

## Missouri Career Mentor video script



### **Rod Nunn**

Public Administrator  
State Government

*Note: This interview was conducted in April 2008 during Governor Matt Blunt's administration.*

Hi, my name is Rod Nunn, and my title is Director of Education and Workforce Innovation. I work for the governor, and my duties entail working with a number of education and business partners throughout state government to solve problems, really, about what we can do to make sure our education system, both at the elementary and secondary levels – high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, as well as schools of higher learning – are preparing students for very challenging times in our economy. It is a very collaborative job where you bring people together to try and seek new, innovative solutions to problems we're facing in our education and workforce system.

### **Characteristics**

In the public administration career cluster, there are certain characteristics and skills that I think are critical if you are seeking a career in this industry. Employers are looking for students and graduates who are problem solvers, critical thinkers, people who can work well and collaborate with others, and I will give you an example of what I mean. I hear a lot of times about how some of our best and brightest students, after they graduate, they don't come back to the state to work. We call that "brain drain." And so if you really want to say, reduce brain drain, there is no one entity that can really solve that. You have got to be able to call on community leaders and economic development, business leaders, community developers, educators, stakeholders and individuals from a wide variety of folks to really put together the types of solutions to make the state and community more attractive so that folks will want to stay here after graduation, to live and raise their families, and to work.

### **Joys & Challenges**

What I enjoy most about my career is being able to work with a variety of individuals from the community all across the state and use my creativity and collaboration skills to really affect change. I get to interact with community and faith-based leaders, I get to interact with business leaders, I get to interact with certainly elected officials at all levels – federal, state, and local government. And so I meet a variety of personalities and types of people, and it helps me as a lifelong learner to be exposed to so many different types of environments and organizations and people. And certainly to be creative and entrepreneurial in tackling problems and bringing people together – when you can call upon the best and brightest in our state to really work with them to solve problems, it makes for an interesting day in the office.

There's certainly a lot of challenges that we face, certainly in my career, in my job, that I see on a daily basis. Probably the most prevalent issue is sort of the unlimited demand for limited resources. We have lots of needs in our state – whether it's our public health or public education or public infrastructure –

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you know, there are just a lot of needs and there are never enough resources to go around, and so you are always making tough decisions, and you are always trying to create the best public value for the common good for the most people. And that can cause certainly a challenging day, and a challenging week in my case.

### **Early Interest**

I think my interest in public service really started around the seventh or eighth grade. I can remember vividly being on something called the Scholarquest Team in middle school. And we went to have these meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays an hour before school started, and our math teacher was actually the leader, and it was basically – he would bring in some history or some public events and he would just throw questions at us. And I was always at the edge of my seat, and I can remember vividly learning about the Cold War growing up and communism versus democracy, and I remember vividly the double-digit inflation of the early '80s and what that meant for economics. I guess I was kinda inquisitive about, well, who were the folks who were out there helping to solve those problems, and I think I want to be one of those people one day when I grow up. That was certainly reinforced when I got home. Both my parents were very active civically and volunteered, and so we were exposed growing up to lots of community leaders, and I always sort of looked up to those people.

### **High School Courses**

There were lots of courses that I think were very helpful to me in high school. I actually think that my math courses were very helpful. I think back on my geometry and my algebra and trigonometry courses and how they help me to become a critical thinker. And in government you are required to analyze issues and policies, and you do a lot of work where you are having to solve problems – not necessarily algebraic equations, but that require lots of insight and knowledge of the rules and those sorts of things. Also, the communication and English were very helpful. We do lots of writing and reading in this particular career sector. And I gotta tell you, I took lots of music classes growing up and those were just as important if not more important than some of the more rigorous coursework I took – those reinforced my social skills – I was actually a trombone player and a section leader. And I think I developed my leadership skills actually being in marching band and jazz band. And so I value those courses as well.

### **School Experiences**

I was very involved in student government as I progressed through the college. You know every college has a governing board and a campus system. And I remember the days of running for student senate and getting elected and really honing my skills to become a public servant and serving the interests of the student body. I worked with several different student groups and served in several capacities of student leadership at the college level.

### **In Retrospect**

In retrospect as I look back on my high school and college curriculum, if there were anything I were going to change, I think I would have taken more Spanish. I probably had – between high school and college – four years of French, none of which I use. And I come in contact so, so much now with leaders and different individuals from the Latino community who sometimes I wish I could just talk in their language. But it's certainly interesting that I took French, and lots of folks were telling me to take Spanish, and I said, 'No, no, no no.' But that is something I would think differently about if I were doing it over.

## **Mentors**

My pathway to working in public service certainly included being influenced by mentors along the way. One mentor in particular, actually I was in an internship in the first couple of years after college, and this person would spend quality time with me, and I would share my experiences and they would reflect on their experiences, and they would give me good advice. And they would give me these interesting tidbits that I could apply. They would say things like, 'Well, Rod, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.' And the importance of applying compassion in public service or they would say, 'Networking is so important,' and 'You need to build a tree. The root of the tree is you and then the branches represent different sectors that you need to interact with, and the leaves are people.' And 'Draw your tree every couple of months to see how you have expanded your network.' And they would just share little things like that have been so powerful and really life-changing for me. And so mentorship and being under someone who has experience in this field has made a difference for me.

## **Advice**

If I had to give advice to someone who was interested in a career in public service, I would certainly tell you to consider in middle school and high school taking a more rigorous course load. Even if you are not thinking of becoming a scientist or an engineer or a medical doctor, rigorous courses in mathematics and science, for instance, are going to prepare you to be a critical thinker, a problem solver.... You know in government, that is what we need. I would also tell you to be balanced. You will need to obtain social skills and soft skills certainly, like leadership, dependability and those types of things that are reinforced in social clubs and in the arts, the humanities, music and those types of things. So I would encourage you to both take a rigorous course load as well as be involved in social activities.

I have one final word of wisdom for anyone seeking a career in public service or any career for that matter. And that is to be a life-long learner. The pace of change in our world is so fast with technology and innovation and globalization, and all these things you read about. But really, if you are going to be successful, you have got to be prepared to always learn and improve yourself. Even when you graduate from high school and if you go into postsecondary education, to college, that's only going to serve you for a few years and you will need to continuously upgrade your skills, and that's going to help you in the future – more than anything.