

Kelly Savoie ([00:00](#)):

Hello, Clear Skies Ahead listeners. This is Kelly Savoie and I'm hoping you can take a moment of your time to rate and review our show wherever you listen to podcasts. We have produced over 100 episodes and you can help us reach even more individuals that will benefit from the diverse experiences shared by our guests. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you enjoyed this new episode. Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series, clear skies ahead, conversations about careers in meteorology and beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie and I'm here with Emma Collins and we'll be your hosts. We're excited to give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

Emma Collins ([00:51](#)):

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Erica Grow Cei, public affairs specialist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Silver Spring, Maryland. Welcome Erica. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Erica Grow Cei([01:05](#)):

Thank you, Emma. And Kelly, it's good to see you.

Kelly Savoie ([01:06](#)):

Erica. Could you tell us a little bit about what sparked your interest in meteorology and how it influenced your educational path?

Erica Grow Cei([01:12](#)):

Oh, geez. I've just always been a scientist at heart ever since I was a little girl. So when I first was asked by the kindergarten teacher, what do you want to be when you grow up? And a lot of the little girls wanted to be teachers or librarians or cheerleaders. I wanted to be a paleontologist, so a little bit different than most of my classmates. And by fourth grade, I had started the science club at my elementary school. Even going back before that in first grade, I remember that the teacher could tell that I needed an outlet for everything that was going on up in my brain, and she let me teach the class a lesson on every Friday, and I was obsessed with space. By this time, I am a child of the peak of the shuttle program, and my first hero was Sally Ride.

([02:13](#)):

So I was very, very into the shuttle program and the astronauts. So I would teach space to my first grade class every Friday. I'm sure the lessons were just scintillating and all my classmates were just thrilled that this was happening. But in any case, I just always had a fascination with how and why things happen in the world, and it took me until actually arriving on campus at Penn State University to put the pieces together to actually come to meteorology. So I started out as a biology major with the intent of going to med school one day. I just kind of figured, well, I love science and I have this aptitude for math and science and people like that become doctors. So that's what I started out with that intention starting out at Penn State. And when I realized that the coursework was not lining up with my interests, but I did have this class in ecology my freshman year that was really captivating me. It was actually my dad who said, Penn State has a really good program for meteorology. Maybe you should check it out. And that was it. I switched to meteorology

Kelly Savoie ([03:31](#)):

And the rest is history.

Kelly Savoie

So how did you prepare for your classroom leading of science? Did you have a little lesson plan and that's so awesome. It's the best story ever. So cute.

Emma Collins

I love it.

Erica Grow Cei([03:46](#)):

Oh my gosh, yeah, I wish my mother was on this podcast with us so that she could answer that question because I'm sure that not only does she remember this because she's the one who reminded me that this happened when I was a little kid, but she also was a teacher at about the kindergarten level for 40 years.

Kelly Savoie ([04:10](#)):

Oh, so you had a good mentor.

Erica Grow Cei([04:13](#)):

She sure knew how to put together a lesson plan, let me tell you. So I'm sure that her guidance was a part of that.

Emma Collins ([04:21](#)):

So when you were a little bit older, were there any particular opportunities that you pursued that you knew would be beneficial to securing a job once you graduated?

Erica Grow Cei([04:29](#)):

Yeah. It's funny how it took me a long time to even get started thinking about what I was going to do when I graduated, and the first real internship opportunity that came along was at a TV station about an hour and a half drive from where I grew up, and I decided to apply for it and got one of the slots. So I did that for the summer preceding my senior year in college, and I would get up at five in the morning and drive up there. And so I got a little bit of a taste of what it's like to do the morning show from then on. However, anyone who's doing the morning show today who's listening to this will say five 30, I wish I could sleep till then. It's much earlier hours. But at least it started to kind of prepare me for that mindset of you're going to have to make sure that that alarm is fully functional and you might be driving in pitch black and looking out for deer on your way to work in the morning.

([05:39](#)):

And it was a really good experience for me to see what it was like to do TV weather. But I don't remember ever making a conscious decision to go into TV. It was the thing that came along and seemed to be a good fit for my desire to be a communicator of weather. And if you've been involved with atmospheric sciences meteorology, especially if you're an operational forecaster and you've been so for more than about two decades, that the weather service around the turn of the 21st century was not very invested in the communication aspect of the forecast communication part of it. I'm not wording it

correctly, but it's because I keep thinking about IDSS. And that's what came along in 2012, and that really helped to open up the floodgates for weather communicators, social scientists, people who were interested in learning more about how the folks that we serve receive the forecast, interpret it, and make decisions based on it. If that had been robust when I graduated college, I might've gone into that instead.

Kelly Savoie ([07:00](#)):

And so once you did graduate, I mean you do have a varied background working in different sectors. What was your first official job in the field and how did you end up where you are today?

Erica Grow Cei([07:12](#)):

Back at that point, more than 20 years ago, you were still sending VHS tapes to news directors around the country to audition for a job in TV, and I sent my VHS tape to 36 different TV stations around the country with my letter of interest in the opening that they had. I only applied to TV stations and TV people will know this market 100 or smaller. I was wary of accidentally getting a big break and I would be over my skis and I wouldn't be able to recover when I stumbled in a medium or larger size market. So I purposely only applied to TV stations in smaller markets, and it took quite a while for me to land that first job. It felt like forever back then. But it was about four months after I graduated, before I finally got that call, and I decided I would take the first job I was offered, and of all 36, it was the farthest from home of any of them.

([08:21](#)):

Oh, no. So I'm from eastern Pennsylvania and this job was in Midland, Odessa, Texas. So they gave me the offer after a couple phone interviews. Of course, keeping in mind Zoom did not exist then. Most of us didn't even have cameras on our laptops. Smartphones did not exist yet. So they were basing their decision on a couple phone calls with me and on the work that they saw on that VHS tape. So they offered me a job and said, we can give you a little bit of money for moving expenses. It turned out that that was \$250. So I did have to foot most of the bill because it was a three day long three day drive to get down there. And they also asked me, when can you start? And I gave them a date and they said, yeah, we're going to need you faster than that. So I had to get there. I remember it was less than two weeks, so I really just had to shove everything that could fit in the car and start driving.

Kelly Savoie ([09:21](#)):

That must've been exciting though. I mean, one is better than none in any type of experience. I mean, I guess it's kind of how the industry is in broadcast meteorology. You've got to just start wherever you can.

Erica Grow Cei([09:35](#)):

Absolutely. And I think it's helpful for folks who are just starting out in their TV careers to remember that this too shall pass if it's not a great fit for you, if it is very far from home in your homebody body, whatever it is, even if it's the duties that are assigned to you when you get there because the contract usually does say, and any other duties as assigned, just remember that this is all building toward your goals. So if you have goals in mind, then it does help you to stay focused on that as you perform some of those day-to-day tasks that are not in your wheelhouse or in your sphere of interest.

Emma Collins ([10:18](#)):

I was going to ask if you could tell us a little bit about some of the goals that you did have while you were having this first job out there in Texas.

Erica Grow Cei([10:25](#)):

Oh my gosh. There was no lack of ambition when I was setting my goals. When I graduated college, I wanted to be in Philadelphia, which was my home market before the age of 30. And I knew that that was a really tough and ambitious goal, but I thought going to put it out there and I'm just going to work my tail off and do what I can to get there. And because of the way that circumstances worked out, it happened. So I did get my third job in the business was in Philadelphia at the ABC station there in the Philly region. So that was a fun thing for, I did the weekend mornings, and so a lot of my friends from high school and college would see me on TV for the first time because they were nursing their newborn because that's the shift I was working. Those are the hours I was keeping. And they would turn on the TV because taking care of the baby maybe woke them up in the middle of the night and there I am. And I remember one friend said, I nearly fell off the couch when I saw you there.

Kelly Savoie ([11:35](#)):

And so what made you decide to shift from broadcast meteorology over to more communicating science with your NOAA position?

Erica Grow Cei([11:44](#)):

Yeah. Well, the first thing I want to say about that is that the skills that I built as a broadcast meteorologist have served me really, really in this new career that I have. But to directly answer your question, Kelly, I had an entire career in TV weather. I was a broadcast meteorologist for 18 years, and that was plenty. So I learned a lot and I kind of maxed out on what I could learn, and I'm a lifelong learner. So when I really started to get more involved with the American Meteorological Society, that's when I started to learn about how the skills that I was acquiring in broadcast would translate to other career paths and other fields of interest, and I was ready to make that transition after a little while.

Emma Collins ([12:35](#)):

So could you walk us through a typical day on the job as a public affairs specialist in NOAA?

Erica Grow Cei([12:40](#)):

Yes. Public Affairs Specialists do media relations. It's not a super intuitive job title, but we are your media relations personnel for NOAA. I specifically work with the National Weather Service. So on a daily basis I fulfill media inquiries, but on a very, very broad range of topics. It could be about a weather radar, it could be about the potential for flooding in an area. It could be about lightning safety, it could be about heat risk. Our new tool that launched last year, it could be about a tropical cyclone outlook that the Climate Prediction Center puts out and lots and lots of other topics. So we connect reporters with the right expert to fulfill that inquiry, whether it's via email, a phone call, zoom chat, we make sure that the reporter gets the information that they need, follow up with extra media items if they need them, websites, graphics, that kind of thing. We also, for the personnel in the weather service, make sure that the interview is well vetted, that the reporter's questions are known to the subject matter expert before they start the interview. And we also provide guidance to our folks for those media interactions to make sure that they are getting their science out there very clearly and concisely if possible, because that makes for better sound bites and for better quotes and articles.

Kelly Savoie ([14:21](#)):

Do you have a database of experts that you've just accumulated so that it makes it easier? I know how these media inquiries are, they need somebody that second and they're on a deadline.

Erica Grow Cei([14:35](#)):

Yes, absolutely. So we do have our go-to list of subject matter experts. I will occasionally ask, if you're not the right person to reach out to for this, could you please point me in the right direction? I also can, and I love Google Suite for this because we use the Google suite at the weather service and I can look at other people's calendars and see if they're on leave. I don't even bother reaching out if they're not going to be available and I can tap someone else's shoulder. And best case scenario, there's more than one expert who can speak fluently on a subject that a person in the media is asking about.

Kelly Savoie ([15:15](#)):

And I'm guessing Noah gets a lot of media inquiries. Yes.

Erica Grow Cei([15:22](#)):

So last week was not typical, so I won't say last week was it was way more, but in a typical week, I fulfill about 30 inquiries, so it averages out to about 100 a month.

Kelly Savoie ([15:35](#)):

And I'm assuming that with the flooding in Texas that probably quadrupled. Yeah.

Erica Grow Cei([15:41](#)):

Or more quadrupled is about right.

Kelly Savoie ([15:43](#)):

Yeah. What are some of the biggest challenges you face during your career? Because we know that there's challenges in this type of career.

Erica Grow Cei([15:52](#)):

Yes. The biggest challenge in my career was transitioning from one career to the other. If any broadcast meteorologists are listening and they have had any thought about possibly having a different career after they choose to leave tv, just make sure that you document everything and don't sell yourself short. The work that you do at that TV station has value outside of television, and it's really important to make sure that that shows up on your resume. So work with someone who works in the industry or at least a similar industry to the one that you plan to enter. Have them look at your resume and make sure that they can understand the value that you bring. And if they can't, then you want to wordsmith it a little bit and figure out which words and phrases are going to resonate. A great example is when a broadcast meteorologist is working with the folks in the newsroom to make sure that they understand how a weather event, an upcoming weather event is going to impact their operations for the day. Most of us just call that the morning newsroom meeting, but guess what? That's decision support. So do not sell yourself short. That is something that should be on your resume. You help decision makers figure out how weather is going to impact their operations for the day.

Kelly Savoie ([17:25](#)):

That's definitely some good advice because I've heard how important it's to have the right keywords in a resume these days with AI and computers just getting rid of the ones that don't have the right wording.

Erica Grow Cei([17:39](#)):

Absolutely. And that's just one example, so make sure that you're thinking about the different things. And there is one more thing, Emma, I wanted to say about how to make that transition is branch out. So I alluded to it earlier that when I really got involved with AMS, it's when I saw my own potential outside of television. So if that's something that you're thinking about joining an AMS board or committee, especially if it's one that isn't directly in your line of experience in the working world, that is going to help in that transition piece. The one that I'm thinking of for me was I was a member of the board on Enterprise Economic Development and I was also on the board on enterprise communication. Both are tangential to my role in tv, but it allowed me to meet professionals outside of television and for me to hone some of those skills as far as translating my experience to another forum.

Emma Collins ([18:48](#)):

I did want to ask, when you were talking about your resume going from broadcast to NOAA, did you find that you had to do a lot of translating for the skills that you were bringing to the table? Or is there a lot more connection that you were talking about how don't sell yourself short, there's a lot more you may not realize?

Erica Grow Cei([19:06](#)):

Yeah, I think it's both. So I worked with a couple NOAA colleague, friends, people I had met through AMS to help me build out my resume. And I use that term because a typical private sector resume is as short as it can be. And one of my friends asked, tell me more about this thing that you did, this one line item. And it ended up being much more substantial when we were done with it. And she asked me questions about other experiences that I had had that I never would've thought to include on my resume, such as workshops that I had attended. And that's all a value add, especially in a government resume. Now there may be changes coming that involved tailoring your resume a little bit more concisely, but it's still really helpful and important to document everything because you never know what you're going to need.

Emma Collins ([20:08](#)):

And now jumping forward ahead again, when you mentioned the AMS boards and committees, did you have any other boards or committees that you found were very beneficial to your career development?

Erica Grow Cei([20:18](#)):

I kind of moved from board and committee member straight to AMS counselor. So the short answer is yes, there would have been others that would have been beneficial. Now that I am the AMS Commissioner on professional affairs, I do sometimes regret that I was never a member of the broadcast meteorology board or the board on private sector meteorology because when I was in that realm, both of those would have been good for career development.

Kelly Savoie ([20:53](#)):

Well, you'll still have that opportunity when you're not Commissioner anymore.

Erica Grow Cei([20:57](#)):

True. That is true. I'm not going to be a commissioner forever, am I?

Emma Collins ([21:03](#)):

We're not letting go of you, Erica.

Kelly Savoie ([21:06](#)):

So I read that you started a business as a talent coach at one time. What are some of the top tips you provide to help individuals perform better on camera and what are some of the most common mistakes people make?

Erica Grow Cei([21:23](#)):

The answer to both of those does start with preparation. So making sure that you are well prepared before you go on air is 90% of the battle and the vast majority of your mistakes are going to be avoided by proper or thorough preparation. That includes looking through all of your slides that you're going to use every single time. It doesn't matter how many times I went on air, I still clicked through my show and kind of also muttered to myself what I plan to say with every slide every single time. I never stopped doing that in my 18 years on the air and even after 18 years, there were still times when I would catch a little something like, oh, I don't like how that one went, how it went from that graphic to that one, I'm going to change the order. Or as it turns out, I don't need that one.

([22:22](#)):

Pull it out. You should have the bare minimum number of graphics that you need to tell your weather story effectively. Putting a bunch of graphics in there is a recipe for all kinds of mistakes. Hurrying the viewer, not ingesting your information, stumbling over your words because you're trying to talk too fast. So it's better to have as short a show on the front end. Those graphics should all be really effective in telling your weather story. And I know I'm focusing a lot on the graphics, but it really is important because they are like your cue cards that you're using in the extemporaneous speech of a weather broadcast. Anyone who's in TV and a lot who aren't know that we are primarily the only folks in the newsroom that are not using a teleprompter. So you really have to make sure that your graphics are providing that assistance in telling the weather story. So your graphics should read kind of like a billboard, if you know what I mean. It's like you're going to be able to ingest the information in a few seconds. You shouldn't be reading and then wait, wait, wait. What did the broadcaster just say? What did the meteorologist just say, no, no, no. It should be really, really easy to digest and your graphics shouldn't distract from the words that are coming out of your mouth.

Kelly Savoie ([23:42](#)):

And I assume that for the graphics, it's important what colors you choose, and you don't want them to be too busy or too complicated. So I would imagine that the preparation for the graphics would take some time.

Erica Grow Cei([24:00](#)):

It's different now than it was 20 years ago. The vast majority of TV stations have graphics packages that come from their ownership group, and that takes out a lot of the guesswork, which is fantastic.

Emma Collins ([24:11](#)):

Well, that's some excellent advice from an AMS Certified Broadcast Meteorologist. So I would expect nothing less. Not only are you A CBM, you also help develop the AMS Certified Digital Meteorologist program. What are some of the benefits of earning an AMS certification? And feel free to talk more about the CDM because we do love our digital meteorologist.

Erica Grow Cei([24:30](#)):

Yes, I'm very excited that that program got off the ground and it was really a labor of love. The CDM program was an idea that I first brought to the AMS President back in 2016, and we were finally able to launch several years later, but that means that there was a lot of work done on the front end to make sure that it was a success. Once we got it out the door. The number of questions that we got from potential seal holders right applicants was pretty minimal because we kind of thought of everything, which was awesome. And I really have to give a shout out to Joe Martucci and to the other folks on that CDM ad hoc committee that helped us put together the SEAL program in the first place because they did so much work to make sure that we were doing our due diligence there.

([25:29](#)):

I really think that earning a seal, whether it's the CDM or CBM, we also have the Certified Consulting Meteorologist Seal and sneak preview, we might have more certifications in the works. I really think that it adds credibility, and that's not just for the people that you serve, but it was definitely a question that I was asked by every potential hiring manager in my career from about five years into my career onward. And people would ask, do you have your seal? And there are some TV stations for which that is a deal maker or breaker, and I do think that it also provides professional development opportunities that go above and beyond what you get just from being on the air.

Kelly Savoie ([26:24](#)):

Thank you so much for telling us about your career path and providing some wonderful advice to our listeners.

Erica Grow Cei([26:32](#)):

My pleasure.

Kelly Savoie ([26:32](#)):

Before we go, we always like to ask our guests one last fun question at the end of the show. What is your favorite hobby, Erica?

Erica Grow Cei([26:41](#)):

I am a sports fan. I am a Penn State football season ticket holder, and last year I went to, so there were 16 games I went to 13.

Kelly Savoie and Emma Collins

Whoa, awesome.

Erica Grow Cei

So every home game plus all three of our playoff games and two away games during the season. So yeah, it was a lot. I married the right person for that hobby because if anyone is more passionate about Penn State Football than I am, it is him. So Kevin and I love to make trips that involve Penn State activities, and we love participating in the NIL program that they have now and beyond Penn State Football, I'm also a huge Phillies fan, so I was very excited recently when the All-Star game MVP was Kyle Schwarber because he won the swing off the first ever swing off in a MLB All-Star game. And it was my boy Schwarbs who helped the National League win the All-Star game. So yeah, I love it. And I don't know about you ladies, but a nice day in the summer, nothing beats going to the ballpark. You can just sit back, relax, have a little chat with your friends and watch some great baseball, or maybe not great baseball, but either way, if the weather's nice, nothing beats a day at the ballpark, in my opinion.

Kelly Savoie ([28:20](#)):

And you're talking to people from Boston. If anybody are huge sports fans, it's Bostonians.

Erica Grow Cei([28:31](#)):

Yeah, I know that I'm the interview subject of this podcast, but my husband, Kevin, again, a huge lifelong Red Sox fan, and he took me for my first Fenway visit while we were still dating. And at that point on, I was like, I can have one NL team and one AL team. That is fine. Fenway is a cathedral. That place will turn you. So I was thrilled to be able to count myself as a part-time Red Sox fan as well.

Emma Collins ([29:04](#)):

Oh yeah. One sweet Caroline, and we'll win you right over. Well, thanks so much for joining us, Erica, and sharing your work experiences with us.

Erica Grow Cei ([29:14](#)):

My pleasure. Thank you for inviting me.

Kelly Savoie

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine, clear skies ahead. Conversations about careers in meteorology and beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is edited by Johnny Lay, technical direction is provided by Peter Klay. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoy, and the show is hosted by Emma Collins and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online@www.ametsoc.org/clearskies. And you can contact us at Skypodcast@ametsoc.org. If you have any feedback. I would like to become a future guest.