

Unconventional Pathways

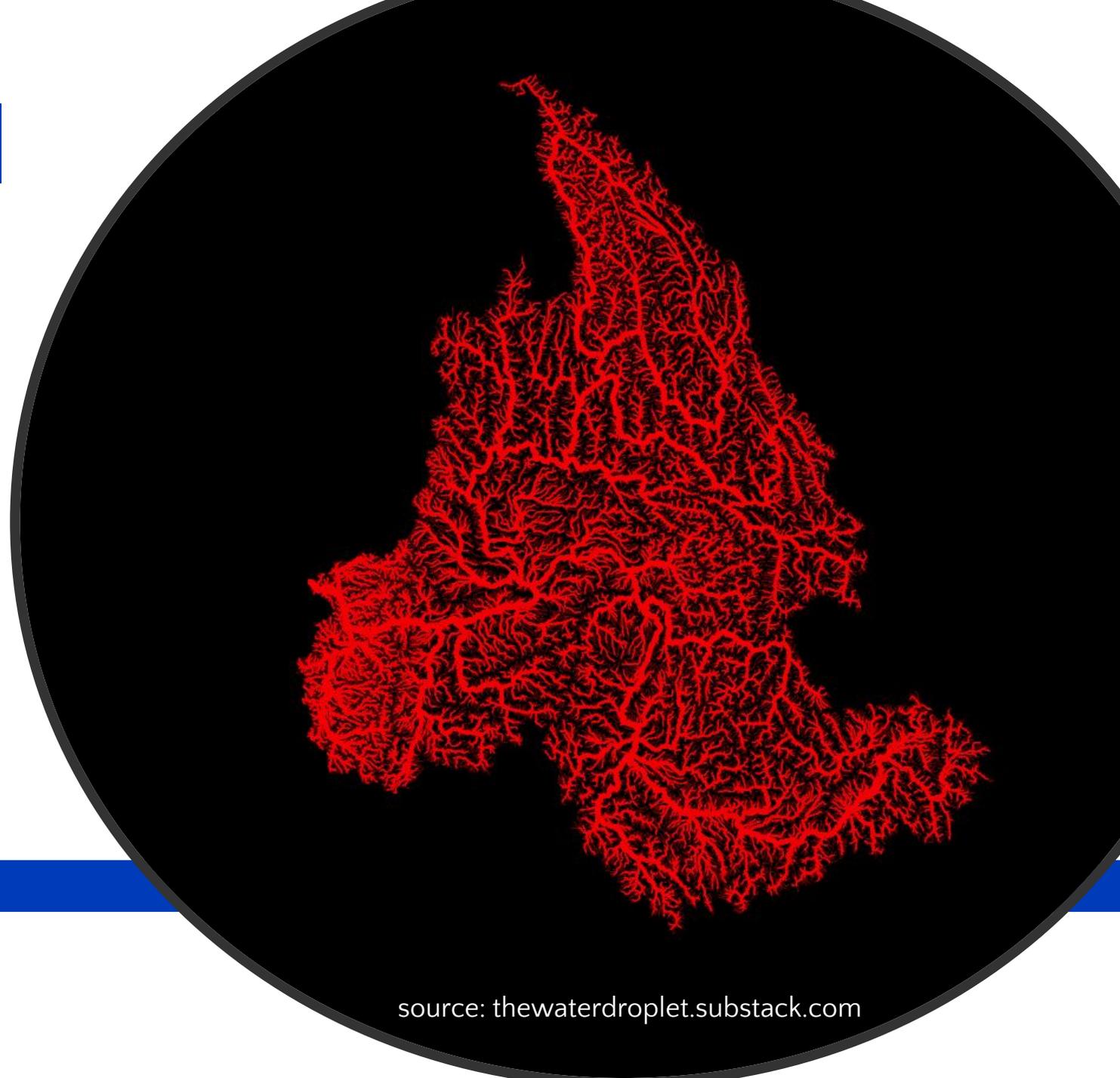
Julia Cummings
Staff Professional

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PNWS-AWWA 2025 / May 8, 2025



source: thewaterdroplet.substack.com

What are we here to talk about?

- How skills from other fields enhance water industry careers
- The importance of leveraging experiences from parts of your resume you may not have considered
- Ways those in management can adapt their hiring strategies to attract more applicants

FIRSTNAME LASTNAME
City, State Zip | 000-000-0000 | email@fakeemail.com | linkedin.com/in/uri

REPLACE WITH YOUR FOCUS HEADLINE
Replace This Subheading with Something That Helps to Focus Your Résumé, Such as Industry Expertise

- **REPLACE WITH A KEYWORD PHRASE DESCRIBING A MAJOR STRENGTH:** This resume template can be used for any type of professional or executive positions. Provide some big picture highlights here of your qualifications that make you the ideal choice for the position you are targeting.
- **REPLACE WITH A KEYWORD PHRASE DESCRIBING A MAJOR STRENGTH:** Think carefully about what you include here. Related to the "major strength" you are emphasizing here, include your professional accomplishments that best demonstrate the strength.
- **REPLACE WITH A KEYWORD PHRASE DESCRIBING A MAJOR STRENGTH:** A resume with columns such as this can be tricky in an applicant tracking system (ATS). The columns need to be created in a very specific way. Be careful not to modify the order and structure of these columns. If you need support, contact us.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Use this space to include
- Keywords and keyword phrases
- From your target industry or job
- Keywords are usually nouns
- That describe your skills, Qualifications, and
- Areas of special expertise.
- Including the right keywords
- Will help your resume perform
- Better in an ATS search.
- Review job announcements to learn
- What employers are searching for.

EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Company Name ■ City, ST 20XX to Present
Replace with a brief description of the company. If you are focusing on a particular industry, this is a good place to work in industry keywords.

JOB TITLE

Be very brief in describing your job responsibilities. Also, tell the story of your time at this company. What lifecycle was the company in (startup, growing, turnaround, etc)? What were the goals of your position? Did you face any major challenges?

Key Accomplishments:

- Related to the story you told in the beginning paragraph, what are your major contributions and accomplishments? In describing your accomplishment, start with the most impactful part. Try to use numbers when possible, to show impact.
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Mentimeter

Have you ever worked in a different field?

0

Yes

0

No

0

Considering a change



Menti

PNWS AWWA 2025



Choose a slide to present

Have you ever worked in a different field?

0 Yes 0 No 0 Considering a change

What skills from outside the water industry do you think are most valuable in your current role?

0 responses

Which industry do you think develops skills that transfer well into water careers?

0 responses



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What skills from outside the water industry do you think are most valuable in your current role?

All responses to your question will be shown here

Each response can be up to 200 characters long

Turn on voting to let participants vote for their favorites



Menti

PNWS AWWA 2025



Choose a slide to present

Have you ever worked in a different field?

0 Yes 0 No 0 Considering a change

What skills from outside the water industry do you think are most valuable in your current role?

0 responses

Which industry do you think develops skills that transfer well into water careers?

0 responses



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Which industry do you think develops skills that transfer well into water careers?

leader
 bold
 focus
 creative
 fast
 inspiration
 transpiration



Menti

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Choose a slide to present

Have you ever worked in a different field?

0 Yes 0 No 0 Considering or change

What skills from outside the water industry do you think are most valuable in your current role?

0 responses

Which industry do you think develops skills that transfer well into water careers?

0 responses

01

Introduction

Hello, I'm Julia

Nanny in Switzerland



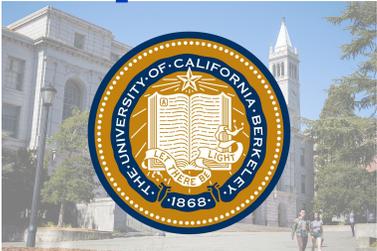
Bartender



Stewardess on Superyachts



Bartender



B.S. in Molecular Toxicology



M.S. in Civil & Environmental Engineering



The Value of Having a Different Background

- “When you bring a **breadth** of experience to a new industry or role, you often see connections others miss.”
 - » Ibarra, H. (2020). *The Benefits of a Nonlinear Career*. Harvard Business Review.
- “They’ve navigated multiple environments, which often makes them more **adaptable** and more prepared to handle change.”
 - » Roberson, C. (2021). *Why Employers Should Value Nontraditional Career Paths*. Forbes.
- Career pivots reflect strategic thinking, **self-awareness**, and a willingness to grow – traits that employers highly value.
 - » Stanford GSB Career Management Center (2019). *Why Career Pivots Are Strategic*. [GSB Career Resources].

02

Let's Meet Some
Examples

Austin Peters

DESIGN MANAGER & WATER PRACTICE INNOVATION LEAD, CAROLLO ENGINEERS

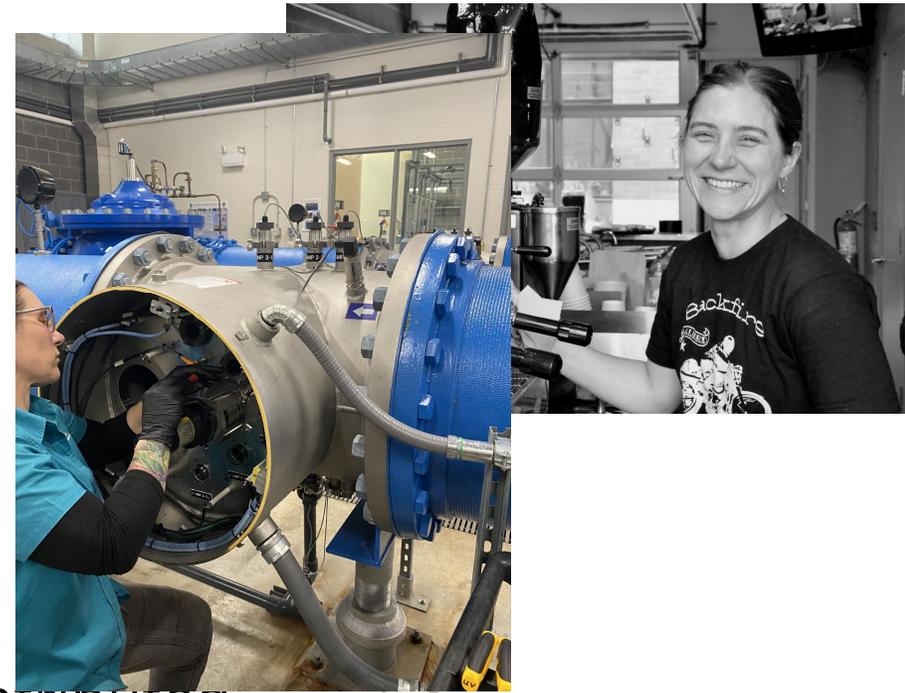
- Mountain guide, folk musician, web designer
- “It’s about the people.”
- How do you think your unique background has contributed to your team?
 - » [It emphasized] the importance of team-building and recognizing the adage that "You're only as strong as your weakest link". You need to give your weakest link the resources they need to be successful. In mountain climbing, you can literally be tied together so leaving your weakest link behind isn't possible.



Camellia McCool

WATER TREATMENT OPERATOR (LEVEL III), JACOBS

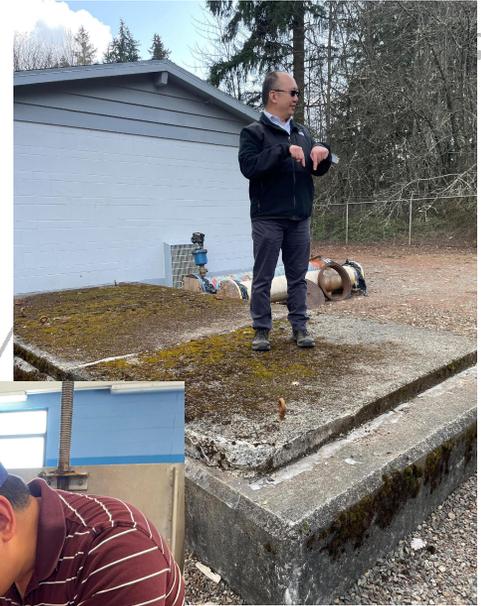
- Farmer, barista
- “Be a jack of all trades.”
- How do you think your unique background has contributed to your team?
 - » I’ve always been interested in how things work, both mechanical and process-wise. It helped me to keep an open mind and say yes to any opportunity, which let me get the experience I needed to work at water treatment facilities.



Pierre Kwan

GLOBAL DRINKING WATER TREATMENT TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, HDR INC.

- Car salesman, front end loader operator, Taco Bell taco stuffer, surveyor, GIS analyst
- “Every project is different.”
- How do you think your unique background has contributed to your team?
 - » It allowed me to develop the skill of being able to handle nearly any project that is thrown at me. I did not progress from Engineer I to II to III to IV to V by becoming very specialize. Instead, I have been able to learn about a wide variety of technologies, situations, and industries.



Michal Lieberman

STAFF PROFESSIONAL, CAROLLO ENGINEERS

- Farmer, arborist, tree climbing instructor, lab technician
- “Any type of experience, especially cross-discipline, will improve your ability to communicate.”
- How do you think your unique background has contributed to your team?
 - » Understanding that people are just people and there are a lot of ways to gain knowledge and experience. I ask myself, “What can the contractor tell you that the engineer can’t?” or “What can the civil engineer tell you that process engineer can’t?” When you reach out to people with that mindset, they’re more willing to be open and help.



Jeff Bolam

OPERATIONS MANAGER, TACOMA WATER

- Military
- “Knowing a little bit about several things in the field helps a lot, plus basic mechanical sense.”
- How do you think your unique background has contributed to your team?
 - » My perspective is a little different because I worked in distribution, maintenance, and as an operator. I can sometimes see pitfalls or encourage engineers to pay attention to maintenance staff or operators before they make decisions.



Advice

“ Define what draws you to the water industry because it can be challenging, and you need to be able to revisit your “why”. “

Austin Peters

“ Say yes to every opportunity. Ask for help. Know your limits and how to work with your team. “

Camellia McCool

“ You will find being good in many topics is often much more valuable than being the best in one thing. “

Pierre Kwan

“ Ask yourself what aspects of professionalism are important to your role or the role you want, then adapt them to you. “

Michal Lieberman

“ Decide if this is what you want to do. Put a little heart into it. Learn all about the jobs your utility has to offer and target what you want. Be patient. ”

Jeff Bolam

03

For Managers

Adjusting to Attract a Broader Talent Pool

- **Highlight real-world experience**

- » Instead of “Must have [degree or experience].”
- » Use “Experience managing complex systems or equipment and troubleshooting under pressure.”

- **Focus on problem-solving and leadership**

- » Ability to lead teams, coordinate operations, and find creative solutions.

Other Fields Have Many Potential Applicants

Customer Service Representatives

2.86 Million People

Agriculture Sector

2.6 Million People

Military

1.3 Million People (Active-Duty)

767,000 People (Reserves)

04

For Emerging
Professionals

Career Planning

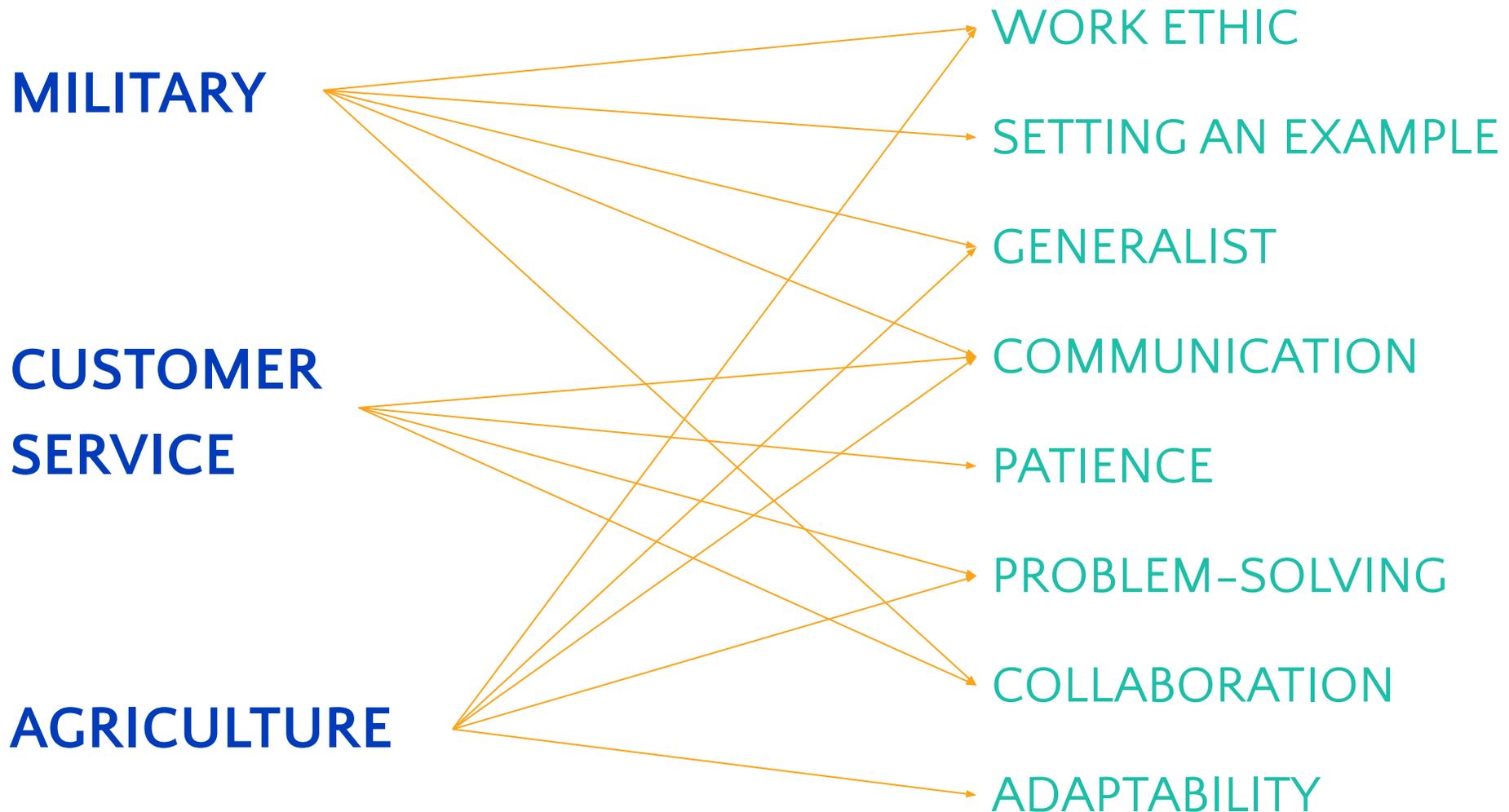
- **DO:**

- » Highlight your background outside the industry
- » Learn how to leverage skills in a new position
- » Show up with curiosity and thoughtfulness
- » Pursue additional educational opportunities and certifications

- **DON'T:**

- » Downplay previous experiences or accomplishments because they don't match your colleagues
- » Feel like an imposter

Consider How Your Unique Path Sets You Apart





Your background is not a limitation – it’s a foundation. The more varied your experience, the broader your perspective, and the more valuable you become.”

Indra Nooyi
former CEO of PepsiCo

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Thank you!