



STS Careers Podcast – Prof. Steve Miller talks to BBC presenter and former STS student Steph McGovern.

BBC presenter Steph McGovern studied BSc Science Communication and Policy, graduating in 2005, before beginning a career in broadcasting. Stints as Financial News producer for the Today programme on Radio 4, and Business News producer for BBC news led to work presenting for Radio 5 Live. Since then, she has presented a range of programmes including BBC Breakfast, Watchdog, and Shop Well for Less, as well as appearing as a guest on shows such as Have I Got News For You. In this podcast, she talks to former Head of Department Prof. Steve Miller about her time at STS.

SMi Welcome everybody – we have with us Stephanie McGovern, of the BBC...lots of things, BBC Breakfast, BBC Radio 4. Producer, interviewer, programme maker etc etc. So Steph, tell us a little bit about yourself first.

SMcG Yes, so, as you say Steph McGovern. I'm originally from Middlesbrough in the North East of England, I grew up there and while I was there, was really interested in science and engineering, because the background there was all quite heavy industry, so there was a real push to get more young people interested in Science and Engineering. So there were lots of free schemes that I got sent on. I think I was originally attracted by all the free food that was offered and all the free trips out to see lots of different companies, but then I realised from doing all that that I was actually quite interested in it as well. So basically, I had this kind of love early on with science and engineering. When I left school I thought I couldn't afford to go to university straight away, so I decided to go and do what we call a year in industry, so I went to work for Black and Decker in Durham, they're the people who make the power tools. I was working for them for a year and training to be an engineer with them, and basically I learned all about how they do lean production, and things like that, and I was given a project to do. In short, while I was there I won a couple of awards, I won Young Engineer for Britain and an award for outstanding contribution to business because I managed to save them quite a bit of money through this product design I did with them based on my training. So, because of that, I started being interviewed by the media quite a bit. Basically, being a kind of gobby northerner, and being a woman doing engineering, people were quite interested in talking to me. I started doing interviews with the media. I was meant to be going to do an engineering degree. I started at Imperial but I hated it, then read about the course here at UCL, and decided to go and do something which was more aligned to my interest in the media and also my interest in science and engineering. So that's how I ended up on the course. While I was doing that I was doing my lectures like you guys are, and then I was legging it off to the BBC to answer the phones, was doing work experience on Tomorrow's World, an old science programme that I loved. That's basically how I got into the media, and now my life is spent travelling round the country reporting from lots of different businesses and talking about what's going on in industry, and jobs and anything to do with your money and business.

SMi So, you came over here, you studied in the STS department. To what extent do you think the STS department did actually prepare you for your life in the BBC and so on, and to what extent did you think you already had that under your belt?

SMcG Yeah, I think...contact wise I already had my contacts at the BBC and that's half the battle, but what it did teach me about was...y'know, like the lessons we did Steve, about how to make a radio programme, where we went out and made a programme, that type of thing – doing that within an academic setting was really useful. It helped with my English as well, because actually I was quite bad at English, I know that sounds ridiculous but the national curriculum hadn't served me well on having good English. Even just how I write improved, I learned a lot about how to write properly, and that really served me well, and does serve me well in my career now. Also, the contacts you make, the fact that you meet lots of people from different areas, that's really important in my career now as well, cause I'm forever meeting people from all different parts of society, and it's important to be able

to communicate with all of them. And also, I had a good time here, it's a good fun place, so I learned how to have a good social life, work hard play hard...

SMi Excellent, that's what we like to have all of our students be able to do. So tell me a bit about your BBC career, because you didn't go straight into broadcasting as such, you were a producer, is that right?

SMcG So I never...when I joined the BBC I never thought I was going to be a TV presenter. Don't get me wrong, when I was a kid I used to watch people like Kate Adie or Moira Stewart or whatever and think 'wow, that's a cool job'. But when I joined the BBC I realised how much of a competitive world it was, and how it was a bit dog-eat-dog, and how...I just thought 'actually, I think I'm going to climb the production ladder, and that's what I was doing. So when I graduated from here I got a job full time on the Today programme on Radio 4. So I was working as a producer on that, doing the business and economics news. I've always been interested in business and economics as well, and I realised quite early on that... it's not as competitive, that area of news, because a lot of people are scared by it, lots of people think 'oh god it's about numbers' and that. Coming from a science-y background I thought 'that doesn't scare me' so I was really interested in that. I was working as the lead business producer on the Today programme, and that meant doing the business slots that are on the show every morning, putting them together, trying to find guests, talking to the presenter about what type of stories we want to do, going into big editorial meetings about that. Also travelling quite a lot, so I went out to Brazil to look at the biofuels industry there – it was when the BBC had a bit more money. I went out to cover the trial of Conrad Black, who was this big tycoon who got in trouble for various reasons, so I got sent out to Chicago to cover that, went to New York for things. So I was just in this great place where I was absorbing everything as a producer. Then, while I was doing that, Evan Davies came along and needed a new producer. Evan Davies being the guy who presented Dragon's Den and is now on the Today programme – when he was our economics editor he wanted a new producer, and I was still kind of like a baby producer, I was still quite young – but because I'd built up my experience while I was at Uni it kind of put me ahead of the game a bit. So I went for an interview with him, and he said 'the funny thing about you is that you don't have the experience in terms of actual years in the bag, of TV production or anything, but you've got the right philosophy in terms of how you think about us telling stories', because that's my job, is to make complex things more interesting, and again, that feeds back to what I learned here, it's about making complex things understandable and interesting, and because I could do that he said 'right, you're on the team'.

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