

JayMac

Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication Alumni Association

GAYLORD ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

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MEREDITH VACHON

Chief Culture Officer & Founder
Bread & Butter
Dallas, TX



Eleven years ago, Meredith Vachon was hungry for something new. And, well, hungry. The 1999 OU journalism alum co-founded Bread & Butter, a public relations agency that specializes in restaurants, food, and travel. Now, her company has nearly 100 employees stationed across the country. We've cooked up this Q&A with Meredith about her career and OU experience.

What is your favorite memory from the journalism & mass communication program at OU?

All of Mr. [Bill] Loving's lectures, especially one where he featured a Q&A with Peter Jennings. But all of them were very entertaining and educational. He was such a character.

He demanded a lot and scared many students with his harsh approach, but I had a realization early on that his “scariness” wasn't actually scary; it was evidence that he cared A LOT. He was driven to see us succeed and wouldn't accept anything less than us giving our best. He knew we were

The most surprising thing to me now is that I do not do PR at all on most days. I would have never predicted that 11 years ago when I was running our clients' campaigns and drowning in pitches and press releases. Today, I'm more of a mother hen, keeping watch over our flock to make sure we keep them laughing, challenged and well-nourished in their careers.

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

1. March 2007 – the founding month of Bread & Butter
2. The day I hired my first employee (we now have 95)
3. The day we moved into our first office (we now have 11)
4. My first James Beard dinner with a client
5. Attending my first Today Show food demo with one of our chef clients

What advice would you give to current

smart enough and knew that if we turned in subpar work, it was only because we weren't giving it our all. His approach worked for me and really motivated me to do my best work. I have no idea if he even knows who I am because our classes were so big, but I'll never forget him.

How did your career path lead you to founding Bread & Butter?

16 years ago, I met my business partner Rachel Ayotte at Wagstaff Worldwide in Los Angeles. We became fast friends, learning the ropes of hospitality PR together. While there, we honed our casual and authentic approach to PR, and had a hard time subscribing to the rote methods that were being instructed. We felt that PR should be heartfelt and genuine, that publicists should listen and trust their guts more often, and that a hospitality PR firm should embody hospitality in every way. Eleven years ago, we each found ourselves at different crossroads in our careers; she in Los Angeles and I in Austin. We decided to partner and found our own agency, Bread & Butter, and make sure our agency was fun and authentic, genuine and hospitable, and a refreshing change from what can be a cold industry.

My interest in restaurants, food and travel began at birth. My father worked in offshore drilling, which led us to live in many countries as a young child and allowed me to eat many different foods from early on. We ate very well at home as my mother was an exceptional cook, and we always explored new and interesting restaurants. Food has always been my favorite thing. Further, I had to acclimate to new environments and new people early on, being a chameleon who could adapt to any group or culture, which certainly benefited a career in PR.

Describe your role at Bread & Butter.

For the agency's first nine years, Rachel and I were partners, each focusing as leaders of our respective regions—she overseeing West and I overseeing South—but today, with 11 offices, we have evolved into a shared national gaze with Rachel serving as CEO and I as Chief Culture Officer. As CCO, I am chiefly concerned with the hearts and happiness of our employees. I spend a

students aspiring to a career in public relations?

- Try every industry on to see what you're interested in. Experience a variety of internships. You never know what field will pique your interests.
- If you have an interest in a particular agency, pay attention to that agency and become an informed fan. Follow their social channels. Keep updated on their client list on their website. Pay attention to their hiring pages and expansion. When you reach out to the agency, applaud their success and be specific, i.e, "I saw the recent article about Kimpton Hotels in Travel + Leisure – nice work!" or "Congratulations on your new office in Charleston!"
- Follow your gut to a company and an industry that excites you. Don't take just any job because it checks the "get a job" box. Wait for the right fit and interview the company as much as they interview you. You're special and deserve the best fit for your unique spirit and talents.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

- Cooking, eating and drinking! ☐
- I cook most nights during week and love getting my loves around the table to connect after a long day.
- I adore my strong "family" of friends who are raising their kids with us in our community, and we spend a lot of time together going out to new restaurants, attending school events, sitting in our yard around our fire pit while the kids play, and leaning on each other as friends and parents.
- I love having dinner parties and am hosting one tomorrow night!
- Traveling – even small day trips excite me. I love discovering new places and observing other lives.
- Less impressive... I binge-watch shows on my DVR and am currently deeply into "Ozark."

lot of time talking to them, sorting out challenges and celebrating their successes. I oversee our Fun Committee, our Culture Committee and our Newsletter. I attend culture seminars, consume articles about culture frequently and watch a lot of TED Talks about culture. I collaborate weekly with our HR Director to ensure we're offering the best benefits and time off packages.



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