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The right channels

The power — and the value — of networking, Furman style

Los Angeles, California — home of the infamous world of Hollywood. It is a ruthless city, more than 2,000 miles from the comfort of the Furman bubble, that brings rejection every step of the way and where everyone is, was or would like to be entertainment's next big star.

Such a competitive environment hardly seems the place for an inexperienced newcomer, fresh from the supportive atmosphere of the Furman campus, to succeed at becoming an actor, executive producer or director.

For one young Furman alumnus, though, passion and dedication fueled his desire to break into this seemingly impenetrable world, and with the help of his Furman connections and the power of networking, his dreams of an acting career are coming true.

When Anderson Reid Gormly graduated from Furman in 2004 with a degree in communication studies, he resolved to go wherever he needed in order to have the greatest opportunity for success. This dream took him to Los Angeles.

After four years of life in the bubble, one might think that moving to a city of more than 10 million people would be somewhat daunting. However, having survived Furman's intense academic regimen, Reid, like so many other alumni, felt invincible. With the support of his family and friends and the resources of the Furman alumni network at his fingertips, he made the leap with confidence.

He also quickly discovered that, as with any other career, who you know is often more important than anything else. So he immediately set out to meet with everyone he knew in the industry — including me.

After graduating in 2003, I had taken my communication studies degree and moved to Los Angeles to pursue a job as a television producer. Having worked in Furman's Office of Career Services for two years under John Barker, I had witnessed firsthand the power of networking and quickly learned how valuable it could be to my success.

Like so many others, I was drawn to the entertainment industry because it would allow me the freedom to be creative while offering an outlet to have a powerful voice. I took the tools I acquired at Furman and set off to pursue my dream of becoming a producer.

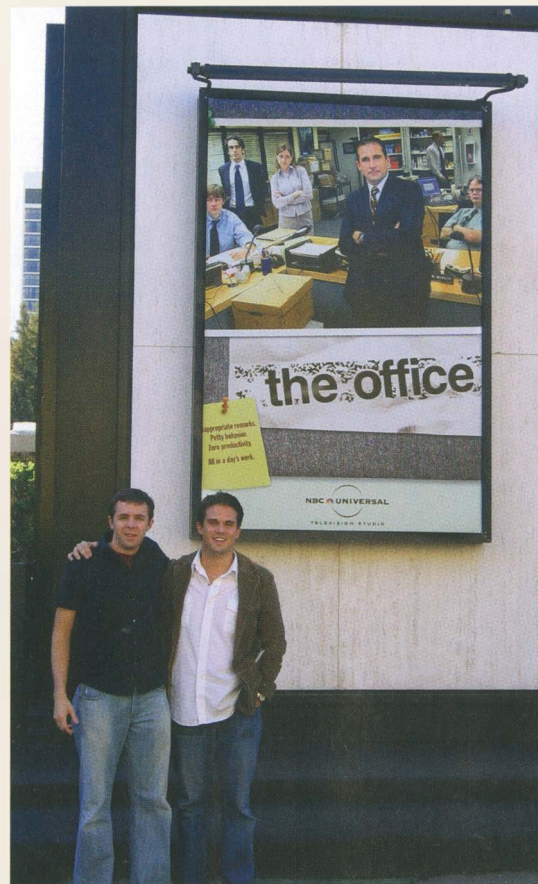
Soon after arriving in LA, I used my networking skills to land a job at Reveille, a television production and development company, working directly under the executive vice president of creative affairs. This job has provided me the opportunity to develop, sell and produce such shows as NBC's "The Office" and "The Biggest Loser," Bravo's "Blow Out," USA's "Nashville Star" and FX's "30 Days."

While working on these shows, I quickly learned that a key element to their success is casting, and that finding the right talent starts with getting the right people to audition. Auditions are coveted because, while they can always provide that one big break that kick-starts an actor's career, they also help a performer establish relationships with network executives, agents, managers, casting directors and producers.

After reconnecting with Reid, I knew he had a long road ahead. I also sensed that one day we would work together. However, I had no idea it would happen so quickly.

One meeting led to another, and eventually I arranged an informal meeting between Reid and Teri Weinberg, our vice president of casting and scripted development. Although this was just an introductory interview, it proved to be a vital part of the networking process for Reid, as he gained valuable face time and rapport with a casting executive. He also got his head shot into our system, instead of in the nearest trash can.

Eight months later, I called Reid to let him know that, at my suggestion, Teri had submitted his name for a part on "The Office" that I knew would be perfect for him. At that point, I had done all I could. Reid had his foot in the door; the rest was up to him.



Reid Gormly (left) and Chad Bennett celebrate Reid's "Office" work.

He auditioned, and sure enough, he was offered a small feature role on the November 22 episode titled "Email Surveillance." The role not only gave him prime-time exposure, but it enabled him to earn his Screen Actors Guild card — a milestone for any aspiring actor, since most agents and casting directors insist that you have your card before they will work with you. Because of this opportunity, many doors will now open for Reid.

This experience also opened both our eyes to the realization that, by supporting our fellow alumni, we help to better Furman and each other. Reid and I are proof that you can trust the Furman network to help you pursue the career and life that you have always dreamed of.

Now go call a Paladin!

— Chad Bennett '03