



# PMCA

Professional Manufacturing Confectioners Association

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## Student Questions Q&A Program - Answered

1. **What's the best advice you heard when you were a student? – submitted by Arabella Benducci**
  - a. Judy Cooley: Follow your heart and do something that makes you happy! I was shown how to become involved in the confectionery industry through the US organizations of AACT and PMCA.
  - b. Carly Meck: The best advice I received was that my resume was horrible. Seems like odd advice, but it really helped me to understand what was critical for employers.
  - c. Bob Huzinec: Be like a sponge when it comes to learning, suck in as much knowledge as possible. Diversify your areas of learning/expertise. Try everything, ask questions (no questions are stupid questions), make mistakes as you as we all have learned from our mistakes. Share what you have learned with others. BE A TEAM PLAYER. The statement goes; there is no I in TEAMS, but people never complete the statement. Therefore, I would like to complete this statement, TEAMS actual meaning: "TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE SUCCESS."
2. **What skills do you need in the confectionery industry? – submitted by Harrison Brown**
  - a. Judy Cooley: Logic, hardworking, forward thinking, ability to be extremely flexible, honesty.
  - b. Carly Meck: Multitasking is a great skill for the confectionery industry. I didn't learn much about confectionery in college, however, I did learn how to multitask!
  - c. Bob Huzinec: Hands on skills are very important get your hands dirty. Understanding how and why things happen in a process is important. An understanding of food science, engineering, QC, manufacturing/processing (from start of process to packaging). How and why ingredients are used their functionality. Supply chain knowledge will also assist you. By this I mean, capacity, manufacturing locations, product costing which includes ingredients, packaging, labor, variable overhead, transportation, duties, taxes, margins, etc. All of this takes time to have a working knowledge, take your time but learn as much as you can from all departments. Nobody knows it all, but it will help to know knowledge in these areas.
3. **What new products are you really excited about and why? – submitted by Zoe Atkins**
  - a. Judy Cooley: Excited about the new innovations in reduced sugar confectionery – especially hard candy. Even more excited to see so many companies "giving back" to those less fortunate!
  - b. Carly Meck: I am particularly excited about plant-based technology. In the past 3 years, the category has blown up with a host of new products being launched.
  - c. Joni Stern: The ingredients that I am getting excited about include those for upcycling as well as low glycemic sweeteners including cocoa pulp, lucuma and yacon and proteins that include Tara and Sacha Inchi.
4. **How do you get a hold on an area as broad as "chocolate" to find an area to take a deep dive in. From doing some work for professors, it is so complex and nuanced. I have been reading a lot of industry manuals (like Beckett's Industrial Chocolate) and it only seems overwhelming! - submitted by Tyler Yany**
  - a. Judy Cooley: Try an internship with a reputable company – most are unpaid, but they can offer a lot of insight. Or even take a week of "free" experience with more than 1 kind of confectionery company – chocolate, sweets, gum – also large, mid-sized and small companies. Additionally, a job

can be extremely insightful. So much of learning comes from experience and actually doing a job. A job during the school year as well as the summer can give you excellent insight into what you may want to do, and (equally important) what you may not want to do. It also gives you a huge head-start into the job world and looks great on your resume.

- b. Carly Meck: The chocolate category is very broad indeed, but I would probably split it into two main buckets: "Manufacturer" and "Confectioner". A manufacturer transforms beans into chocolate while a Confectioner transforms bulk chocolate into small confections and candies. There are companies that do both so it does get a little confusing! By splitting chocolate into two categories, it can help you understand which technology and technical information would be worth looking into.

**5. What are some things that us students can do now or early on in our career to set us up as leaders like yourselves further on? – submitted by Amber Heun**

- a. Judy Cooley: Jobs, Jobs, Jobs. The more you can do prior to graduation, the more experience you have, the more determination you have, the better your resume will be and the more insightful you will be about a career.
- b. Carly Meck: There are many free or low-cost leadership courses you can take online, and then translate to your resume. In addition, participating or leading within clubs at college is a great experience as well.
- c. Bob Huzinec: I volunteer in associations such as the AACT, PMCA. Network with those in the industry. If asked to be a member of a cross functional team take this opportunity.
- d. Joni Stern: One of the most important things is networking all the time. Having contacts in the industry can help you when you least expect it! Your company could fire you tomorrow, but they cannot take your network!

**6. Do most of you have graduate degrees? What are opportunities available to someone with a graduate degree compared to an undergraduate? – submitted by Josie Sorensen**

- a. Judy Cooley: I earned an MBA and an International certificate long after my graduation with a BS. I'm not sure they helped me earn more \$, but they did give me excellent insight into doing my job better and definitely in furthering my career.
- b. Carly Meck: I have a graduate degree but I earned it while working with my undergrad degree. Many companies offer tuition reimbursement programs so if you are on the fence about a graduate degree, consider working for a few years at a company that might pay for your future education.

**7. How do you think working in the confectionary industry different or unique comparing to other industry? – submitted by Kai Kai Ma**

- a. Judy Cooley: The confectionery industry is very different (even than the larger food/snack industry) because of the comradery we all feel for each other personally; we are all a candy family – we help each other, teach together, work together for the improvement of the industry.
- b. Carly Meck: The Confectionery industry is UNIQUE. We are a very close-knit candy family, even if we work for competitors! We also value education and are able to share "industry secrets" among our peers. Many other industries are fearful to share too much information outwardly, so I am very thankful for all of the educational material we have access to.
- c. Joni Stern: The confectionery industry is unique since there will never be a recession as evident in the past year when sales were up 20%.

**8. Do you feel that hands on learning in the field helped you better than learning in a lab class? – submitted by Arabella Benducci**

- a. Judy Cooley: Absolutely – there is no substitute for hands-on learning; learning by doing.

- b. Carly Meck: Both helped, in addition to my part time jobs. The lab work helped me to write lab reports (which I still do!) as well as how to measure properly and work cleanly. Working in the field taught me the specifics of my day-to-day work.
  - c. Bob Huzinec: Hands on skills are very important get your hands dirty. Understanding how and why things happen in a process is important. Talk to those in the manufacturing environment they live the products every day and ask questions. These people over the years have developed the skills to evaluate process and product by touch and feel along with following the SOP's.
- 9. Does anyone have experience dealing with new ingredients in confectionery that the federal regulatory may not be aware of (example - not in GRAS list) and how was your experience to get the product/ingredient in the market? – submitted by Urvi Shah**
- a. Judy Cooley: Absolutely – many companies have experience with ingredients that is not yet approved. Also, many ingredients are approved in other countries but may not be approved in the US. Many countries also use ingredient approval in their countries as “trade barriers” – they will ban ingredients that are approved in other countries to prevent these products from being brought into their country. If you are working on products for other countries, it is extremely important to have access to accurate regulatory information from other countries. Additionally, these regulations change frequently. For example, I was developing a mint for South Korea – one important ingredient was not allowed in China and Japan; there was not a common ingredient with this functionality that was allowed in all 3 countries; 3 formulas had to be developed.
- 10. When applying for a job out of college after having only a virtual internship, will a company understand that the circumstances didn't allow for more hands-on experience? – submitted by Kayla Finkelstein**
- a. Judy Cooley: It is also important to have jobs that may be relevant – can you work in a candy store, a food service position, something also part-time to “round” out your experience and not just studying.
  - b. Carly Meck: Companies are being very flexible right now, from virtual interviews to virtual internships. I would imagine that most companies would understand the way of the world. Even if your internship is online, there would be nothing stopping you from trying out some hands on activities at home! There are plenty of food science or confectionery tutorials online to get your hands a little dirty with some things that might be of interest to you.
  - c. Bob Huzinec: In today's world that has become the norm. Explain this and state that you cannot wait to get into making product in a lab. Go into detail on other areas where you have hands on experience during your education.
- 11. When did you decide on going into the industry? Was it at an ungraduated level, graduate, after working in other industries? What was the tipping point to apply? -submitted by Tyler Yany**
- a. Judy Cooley: Undergraduate – I was working for a confectionery company all 4 years in quality and product development while going to school full time.
  - b. Carly Meck: It was undergraduate for me. I was very lucky to stumble into the confectionery industry, through a networking connection, and it really solidified my career choices. I didn't look into other industries since it seemed like a great fit for me.
  - c. Bob Huzinec: I accidentally got into the industry. I thought that I would be working for the drug division and low and behold day 1, I was told that this person was going to train me in how to make gum and candy. Well 43 years later I do not regret anything and would not change a thing I did. Remember if you find something you like continue doing it until you are not happy anymore. At that point it is time to change.

**12. Now that you are all in the food/candy industry, what do you look forward to every day and in the future?**

**– submitted by Neve Blanz**

- a. Judy Cooley: Working with my “candy family”! They are my best friends even though we may all work for different companies.
- b. Carly Meck: I look forward to learning more about confections every day! Even after working in the industry for 10 years, I still learn new information about chocolate and confections every day. I had thought I would “know all that there is to know” about chocolate after a few years but there are always fun and new skills to take on.
- c. Bob Huzinec: Working with my team members, looking into how to develop the next big thing which the consumers want, assisting those learn the in’s and outs of the confectionary industry. I never have a dull day.

**13. What’s the most influential thing you’ve learned in your career from “trying” or making mistakes? – submitted by Elisabeth Weir**

- a. Judy Cooley: A full garbage can means that you have learned a lot – use these experiences for learning. Making mistakes and getting it right on the 3rd or 50th try is how we all learn.
- b. Carly Meck: I was always afraid to speak up in meetings when I first started, thinking that I did not have enough experience to share an opinion. I had to make a purposeful effort to speak up when needed and try to share my knowledge with the team. It was intimidating at first but I wound up contributing to several great projects.
- c. Bob Huzinec: Learn from your mistakes and only make them once and don’t be afraid to try things. Everyone who has succeeded has made mistakes, JOIN THE TEAM.

**14. How is the international confection industry different from the domestic industry? Are there opportunities for these global connections? – submitted by Morgan Weinberg**

- a. Judy Cooley: Absolute and a great question. Most companies market their confections in other countries. There are many similarities but also many differences. You must be aware of (but not limited to): various regulations, trade barriers, different terminology, different taste preferences, difference in sweetness preferences, different trends, various production techniques and possibilities, different distribution avenues, warehousing and shipping conditions, conditions in stores, almost anything and everything can be different. I once found that in China, even if stores said they had air conditioning, they almost never turned it on, or turned it off at night to meet local regulations or to save \$. Or even propped doors open to let the humidity in; their idea and understanding of air conditioning is very different than ours.
- b. Carly Meck: Most companies have global components, be it manufacturing sites, suppliers, or equipment needs. It is part of our everyday business to work with international industry colleagues, in most cases. The domestic confectionery industry seems to be a bit closer knit than international counterparts. We see value in sharing knowledge while internationally, it may be seen as sharing secrets.
- c. Bob Huzinec: Having the opportunity to travel and work in many plants around the world, the learning experience is fantastic. Learning the cultures, languages, foods, etc. give you a better feel for the world and the industry. Remember the fundamentals of confectionary processing, the ingredients and their functionality are basically the same worldwide. Developing products which are stable, acceptable to the country you are in is the challenge. Here is where an understanding of the country tastes, environment (temperature & humidity), etc. come into play. If given the opportunity to work worldwide if you can accept the opportunity.

**15. How would you differentiate between a Master's vs PhD? – submitted by Elisabeth Weir**

- a. Judy Cooley: To me, PhD is probably more required for deeper research than a masters. That said, experience can be the best teacher. It also depends on what you personally like to do.
- b. Carly Meck: It can come down to what part of the industry you would like to go in. A PhD is typically more suited for academia however, there are plenty of PhD's in manufacturing as well. An advanced degree is not necessary to have a successful career in confectionery, but it can help to advance into different areas.