

Public Relations & Communications Association

**PRCA**

NEXTGEN Southeast Asia

# THINGS I WISH I KNEW BEFORE JOINING PR & COMMUNICATIONS

CELEBRATING DIVERSE PASSIONS,  
PATHWAYS AND PERSPECTIVES

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## **Dear reader,**

Behold the first initiative by the PRCA Southeast Asia NextGen Group! We are thrilled to be unveiling our first initiative – a digital coffee table compilation of ruminations and reflections from a handful of diverse and accomplished practitioners in the region, to inspire the wider community.

The idea for "3 things I wish I knew" was born when the group found common ground over the fact that much of what we know as practitioners was acquired on the job. It doesn't take a new joiner long to realise that school doesn't quite give you all the tools you need to thrive in this fast-paced, frantically-evolving industry. As comms people, we know there's nothing better than the steer of someone who's been there and done that to offer an experienced point of view.

The other collective realisation was how diverse our journeys have been. Some of us have grown up in agencies while others have founded their own. Some have found a way to apply their comms know-how to different leadership roles while others have dedicated their careers to lecturing and grooming young comms talent. It suffices to say that the possibilities in PR and comms are as diverse as they are limitless and that's something to celebrate.

We're hugely grateful to the 15 practitioners from Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines who spared us their time and thoughts for this project. We hope these honest musings will provide you with rich insights to guide your next steps, whether you're taking your first in the industry or finding yourself at a crossroads and gearing up for the next big adventure.

Enjoy!

Cheers,  
Alicia Thong CMPRCA and Sugandha (Suhani) Bhandari MPRCA  
Chair & Vice Chair  
PRCA SEA NextGen Group



## ANGELA TAN

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS,  
AKZONOBEL, SINGAPORE

**1. Be the rainbow after the thunderstorm:** PR and Comms always looks glamorous – but there is a lot of effort and hard work behind the scenes. While macro-level thinking is essential, it is equally important to attention to the detail, be it for a piece of written work or planning an event. I always visualise PR and Comms as the rainbow – the beautiful splash of colour after the hard work, sweat and toil. This is especially pertinent when managing crises; when we get to bask in the satisfaction of achieving win-win outcomes at the end of the day.

**2. Have empathy for the feelings and values of others:** Communications is essentially about speaking to hearts and minds and ensuring that your message resonates. Always remember to put yourself in the other party's shoes and be proactive with managing concerns and considerations.

**3. Keep learning:** In my 29 years managing PR and Comms, I have been fortunate enough to witness the lightning pace at which technology has changed our world. Social media for example, has transformed the landscape, and it just goes to show, especially with the onset of COVID-19, that we must never rest on our laurels. I strongly believe that as business partners, we should expand our horizons beyond communications with knowledge in industry trends, competitor insights, business knowledge and even financial analysis.

## AN UNCEASING DRIVE TO LEARN

Angela is an award-winning professional with close to 30 years of expertise spanning various disciplines from PR, integrated marketing, business development to corporate affairs and branding. She specialises in driving impactful win-win partnerships and high-level stakeholder engagement and reputation management for government agencies (Land Transport Authority), consumer goods (The Walt Disney Company), financial services (Singapore Stock Exchange, DBS Finance, Aviva Financial), healthcare (Parkway Group), and media (Singapore Press Holdings) companies.

She has also worked in diverse industries and geographies in Asia, Australasia, Middle East, Africa, UK and Canada. In her current role at AkzoNobel, Angela champions sustainability as a member of the Asia Green Building Council and Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition driven by the Global Compact Network and World Bank CPLC and embraces Diversity & Inclusion.

A black and white portrait of Cherry Lui, a woman with dark hair pulled back, smiling. She is wearing a dark-colored top with a white floral pattern. The portrait is positioned on the left side of the page, with a dark blue overlay at the bottom left containing her name and title.

## CHERRY LUI

MANAGING PARTNER  
HEXA-COMMUNICATIONS, MALAYSIA

**1. The career path in communication is dynamic:** I fell into healthcare communication by accident but quickly learnt that it is a highly diverse and rewarding sector. With the ever expanding variety of roles out there, it is common for people to have a change of heart along the way, and that's fine. In fact, I would encourage everyone to keep an open mind to new opportunities throughout their careers.

**2. Don't be discouraged:** Ironically, radio silence is part and parcel of this industry, especially when you are starting out. Don't be discouraged when your interview pitches get turned down or even go unanswered. Instead, learn from each let-down to make your next approach better.

**3. "It's about making sure you surprise them, and they don't surprise you":** This is my favourite quote from a movie called Ms. Sloane. It's about how proactive planning and thinking two steps ahead can help anticipate and solve potential issues well before they arise. As a consultant, we owe it to our clients to do our homework and consider all eventualities to mitigate potential risks, as well as provide sound advice on the implications of each option on the table.

## A PASSION FOR HEALTHCARE

Cherry is a believer in the power of communication – how it can help improve society's health literacy, empower individuals to take charge of their own health, as well as influence policymakers at a national level. This passion and belief has fuelled her decade-long career in healthcare communication at various organisations, from networked agencies to a public healthcare institution and multinational pharmaceutical company.

The desire to improve patients' access to innovative medicine and enable better communication between patients, their families, caregivers and healthcare providers, inspired Cherry to set up Hexa-Communications. From influencing healthcare policy to inspiring people to take charge of their health, Cherry feels that the best part of the job is knowing she is making a difference to someone's life.



A black and white portrait of Christina Garcia, a woman with long, light-colored hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark, sleeveless blazer over a dark top and a small necklace with a circular pendant. The background is a plain, light color.

## CHRISTINA GARCIA

HEAD OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS, APAC,  
FACEBOOK, SINGAPORE

**1. Deal with issues early:** Organisations are moving faster than ever before. As a communications strategist, if you're not agile enough to solve problems fast, the problem will have shifted. Prevent problems from escalating by bringing in cross-functional partners early (and get to know who they are!) – a diverse and inclusive working team will bring deeper insights to what you are trying to solve and help you confront the issue. Nothing is someone else's problem – if you find a problem, take it upon yourself to fix it.

**2. Be kind, always:** I have developed a greater awareness of just how many people are dealing with personal issues on top of their workload. It is happening all around us, all the time. Understand and value what's going on with people. Send a thank you note; learn your teammates' working preferences, acknowledge receipt of emails and chat messages, relay positive feedback you have heard about someone's work, and importantly, be kind to yourself – self-care is an act of kindness!

**3. Listen more and keep learning:** Self-growth is key to having a fulfilling career. For example, hear people out without attempting to solve the problem, be open to learning new ways of doing things and get involved in regular learning and development opportunities – there's so much great stuff online. Great things happen to those who don't stop believing, trying, learning and who are open to all possibilities!

## JOURNEYING ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND TIME ZONES

A senior communications leader with 18 years of experience working in complex global organisations across Sydney, London, Hong Kong and Singapore,

Christina first began her career as a PR Consultant and later pivoted into corporate communications, specialising in technology and financial services. Inspired by an opportunity to evolve a company's purpose, Christina was immediately fascinated by how authentic storytelling could help shift organisational culture and bring about real change.

Christina's journey across disciplines (and time zones!) has seen her drive transformation and culture for leading organisations, whilst advising senior leaders through critical business milestones and periods of change. In her last three roles, Christina led Executive Communications for Ernst & Young APAC, built out the Internal Communications discipline for Uber APAC from scratch prior to IPO, and now leads Internal Communications for Facebook, APAC.

A black and white portrait of Clement Foo, a man with short dark hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored collared shirt. The background is a plain, light color.

## CLEMENT FOO MPRCA

CONSULTANT, BLUE TOTEM COMMUNICATIONS,  
SINGAPORE

**1. You don't have to do things alone – teamwork makes the dream work:** PR is a team sport that involves a wide range of day-to-day tasks and responsibilities, and often a variety of projects running concurrently. A well-oiled high-performing team will serve you well in the long run compared to a team of lone high-performers.

**2. It's okay to be rejected, be resilient:** Day in, day out, you'll receive rejections that come in many forms – a flat out no (often the best kind), a yes that turns into a no at the last minute (the worst kind), or just being flat out ignored. This rejection will usually come from the umpteenth pitch you've sent to your media contacts, but will also come from your clients, if you're in an agency, or from your colleagues in other departments if you're in-house. It's important to learn that this is okay – you can't win them all every time. Use every rejection as an opportunity to learn what works and what doesn't and develop better strategies over time.

**3. You will never be totally in control, so expect the unexpected:** We're born with the innate need for some semblance of control in our lives...but really, when are we ever truly in control? There are so many external factors affecting our work and results – from the news cycle, to the many media and stakeholders we engage, the spokespeople we field, and the public's reaction (especially with social media), we remain vulnerable to disruption from the unknown. Rather than fussing about what we cannot control and trying to predict the future, it's important that we spend our time working on factors that are within our control and spheres of influence. Keep your cool when things get side-tracked, tap on past challenges and experiences, and remain nimble and flexible to adapt to the latest situation.

## THE PR PRACTITIONER WITH A HEART OF GOLD

Clement is a passionate public relations practitioner, but his first love was the social services sector. Rather than picking one over the other, Clement chose to pursue both and has done so to great success.

With the support of his colleagues at Blue Totem Communications, Clement has been able to grow and nurture a successful career as a public relations practitioner whilst also serving as a professional counsellor.

As a communicator, he has worked on campaigns for big and small brands – including Verizon Media, StarHub, Jebesen & Jessen, Experian and Acer – helping them impactfully engage their stakeholders and meet their business goals.

As a counsellor, Clement has worked extensively with at-risk youths, taking a person-centred approach to therapy. He is currently a volunteer counsellor at Prison Fellowship Singapore, having previously worked with Habitat for Humanity, and a children's home in Indonesia.



## JOHN CARLO (JC) ALARCON

PR AND PARTNERSHIPS LEAD,  
LALAMOVE, PHILIPPINES

**1. If you love storytelling, this is the career for you:** As a student, I envisioned a future in journalism but I wasn't sure if the job would offer much creative freedom. The campaigns I've launched over the years will attest to how much fun PR work is and how rewarding it can be.

**2. Know your market:** How you tell your story and how you introduce yourself to the audience must be bespoke and intended for them. I find compelling PR stories to be close to the audience's experience.

**3. Building good relationships is key:** Whether it's a client, media contacts, or people you've interviewed for a story, make sure you connect with them. Leave a good impression because these relationships might come in handy in the future.

### IS THE GRASS GREENER? AGENCY VS. IN-HOUSE

For John, starting a career in PR and communications fresh from university was a decision that took much deliberation but the payoff has been worth it. He kick started his career and honed his craft in agencies for three years before switching tracks and going in-house at Lalamove. Fast forward to today, John is proud of his and his team's success in making Lalamove a household name in the Philippines for same-day delivery.



A black and white portrait of Karin Lohitnavy, a woman with shoulder-length blonde hair, wearing a white short-sleeved top and a multi-strand pearl necklace. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle smile. The background is dark.

## KARIN LOHITNAVY MPRCA

MASTER CONNECTOR, MIDAS PR, THAILAND

**1. Clients don't always understand what we do:** PR essentially defines a company or brand's offering to the world and amplifies these key messages across a range of channels. This is core to what the practise aims to achieve, with agencies judged on how well they do this by a variety of metrics – published media value in monetary terms, number of high-tier media delegates at an event, rate/quality of engagement in social media campaigns via an influencer, or a combination of measures. It's helpful for new entrants to develop an understanding of why brand-building takes time; why magazine features have such a potentially long "coffee table life" (or browser permanence, for online); and why the creation of powerful "owned" media offers sustained advantages to a business beyond the rapid-fire analytics served up by buying online ads.

**2. Clients sometimes have unrealistic expectations, so learn to manage them:** Clients can be demanding, so a core skill is managing client expectations. Avoid expectation shortfalls by asking the right questions before working on a campaign/release, understand the marcoms manager is under considerable pressure internally from seniors, be clear on anticipated outcomes/achievable results from the outset; be resilient when disparities/gaps occur within a brief and push appropriately and finally, work with a spirit of being part of the client's in-house team, but with the advantage of being surrounded by experts within one's agency (all of whom are working for the client's benefit).

**3. Patience can be a beneficial strategic goal:** Remain focused on cultivating close client/client-media relationships; address questions/concerns when raised; be pro-active in recommending strategic steps that don't deliver immediate results; and keep an eye on long-term improvement (rather than KPI-killing) as a positive guiding light on the horizon.

### MASTER CONNECTOR, MASTER MENTOR

Karin Lohitnavy is Master Connector at Midas PR in Bangkok. Her journey, from working in the communications sector in Luxembourg in the early 2000s to serving clients as Master Connector with MIDAS, a leading Bangkok-based PR firm, encompasses 15+ years of experience in the lifestyle, travel, real estate and luxury industries.

In recent years, Karin has taken every chance to share her expertise by mentoring young businesspersons and speaking at a number of leadership, business and PR conferences, such as the Women in Business Series and the Thailand Start-up Summit. She strives to offer her knowledge and expertise to provide other entrepreneurs and PR practitioners the chance to grow and be successful.





## LENA SOH-NG MPRCA

SENIOR ADVISOR AND FOUNDER  
DISTILLERI, SINGAPORE

**1. Mentorship and networking is crucial:** As someone who founded her own independent PR agency in my late 20s it would have been helpful if I had a 'guru' whom I could turn to, for advice and counsel. Hence, do look to join industry associations early and retain relationships with clients, peers, seniors who can be potential mentors or provide inspiration in your work. Active networking also enables you to stay in touch with latest trends and industry updates which is crucial in the world of communications.

**2. Always stay on top of the game:** No matter how busy or senior you are in your job, never stop learning and digesting new content and ideas. The industry is always changing and there is always something new. It was shocking to hear of friends in the industry who once told me that they were not going to engage on social media, when it first started. We are communicators after all, and it's important to not just know but also engage. How else does one get first hand insights?

**3. Step back to step forward:** The work in this industry is dynamic which also takes a lot of energy. We practitioners are often working on tight timelines, managing a few things at any one time, and face unexpected internal or external crises. I have witnessed how such stress can affect the mental and physical health of people in this industry. Although it's tough to put aside the work in front of us, the reward from stepping back and taking a breather is immense. It's important to discipline oneself to do that.

## THE LEARNER TURNS LEADER

With close to 30 years of PR and communications experience, Lena brings invaluable insights to her clients. She is the Founding Partner of Huntington Communications, which under her leadership, has won many communications industry accolades. Recognising the need for transformation and to be poised for a vastly new communications landscape, Huntington Communications merged with a creative agency at the end of 2020 to form a strategic agency named Distilleri. Distilleri advises on branding, reputation, crisis management with an integrated communications lens.

The brands she counselled include 3M, AkzoNobel, IKEA, Fuji Xerox, Gong Cha, Mattel, Montblanc and Watsons. She has also conducted leadership training in media and crisis communications for Frasers Centrepoint Malls, Volvo Trucks, Philips, School of the Arts, and Singapore International Festival of Arts.

Lena has been a global Board member of PROI and sits on the Board of PRCA South East Asia.



## LITA SOENARDI MPRCA

FOUNDER & PARTNER,  
MAVERICK INDONESIA, INDONESIA

**1. PR is not just about great events and good media coverage:** In my early days, I was focused solely on how we could host great events that people would remember and how many news impressions we could land. I did not realise that the more important question was how these elements could make a real difference to the brand or company in terms of reputation and growth.

**2. Measurement is key:** We don't always take the time to reflect on the results our hard work has yielded for clients. Be sure to take stock and measure results, check in with the client to ensure you understand that what you do has made a difference, and how you can be more successful in the future.

**3. Having a good network does not make you a good PR person:** It's always good to expand your network and know 'the right people'. However, unless you couple this with a strong vision and solid thought leadership, you are just another well-connected person in the industry.

### FROM COMMUNICATIONS NOVICE TO FOUNDING PARTNER

With no formal education in communications, Lita got to where she is today through practical learning on the job.

When she first joined a global communications firm, the PR division had only just been formed, and Lita had no idea where to start. Limited resources meant that Lita had to learn on the go, with little to no guidance, and grow from her mistakes.

Through grit and determination, Lita worked her way up to become VP of the company, before taking the bold step to launch Maverick Indonesia with her partner.

Drawing on her own experience, Lita believes in providing her team with right support, as well as opportunities to take on new challenges and make their own mistakes.

Almost 20 years later, Maverick Indonesia has grown from a 6-people PR firm to 75-strong team. To this day, Lita reminds her team that, as the industry is constantly changing, having a growth mindset and adapting faster than one's competitors is the ultimate key to success.



## MAGDA NIEWCZAS

SENIOR MANAGER,  
FINN PARTNERS SINGAPORE

**1. Time management is key:** The dynamic nature of our work is thrilling, but it can also be overwhelming. Learning and putting into practice proper time management skills can help make the pace of work less hectic and reduce unwarranted stress from missed deadlines.

**2. Viewing professional relationships as partnerships will lead to greater success:** It can be tempting to view relationships with clients, vendors and media as being transactional. Instead, learning to view others as partners and building trust will pave the way to accomplishing bigger, more impactful goals.

**3. Be courageous and adopt a growth mindset:** Public relations is a field that requires a gamut of skillsets: networking, writing, strategising, digital savvy – and a never-say-die attitude. What truly excites me is that the industry and my role are constantly evolving; there will always be a new challenge to overcome, and its only by being courageous and tackling them will you see growth as a practitioner.

### A 6,000 MILE JOURNEY TO DISCOVER A PASSION FOR PR

At 22, Magda Niewczas packed up her life in Europe and flew 6,000 miles to complete a double master's degree and pursue a career in the field of international relations.

Post-graduation, Magda served at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Singapore as a PR and Cultural Officer; it was here that Magda discovered and nurtured a passion for communications. Despite not having formal training, she took the plunge and joined an integrated marketing consultancy.

Over the years, Magda has successfully married her wide knowledge of international relations, governance and geopolitical risk with the core skillsets she developed as a public relations practitioner, to provide deep and impactful counsel for her clients.



A black and white portrait of Michael De Waal-Montgomery, a man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored collared shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

## MICHAEL DE WAAL-MONTGOMERY

DIRECTOR,  
ELLERTON & CO. PUBLIC RELATIONS, SINGAPORE

**1. Learning the craft of a good headline is vital:** One of the enduring lessons I learned from my editor at South China Morning Post was around crafting a good headline for a story to achieve cut-through with readers. Rather than trying to be too clever or wordy, here's what she told us: "Imagine something happens to you during the course of the day – what is the one sentence you tell your spouse as soon as you get home that evening?" That instinctive go-to line tends to be the story headline.

**2. Media database > personal relationships:** I find that, all too often, people in the media and public relations industry think of relationships as being the most important factor in securing coverage for a client. Having been a journalist for years, I came into the world of public relations knowing that the strength of the story is always more important than whether it was pitched to me by a stranger or somebody I have a personal/professional relationship with. Thus, I would advise picking up the skills to craft great stories, rather than trying to wine and dine your way to coverage through a roster of "relationships".

**3. Accept your limitations:** There will always be parts of the job where your colleagues are better than you, and vice versa. Rather than trying to be everything to everybody, accept your limitations and run a piece of work past a second pair of eyes that you know tends to have a better grasp of the task at hand. There's no need to beat yourself up about not being the best at everything all the time. Lifelong learning can help us improve in some areas where we are weak, but sometimes it comes down to different ways of looking at the world, different personalities, and different wiring. It's that variety that makes the world such a colourful and fun place.

### SWITCHING SIDES: FROM JOURNALISM TO PR

Not unlike many in public relations, Michael started his career as a journalist writing for technology publications including Silicon Valley-based VentureBeat and Singapore-based E27. As a journalist, he reported on the start-up and technology scene in Asia. Having covered some of Asia and the world's leading start-ups, he learned to discern a good story from a bad one and over time attracted millions of monthly page views to his articles.

After a few years in journalism, he moved into public relations where, while at Fleishman Hillard, he consulted for global clients including SAP, Skyscanner, VMware, and Pivotal. Today, Michael continues to hone his craft in storytelling and media relations as a Director at Ellerton & Co. Public Relations.

A black and white portrait of Pavel Slutskiy, a man with short dark hair and a light beard, wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed. On the left side of his blazer, there is a circular logo of Chulalongkorn University. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## PAVEL SLUTSKIY

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,  
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

**1. Running a company is not for me:** It took me almost 15 years to realise that I do not enjoy running my own business. I used to think of myself as an entrepreneur who likes independence, but then I learnt that being a business owner comes with being dependent on the people who work for you and being responsible for them.

**2. Platforms and technologies change, but the basic principles of working remain the same:** The communications industry is and will always be technologically determined. And yet, to be successful, you do not really need to be tech-savvy. As long as you can think strategically and write well, the lack of technical expertise will not be a problem. These competences can be outsourced, and in most cases, they are not expensive. It makes more sense to concentrate on developing core skills that will remain valuable in any technological environment.

**3. Think small:** Whilst it feels good to have big-name projects under your belt, I have in my experience found it more interesting to work with smaller companies; the work is usually more demanding and requires more creativity, but every success you achieve feels much more rewarding.

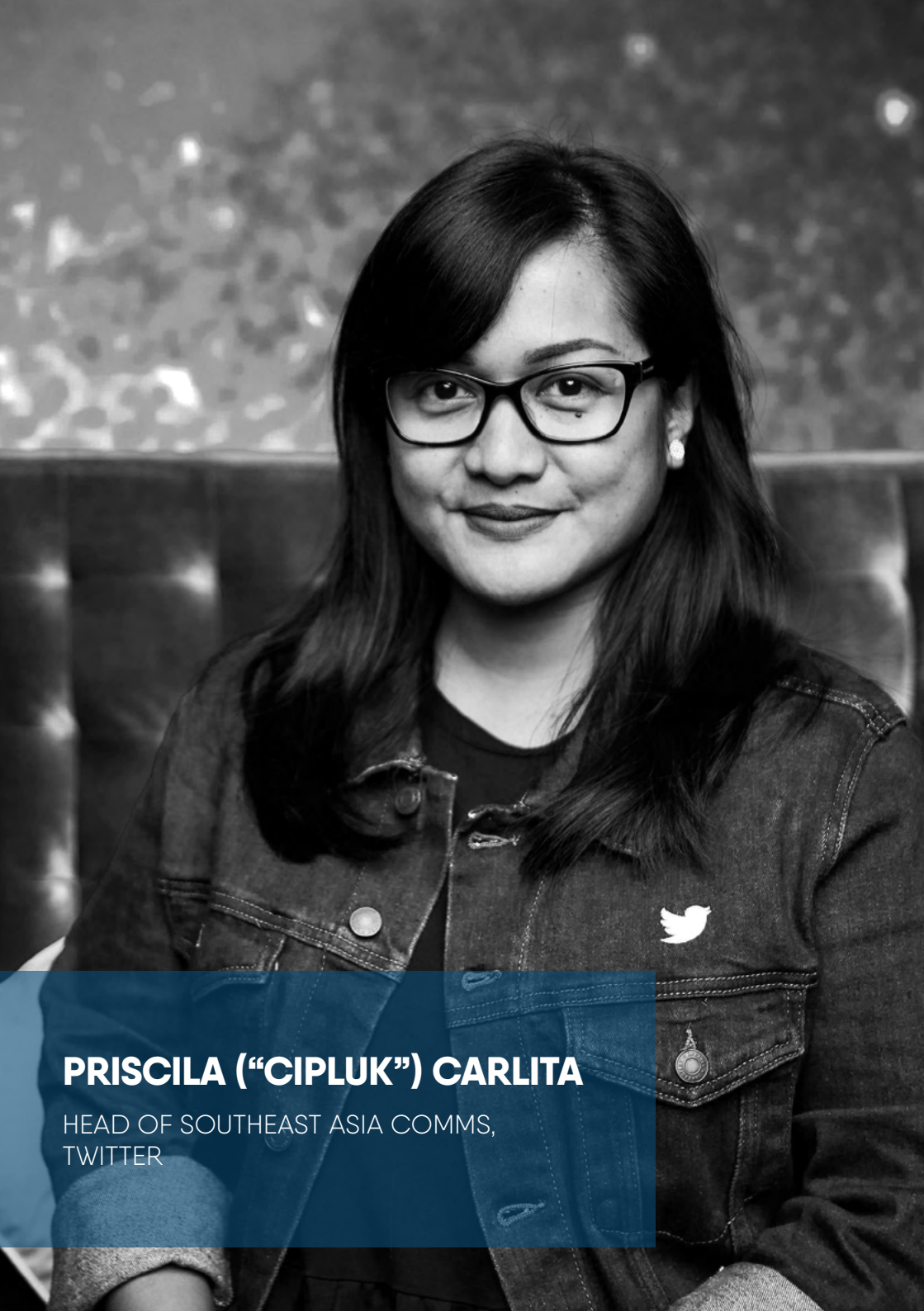
## STRADDLING CONSULTANCY AND ACADEMIA

Pavel Slutskiy is an Assistant Professor in Communication Management at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. He is also an associate professor in Public Relations.

His research interests include communication theory, cross-cultural communication and public relations. To date, he has authored “Communication and Libertarianism” (2021), an exploration of communication issues and libertarian theory, as well as myriad other works.

Slutskiy is also a communication practitioner with over 20 years of experience in PR, corporate communications, journalism and social media, having worked with clients including Lufthansa, Walt Disney, Sony, Chanel, Hitachi, Audi and many others. He is currently a consultant at Midas PR in Thailand.





## PRISCILA (“CIPLUK”) CARLITA

HEAD OF SOUTHEAST ASIA COMMS,  
TWITTER

**1. Your personal brand matters:** No matter where you are, once you enter the PR & communications industry, people will develop certain expectations of you (e.g. “PR needs to be this, needs to do that”). If you want to be perceived as a PR professional with a strong skill-set / specialities (corporate / product / crisis management / etc.), start building your personal brand from early in your career.

**2. Creativity doesn’t always mean to create something new:** Creativity in PR also means you can problem-solve or find alternative solutions to challenging situations. Make sure you’re always up to speed with what’s happening across verticals/work streams, so you can provide timely and valuable counsel to your stakeholders.

**3. Strong stakeholder management is vital:** Especially when working as an in-house comms professional, relationship-building with cross functional teams within the organisation is crucial in order to get things done. It applies to agency roles, too, when you need to navigate larger client teams extending beyond PR/communications. If you’re just starting out in PR, mark this as one of your top priorities for professional growth.

### TWEET TWEET: CONSUMER MEETS CORPORATE COMMS

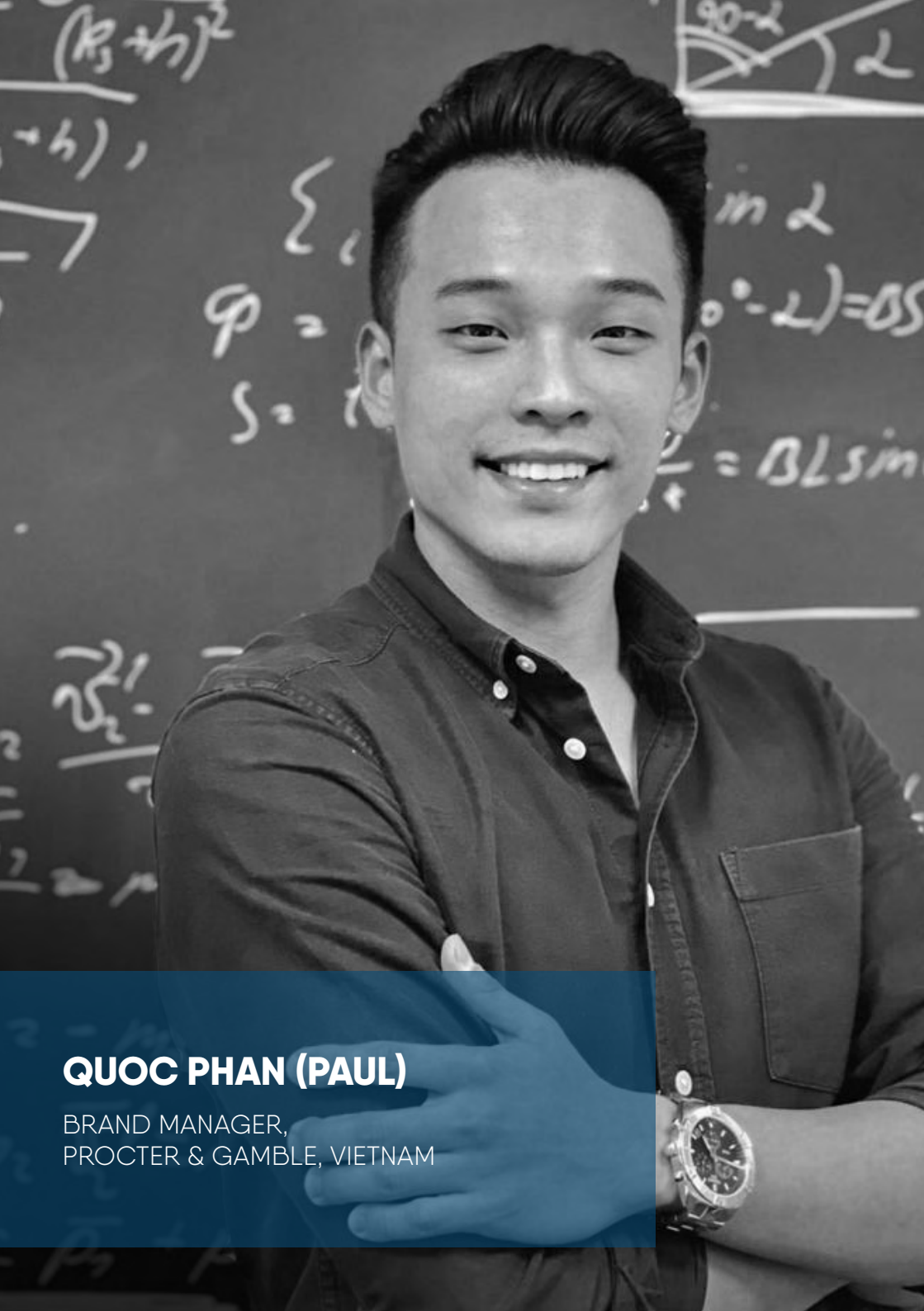
Having worked in the PR industry for the past 15 years, Cipluk’s experience spans consumer and corporate communications roles, marketing, digital, as well as community engagement in Indonesia and across the Southeast Asia region.

Cipluk spent the first five years of her career with local PR agencies in Jakarta, handling clients from various industries: sports, music, telecommunication, insurance and FMCG. Leaning into a strong interest for consumer tech, Cipluk then joined Acer Indonesia’s Digital, Marketing Communications, and Community team. She later joined Mondelez Indonesia to support their brand communications efforts for the likes of Oreo, Cadbury and KRAFT.

In 2015, Cipluk was hired by Twitter to build the communications team for Indonesia.

She is currently responsible for strategy development, as well as the execution of communications activities for Twitter across Southeast Asia.





**QUOC PHAN (PAUL)**

BRAND MANAGER,  
PROCTER & GAMBLE, VIETNAM

- 1. Psychology works:** Your audience, no matter how niche, are human after all. Understanding some basic principles in psychology can be useful in developing communication strategies.
- 2. Less is more:** There are many ways to communicate but always look to focusing on your brand's top priorities and adopt a mindset of simplifying things for your target audience.
- 3. Make leadership your character:** Approaching every task with a leadership mindset is crucial to unlocking learning and progression opportunities.

**LEARNING TO BE A LEADER**

At 21-years-old, Phan Kien Quoc (Paul) entered the workforce as a Personal Assistant whilst working towards his Bachelor's degree in telecommunications engineering. Within six months, he was promoted to Chief Representative Officer of Vietnam for petrol and chemicals company, Trigotrade(M)Sdn Bhd.

However, Paul's passion has always been in helping brands communicate, and in 2016, he joined the industry, cutting his teeth across a range of B2B (IT, services) and B2C (FMCG, F&B) brands. While B2B communications taught him the skills to work with technical and specialist knowledge, B2C communications sharpened his consumer-centric mindset.

His entrepreneurial spirit and can-do attitude have helped him adapt and advance quickly with each new role. In 2020, he joined consumer goods giant, Procter & Gamble, and is now Brand Manager for Head & Shoulders and premium portfolio brands.

A black and white portrait of Sarah Cheong, a woman with long dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark turtleneck under a light-colored blazer. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

## SARAH CHEONG

SUSTAINABILITY PROFESSIONAL

**1. Decide early on what you'd like to be known for:** What are the top 3 things you'd like others to think about when they describe you? Thinking carefully about this will help you better articulate your non-negotiables and what you stand for. When I started working, I decided I would like to always be associated with being reliable, authentic and empathetic. These principles helped to ground my interactions and work ethic, and set a foundation for how I built up my career. Recalling them always helped me when I felt I was going off-course or on uncertain ground.

**2. Having pride in your work will most often result in work you are proud of:** Holding myself accountable to the highest possible standards has often meant that I put in twice the amount of effort into what I am doing, and I think this has helped me produce my best. Having said that, it is equally important to be kind to yourself and balance your wellbeing with your career. In true spirit of sustainability, we need to be as careful with our health and relationships as we are with our career. We are, after all, in this life for the long-haul!

**3. Magic lies beyond your comfort zone:** Whether it's a career move, entering a new industry, or standing up for what you believe in...these are all situations that I have found myself in that downright terrified me. Under these circumstances, it is useful to ask "what's the worst that could happen," and speak to friends who believe in you. I have found immense freedom and growth in choosing to take one small step after another and living through the uncertainty and challenges. As long as you don't compromise on your values, it helps to recognise the world is bigger than a particular job, company or person, and you always have a choice on where you want to grow.

## COMMUNICATIONS AS A LAUNCHPAD FOR GOOD

Currently transitioning into a new role in the government, Sarah was previously Zuellig Pharma's Regional Sustainability Lead. There, she played a central role in inspiring the company's 12,000-strong team and its external stakeholders around a common goal to become a more sustainable company. Sarah kicked off her career in communications cutting her teeth at AKA Asia – an integrated communications agency. There, she found herself drawn to projects that focused on community engagement.

Later, Sarah joined the hospitality industry and drove social content creation centred on corporate social responsibility and sustainability. This is when she discovered her interest in helping corporates make a tangible positive impact on their stakeholders. In her role at Zuellig – despite it not being a traditional communications role – Sarah drew heavily on her background and training as a communicator. In particular, the ability to make the complex topic of sustainability approachable to stakeholders was crucial to the positive outcomes she delivered.



## SHARON ISSABELLA

SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER  
GRAB INDONESIA, INDONESIA

**1. Commit to continuous learning:** The way the world communicates is constantly changing. An understanding of the latest channels is imperative to creating an on-point communications strategy. However, being trendy doesn't necessarily translate to impact. Intellectual rigour and discipline need to complement creativity to build campaigns that are as memorable as they are measurable.

**2. Stakeholder adaptability is crucial:** Our stakeholders range from management executives to government officials, media friends and direct consumers. The ability to adapt our communications style and content depending on who we are facing is what defines a great communicator.

**3. Preparation and (some) paranoia are essential:** We've seen how companies and their spokespeople wing it on speaking engagements and social media. Many of these occasions have led to major PR headaches. A healthy amount of paranoia will help pre-empt issues and a great deal of preparation will ensure things go off without a hitch.

## FROM WIN TO WIN

Sharon started her decade-long journey in communications at one of Indonesia's leading PR firms, Maverick. Building up core skills in brand communication, marketing and PR, she moved on and grew her expertise in different industries, from tech at Microsoft, to banking at DBS.

Her passion, drive and hard work eventually brought her to decacorn Grab Indonesia, where she now leads strategic communications for all its business verticals. A creative force to be reckoned with, Sharon's work has been recognised through awards in and outside Indonesia.

In 2019, she was listed in SWA Magazine's Top 100 Corporate Communications Practitioners in Indonesia and her latest campaign for Grab, #KitaVSCorona, won in the Community Relations category at the SABRE Awards Asia Pacific 2020.





## YUNNIE MARZUKI

SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS EXECUTIVE,  
ANYMIND GROUP, INDONESIA

**1. It's OK to ask for help:** Most of the time, when we are facing difficulties, we tend to try solving the problem ourselves first. However, I have realised that it is okay to ask others for help when necessary; in fact, it may even lead to a better solution being found or the generation of fresh ideas.

**2. There is no right or wrong question:** Coming from a background in media, I am often faced with the dilemma of whether or not to ask the questions that immediately come to mind. I have learnt, however, that as long as your question could add value to the content you are producing, it is worth asking; this is particularly true in the media and public relations industry, which is built on crafting and telling stories!

**3. Don't rest on your laurels:** The communications space is evolving so rapidly, so it's important to keep yourself updated on what's new. Ultimately, I believe that opportunities will come along for those who keep learning and growing.

## STARTING OUT IN START-UPS

Starting her career as a Technology Correspondent for Digital News Asia, Yunnien was the independent news portal's country representative for Indonesia, a role that enabled her to combine covering Indonesian technology-based businesses and the country's vibrant start-up scene.

One of the start-ups she covered was AnyMind Group, and through an interview with the company's Co-Founder, became intrigued at what the company was doing in Indonesia and across Asia.

In 2019, Yunnien made the jump into communications, joining the then 3-year-old company as Communications Executive. Over the years, she's gained not just a deeper insight into public relations as a function, but also how various parts of the communications sphere – like internal communications, social media and content – work in harmony.



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