

## A Colledge Education

Nearly every LinkedIn review of health-care communicator Tanya Colledge mentions how hard-working she is. What sets her apart, though, is not how much she works, but how thoroughly. A person whose career path has advanced so quickly in 10 years could be relentless, plowing through without stopping for breath. Not so—Colledge makes every move with great care and intention.

Colledge often pauses before answering questions. She wants to get things right. She is reluctant to talk about her new role as Manager of Communications and Stakeholder Relations at PHSA (Provincial Health Services Authority); she wants to know the portfolios and projects, and that *takes time*. When discussing mistakes as opportunities for growth, Colledge says, “You learn something from those mistakes, and you won’t make them again if you *take the time* to think about it in that way.”

Colledge matches her diligence and work ethic with ambition, and her approach towards achieving career goals is just as dedicated: “Every single career move I’ve made has been to advance. It’s something that I’m pretty proud of that I started off as an editorial assistant, then I was coordinator level, an officer, then a leader and now I’m a manager. So, it’s had a nice upward trend.” That trend is not static; she can already see further opportunities on her new team.

The decision to study communications was a lateral move. Colledge wanted to be a fashion writer but realized it would require a move to Toronto or Montreal, where the major fashion houses are. She wanted to stay west, “so I kind of rejigged.” In 2010, Colledge gained a Print Futures professional writing diploma from Douglas College. She soon capitalized on this to gain a bachelor’s degree in professional communications a year later.

At first, the career path ahead was not clear: “When I was in the Print Futures program, I don’t think I really knew or understood what a role in communications looked like.” However, the world of professional communications took shape when she started her internship at the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. This world encompassed so much more than working at a PR firm or agency, and that excited Colledge: “That’s the beautiful thing about communications. You can do it for any industry you can think of ... it really opened my eyes to work that makes a difference.”

The internship gave Colledge another major advantage: “For a new graduate, I had real-life work experience. That really helped me in landing the editorial assistant role at WorkSafeBC, a pretty big first employer ... amazing to get right off the bat.” What else helped her to land this job? “A strong portfolio.” Colledge took every available opportunity to volunteer. She wrote for the Douglas College paper, managed CPRS Vancouver’s social media accounts and wrote blog post after blog post to widen her experience.

It’s easy to see why Colledge thinks that some students she has supported over the years gave up too easily; she values consistent, intentional effort: “Putting yourself in a position where you feel uncomfortable is good ... to employers it means a lot that, even if you did it wrong, you tried.” To balance out this intense approach to work—and avoid burnout—Colledge applies the same discipline to her own self-care. She ensures that, each day, she has done at least one thing for herself that makes her “soul feel good.” For Colledge, this most often means time to herself at the gym.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented immense challenges to health-care communicators, and Colledge says that self-care has never been more important. Funnily enough, she has thrived on the “adrenaline rush” of responding to constantly changing needs and demands. She is also proud of her role in counteracting misinformation about the virus: “More and more people are looking at their sources of information and I’m part of feeding that. It makes me feel really good about what we do.”

Colledge has found her niche in health-care communication and can no longer see herself doing anything else. High salaries and business class flights do not motivate her: “Those things don’t fill my cup.” So, what does? Colledge naturally takes time to answer this: “Making a difference in people’s lives. All the information we’ve been scraping together about how to stay safe, about the vaccines ... if it weren’t for communicators putting that together, people wouldn’t have it. You can’t have survived the last 20 months if you’re not passionate about the work and the people that we’re supporting.”

The pandemic presented major challenges in Colledge’s previous role. She made public health information the best it could be within the constraints of budgets and time. The pace at which circumstances changed made this even more difficult. On top of this, Colledge supported communications rollouts for many other health-care projects while the pandemic lingered on. This involved strategic planning, advising directors, putting together materials for social content and writing key messages for the Ministry of Health.

Over the past 20 months, Colledge has learned to have honest conversations with leaders, and her own team, about realistic time frames and capacity. This was hard for someone who “had always been the ‘Yep, sure, not a problem, I’ll do it!’ person, and then you realize that you really can’t do it all.” Colledge says that she can now go back to ministry leaders and ask which of their five *must-not-fail* projects to prioritize in case they can’t all be done within a week. She says that the Tanya she was 10 years ago could not have done this.

When asked what advice she would give to that Tanya, Colledge pauses before replying, “Push through those hard moments because that builds character. Know that you can’t be perfect. Try to be perfect but be okay when it’s not.” Colledge acknowledges that, while this pursuit of perfection is an important aspect of professionalism for her, it is not achievable in today’s world. This is even more true

when living through a pandemic: "Information changes so quickly, by the time you've produced something it could no longer be accurate."

Colledge is incredibly driven. Improving people's lives clearly matters to her. It will be fascinating to watch the continuing trajectory of someone with such determination. As Colledge says herself, "I do everything all the way. It's all or nothing for me."