acclimate there. I joined a number of sports leagues in Boston when I first moved in which I met a number of good friends from. The stronger your personal life is outside of work, the happier you will be in life and it will show in your work.

BECP: Do you have any tips for those interested in leadership or mentorship?

Mike: If you are professional interested in mentoring a student, the AMS BPSM is always searching for mentors in their Mentorship Program! I also recommend getting involved with an AMS board if you can find the spare time. It is a great networking opportunity and a strong resume booster.

