



WELLNESS CONNECTION

LIVE WELL. WORK WELL.

SEPTEMBER 2021

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT - Interview with Vice President of External Relations and Communications, Adrienne Nazon



By Seth Yoder

Q. Could you briefly describe your new role with the University of Illinois System and what excites you most about the position?

A. I am the inaugural Vice President of External Relations and Communications. In my role, I am working with colleagues across the University of Illinois System and its three universities to build, broaden, and protect the University of Illinois brand reputation and advance its priorities with a goal of fostering a broad-based understanding, support, and investment in the institution to

ensure the transformative power of the system grows and impacts lives at scale. It is a pivotal time to be in higher education, and over the next decade it will be imperative that we continue to evolve, shape and enhance our societal value in the larger marketplace. The University of Illinois System plays a critical role in the future of the state of Illinois and beyond, and I am excited by the opportunity to come back to my home state and play a role in shaping that future.

Q. Have you had an opportunity to work on developing communications/branding for an employee wellness initiative in any of your previous roles?

A. I had the opportunity to work with the Chief Wellness Officer in my previous role on a number of wellness-related initiatives. The initiatives were primarily geared around increasing

understanding of and participation in wellness and its many dimensions as well as increasing awareness of how wellness impacts individual staff and the organization overall.

Q. [Follow-up to question 2] Could you tell us about what you learned from that experience?

A. The first thing that I learned from those experiences was the nine dimensions of wellness and although I have worked in this business for a long time, it was the first time I considered wellness as a part of branding. A big component of branding is culture and developing an understanding of how culture is reflected both inside and outside of an organization is critical. It quickly became apparent to me that incorporating the dimensions of wellness in the culture of an organization could play a big role in attracting and retaining top talent.

Q. What role do you see an employee wellness initiative playing in developing the overall university brand?

A. As I mentioned previously, I see branding as a way to manage and influence the organization's reputation as an employer for job seekers, employees, and stakeholders alike. I truly believe that brands are built from the inside out and you can only build reputation outside that is commensurate with what authentically happens on the inside. By extending that principle, the focus on wellness as an important part of the culture that you build becomes critically important to current and prospective employees as well as our other internal and external stakeholders.

Q. Do you incorporate any aspects of wellness (mental, physical, spiritual, nutritional, etc.) into your workday routine and would you be willing to share about the activities and the impact they have on you?

A. I spend a good deal of time working on my intellectual wellness by reading both personal and professional books. Someone once told me that if you spend one hour a day developing your craft within five years you will be a guru. I am not so sure about the guru part, but there is something to be said about spending time working on your craft and being intentional about it that helps you stay connected to the work you do, where it is expanding, and how you can continue to shape and mold your role and the role of the entity you support in that space.

I also try to spend some time meditating in the morning. You never know where your day is going to go and starting off with meditation helps keep me centered. I often do my meditation on an early morning walk when it is really quiet out. During my walks, I can concentrate on the tenor of my day more than anything else. I try not to spend time thinking about what is on my calendar, but rather, what I need for myself so that I can be clear and fresh for my day.

Something else I do is journaling and, in particular, gratitude journaling. During the pandemic I bought gratitude journals for my entire team at Ohio State and tried to encourage them to concentrate on the things they were grateful for during what was a very difficult time. I enjoy journaling in the evenings and think about the things that inspire me, as well as challenge me. The things that make us uncomfortable or stretch us, while they may be unpleasant, often teach us the greatest lessons about ourselves. It is important to acknowledge and recognize all things that impact us, whether good or bad.

Q. What is your favorite wellness-related habit or tip?

I find that my morning meditation walk is my favorite because I am able to combine both my mental and physical wellness in one activity. I find these walks really help me start my day off on a positive note, as well as provides me with the opportunity to reflect and put things in perspective so that negative energy does not have the opportunity to build. I was a health athlete at Ohio State and during the program, I learned a lot about how to manage my energy and the importance energy has on our overall wellness. My big takeaway from the program was how I viewed my stress levels. We were taught that stress does not always have to be viewed negatively; in fact, stress can help facilitate growth and learning. The key to this is developing mechanisms that allow you to recognize stress and identify when you need to release stress. By appropriately regulating stress with release strategies, you can leverage it and convert it to positive energy. I see my morning walk as one of the mechanism to do that and balance my energy.

