

Public relations: the perfect career

By [Davina Malan](#)

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I recently had the opportunity to be a part of St Teresa's High School's first career day, and it gave me the opportunity to pause and reflect on the career I love so much, before standing in front of a group of impressionable young women who were looking to experts in their fields for inspiration.



Image supplied. Davina Malan, senior consultant, Tribeca Public Relations, shares her passion for the PR profession

Apart from presenting to prospective and existing clients, I don't have much opportunity to speak to large groups of people – and I initially found a group of teenagers that I perceived to have their own attitudes and opinions to be quite intimidating.

The room was packed and seeing all their eager faces inspired me to put my nerves aside so I could share my passion for my profession and inspire them to follow in my footsteps.

Here are some of the key highlights I shared.

- **Why we do what we do**

While we're talking about reasons... It's a key differentiator of my public relations approach, and that of Tribeca's that no project or plan makes it out of the starting blocks unless there's a clear business objective behind it.

That makes everything sound so serious – but it's vital. Unless you understand what you're trying to achieve for your client and their brand, you won't be able to plan properly – or measure your success.

- **PR isn't all about parties and events**

PR is so much more than the posh parties and fabulous trips portrayed as key to the profession in movies and TV series. It's true – we do get to organise and attend parties and events, and sometimes we even get to rub shoulders with famous people.

It's also true that we're often behind the scenes at these events, making sure that everything runs smoothly, that every VIP's every whim has been attended to, and that the event achieves what it was designed to do, and isn't in the news

for the wrong reasons.

- **So what do we do all day?**

No two days are the same in the wonderful world of public relations. One of the things that gets me really excited to go to work every day is being a part of the stories that matter, and because of public relations, I have been able to help local and international brands tell their stories to the audiences they want to reach.

In my time, I have helped launch new airlines and routes that have allowed people to travel the world, I've helped open new hotels that created thousands of jobs for so many people who were previously unemployed. I've helped brands in crisis, and I've helped brands celebrate milestones.

I've helped brands like Lego that create amazing toys, but this brand also helps thousands of underprivileged children receive an education. I've helped gather funding for social workers in Alexandra so that the community can have access to the help that they need. I get to be a part of telling all these incredible stories.



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- **What happens when the news isn't good?**

We don't always work hard to get our clients into the news – sometimes we work really hard to keep them out of it!

Doing business in South Africa is tough at the best of times, and some sectors are more vulnerable to the country's ebbs and flows of bad news. There's a different level of reward and satisfaction that comes from helping your client navigate stormy waters and seeing them emerge from a crisis better as a business, and stronger as a brand.

- **Technology keeps us on our toes**

When I started my career all those years ago, there was no such thing as social media, smartphones didn't exist, and our idea of TikTok was dancing to tunes played on audio tapes through a ghetto blaster or a Walkman.

The rise of digital technology has changed the way companies speak to their audiences. Before email, we were sharing press releases with media via fax machine, and we only ever communicated via a one-way broadcast.

Today, digital PR has brought brands online, allowing them to share information in real-time and have an actual

conversation with their audiences. PR is no longer just about working with journalists, now we are having to consider influencers too.

While journalists and other publications continue to provide an important source of earned media within PR, influencers whether they are analysts, economists, or industry experts, are shaping how people perceive brands, and are a very important component in the PR toolkit

A career in PR

If you're considering a career in PR, bear these points in mind:

- Don't job hop. Give yourself at least three-five years at one agency, grow your skill set and find a mentor who will guide you through your journey.
- Don't ever think you know everything. Knowledge is power. There is always something new to learn. Especially in public relations.
- Even after being in the industry for almost 20 years, I am always trying to learn new skills and grow my experience even more. I love watching my team grow and if I know I imparted even a fraction of my knowledge onto them, I have done my job well.
- Read, read, read. Knowing what is going on around you, in the news and on the ground is the single most important power you will ever own as a PR consultant.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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