



## Ep. 11: Negin Kamali (COM'98), Princess Cruises PR Director

Host: Jeff Murphy (Questrom'06), BU Alumni Relations

In the rapidly changing world of public relations, Negin Kamali (COM'98) has established herself as a thought leader with an impressive track record for success. Prior to becoming the Director of Public Relations at Princess Cruises, Negin held a variety of roles at the renowned agencies Golin and Bishoff Solomon where she worked with brands like Mattel and McDonalds. She spoke about the many lessons she's learned in building her career including the art of networking, how she learned to manage up and why her professional resiliency has been key to her success.

### Podcast Transcript:

- Jeff Murphy: I'm Jeff Murphy from Boston University Alumni Relations and I'm your host for an interview series showcasing the career paths of our most interesting and accomplished alumni. Welcome to the Proud to BU Podcast. My guest today is the Director of Public Relations for Princess Cruises, Negin Kamali. Negin earned her degree in public relations from the College of Communication in 1998. Prior to joining Princess Cruises, Negin held a wide variety of senior roles at the Golin PR agency including Senior Vice President and Executive Director. We spoke about her path beyond BU, why she felt drawn to the PR world and the lessons she's learned in building her career. Negin, thanks so much for taking time to be on the Proud to BU Podcast. We just talked about this briefly, but I, the way I found you was because you actually had volunteered to be an advisor for the BU Career Advisory Network, would you mind telling me a little bit about why you decided to join that movement?
- Negin Kamali : Sure. Well, thanks so much for having me, but I have found mentorship to be one of the greatest offerings that I can give back to those entering in the communications field and I think BU does a great job of trying to connect alumni to communications professionals, especially in the College of Communication. And I saw that opportunity and it afforded me the chance to be able to give something back to a community that I'm not as close to since I live here in Los Angeles, but to be able to share my experiences and quote "wisdom" with those that might be entering the field.
- Jeff Murphy: That's awesome. Thank you so much for doing that. It wasn't that long ago that you signed up. Have you been contacted by anybody yet who was looking for some advice?
- Negin Kamali : I haven't, I have not been contacted by anyone.
- Jeff Murphy: Well, we'll have to make sure that we remind folks once we release this interview that you're available for consultations. Let's rewind the clock a little bit. Would you mind telling me a little bit about just you as a kid growing up? I think, did you grow up in the Los Angeles area?
- Negin Kamali : I did. I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles called Palos Verdes. I was actually born in Iran, left when I was four around the revolution, but grew up the majority of my time in LA and I went to undergrad in San Diego, and then immediately following that experience, started

applying to communications grad programs and Boston has a very special place in my heart. I have family that lives in Boston. My parents actually fell in love in the city and it was a opportunity to be able to apply to grad schools on the East Coast. And when I got into BU I was thrilled that I was able to have the same experience that my parents also had.

Jeff Murphy: That's quite a story, did your parents by any chance work in PR? I'm just wondering, I know that as an undergrad at UC San Diego, you majored in communications. Was that something that you just, your entire life sort of knew about as a field when you were a kid? Was that kind of what you knew you always wanted to do?

Negin Kamali : I had no idea what public relations really was until I stepped into my first class at BU. The communications program at the University of California, San Diego was an excellent one, but it was very theoretical and not practical. And my parents were not in communications. My Dad is a consulting mechanical engineer. Um, my mom is a bit more on the artistic side. She owned a women's clothing Boutique for about 28 years, but neither one of them really knew what public relations was. I actually had to find, even though they're fluent in English and that's what we speak at home. I tried to find the Persian word for PR, which doesn't really exist. It was quite an experience trying to tell my dad, who was in the hard sciences, that his daughter wanted to go off to study this liberal arts kind of field.

Jeff Murphy: So when you got to BU, you mentioned that you were looking for something that was a little bit more practical than theoretical. When you got to BU did your academic experience immediately live up to what you were hoping to have?

Negin Kamali : Yeah, absolutely. From all my classes and the coursework, I really dug really deep into case studies and learnings as well as writing. And it was a great supplement to the undergraduate learning that I had.

Jeff Murphy: Were there professors or specific classes that stand out in your memory that you remember that really had a profound impact on your career?

Negin Kamali : Yeah, I mean, Dr. Marilyn Root, who was the communications Assistant Dean at the time when I was there. We're still connected on Facebook and um, she really took an interest I think in our grad class or in the graduates. And I found it that I could always speak to her. I learned from, from her and her classes. So, you know, every teacher I think really gave me a great opportunity to learn from what their expertise was. And then also all of our guest speakers as well that came in from the community. I could really learn from their practical knowledge.

Jeff Murphy: I'm curious to know also about your experience at BU outside of the classroom and I'm guessing as a grad student, maybe it was certainly different from the traditional undergrad experience, but did you feel at home at BU? Were there places on campus that became regular hangouts, were there student organizations that you got involved in outside of academics, that sort of added to your experience?

Negin Kamali : Yeah, I mean it definitely was a different experience in undergrad. So I moved to the city actually with one of my best friends who went to the BU School of Social Work. We got an apartment in Kenmore Square. And, you know, I lived, you could hear the Red Sox games from our rooftop, so we had the idyllic, you know, Boston experience and I definitely remember spending most of my time in the College of Communications. But, you know, being able to walk to school and then future in the future, walk to my internships and really



take in the city and the campus was an amazing experience. It really was one of the best periods of my life.

Jeff Murphy: So when you think about yourself, those nights you spent up on your roof listening to the crowd at Fenway Park, when you think about that person, would that person be surprised to see the career that you've gone on to have now?

Negin Kamali : I think I would have been surprised at where I ended up but I knew then that this was the field for me and I feel really lucky that I found it and then found the industries in which I had clients and now in which I work in-house that I'm able to work in because I really truly feel blessed to really found a career that I feel like that I'm passionate about and evolve as the industry itself evolves.

Jeff Murphy: So looking at your LinkedIn profile, it looks like you started working at Bishoff Solomon Communications even before you finished your degree, is that right?

Negin Kamali : I did, I, as part of our grad program, if I recall, there was an opportunity to do an internship and I identified Bishoff Solomon Communications, which was a small-ish agency in the city, which is actually no longer there, the principals [inaudible], but both are currently working in communications and one is one of my significant mentors and I still keep in touch with her, but I identified them as an agency because of the client list that they had. So everything from a region, the regional work for Starbucks, up and down the East Coast to the Colonnade Hotel right there by the Prudential Center, to Legal Seafoods and the Boston Pops. So those were some great clients that I had the opportunity to work on with them.

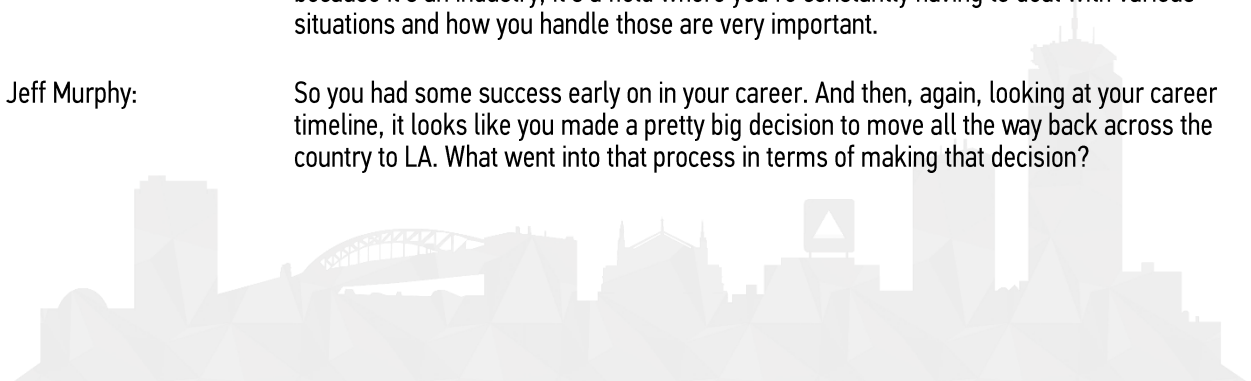
Jeff Murphy: So that must have, you know, having that exposure while you're still working on your degree must've made the decision process on what to do afterwards fairly easy. Did you know that you had a full time gig lined up before you actually walked across the stage with your diploma?

Negin Kamali : I did, I have to think back, I think, I was an intern and there was an opportunity to get hired as Account Coordinator and I grabbed it. So I was very lucky.

Jeff Murphy: When you think back to that first, you know, account coordinator position, what were, the reason I asked this question because I think we have a lot of sort of recent and young alumni who listen to the podcast. What did you learn those first couple of years out of school where you're finally working full time in the field that you picked? What were the lessons that you learned about PR and how to make it in that industry

Negin Kamali : I learned to be resilient. I learned to work hard. Um, I, I learned about client relations. I absorbed from every person that I worked with their work style and approach and I really believe that I continue to learn from every person that I come into contact with. And so to be able to be in the workforce and see different styles of approaches to problems and how they go about it to different characteristics that you may want to emulate or adjust was helpful because it's an industry, it's a field where you're constantly having to deal with various situations and how you handle those are very important.

Jeff Murphy: So you had some success early on in your career. And then, again, looking at your career timeline, it looks like you made a pretty big decision to move all the way back across the country to LA. What went into that process in terms of making that decision?



Negin Kamali : Well, from a professional point of view, I had an amazing experience at Bishoff Solomon Communications, but there were some limitations in terms of size, of budget, of the national scope of clients. And the, you know, the, even the media relations work that I was doing was much more regionalized. And so I started thinking about like what my next step would be and it really was to gravitate to working with larger budgets, more national clients so that my experience could broaden and, you know, I looked at New York as well as Los Angeles and coming back to LA to be closer to my family, ended up being the right choice. So I was very lucky that I actually, you know, Bishoff Solomon Communications was working with Mcdonald's at the time on a regional basis and I knew of some contacts over at Mcdonald's national agency, Golin Harris, which was the name at the time, now Golin, and I was able to make a connection in LA. I believe he was actually a BU alum as well. And I reached out to, Jerry Swirling, but I might be wrong. So I'll double check, I'll have to double check that and get back to you, and he actually put my resume on the desk of a colleague at the agency, and that was kind of how that moved.

Jeff Murphy: So it's no stretch to say that networking has played a really important role in building your career, right?

Negin Kamali : Networking is a huge way to build your career and it is so much easier than it used to be with sites like LinkedIn.

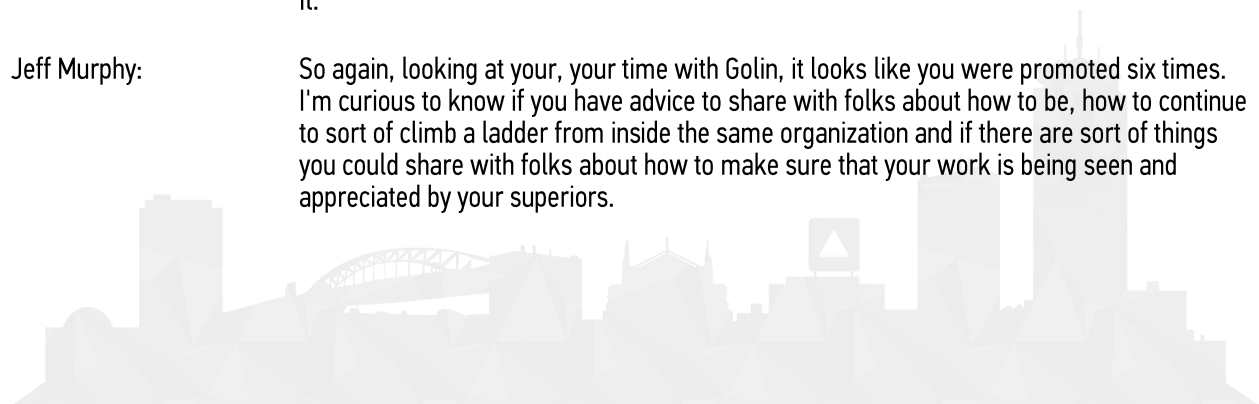
Jeff Murphy: So then you go to Golin, if I've got my time correct in 2000 and you're there for 16 years and held six different titles along the way, is that unusual for the PR industry, for somebody to be with the same firm for so long?

Negin Kamali : Well, I think in this day and age it's unusual, but I really was afforded unique opportunities that allowed for my growth and kept me there. So, it was career making to be there.

Jeff Murphy: So what were some of those projects that you worked on that, that became career making and I'm curious to know, the highlights that you remember, but maybe also were there, were there times where things didn't go as planned and you know, some lessons that you really learned from taking some missteps?

Negin Kamali : Yeah, I'll start with the lessons, then go to the good stuff, but, you know, even my first week there I got put into a new business pitch for a major automotive client and the pitch had all of the executives from the automotive client as well as our leadership in the room. And, you know, I stumbled on my speaking and it was, it was a bit of an embarrassment for me but the CEO at the time said to me, Hey Negin, you know, you were a, they, it really just showed that you were being human. And although I appreciated his feedback, I think what I learned was practice was important. And from that, from that challenge, I ended up identifying speaking opportunities, took on basically any speaking opportunity that came my way so that I could practice either public speaking, or other speaking opportunities to enhance that because it was a bit a bit of an embarrassment. So needless to say they went on, they won that piece of automotive business and had it for a very long time. So that, didn't really effect it.

Jeff Murphy: So again, looking at your, your time with Golin, it looks like you were promoted six times. I'm curious to know if you have advice to share with folks about how to be, how to continue to sort of climb a ladder from inside the same organization and if there are sort of things you could share with folks about how to make sure that your work is being seen and appreciated by your superiors.



Negin Kamali : Yeah, I mean I think one of the key moments in my growth was when one of my supervisors at the time left to go back to the East Coast to be closer to her family and they did not hire a replacement and I basically elevated my work and was able for that work to be seen by a Vice President at the organization and that led for me being promoted from a senior account executive to an account supervisor. So, I think identifying opportunities like that and look for those where you can step up is a, is a key, is a key moment in an agency. I think also taking on new opportunities and showcasing your strengths is another one to do. So, those are just two, but I didn't get a chance to tell you about the successes.

Negin Kamali : I'm going to take a moment and talk about two of them. One is I worked on the Mattel business for a significant amount of time and had the great opportunity to celebrate both Hot Wheels, 35th and 40th birthday and we took the Hot Wheels brand on the road to seven automotive cities around the country, and had an amazing time bringing that brand to life for kids and adults of all ages. So that was one great opportunity from an experiential event standpoint as well as a national and local public relations activation and then staying within travel and cruise Cunard Line was one of my clients at Golan and I was lucky enough to work on the launch of a ship, Queen Elizabeth, with the Queen of England at the time who named her over in London. And that was also just an incredible opportunity as well.

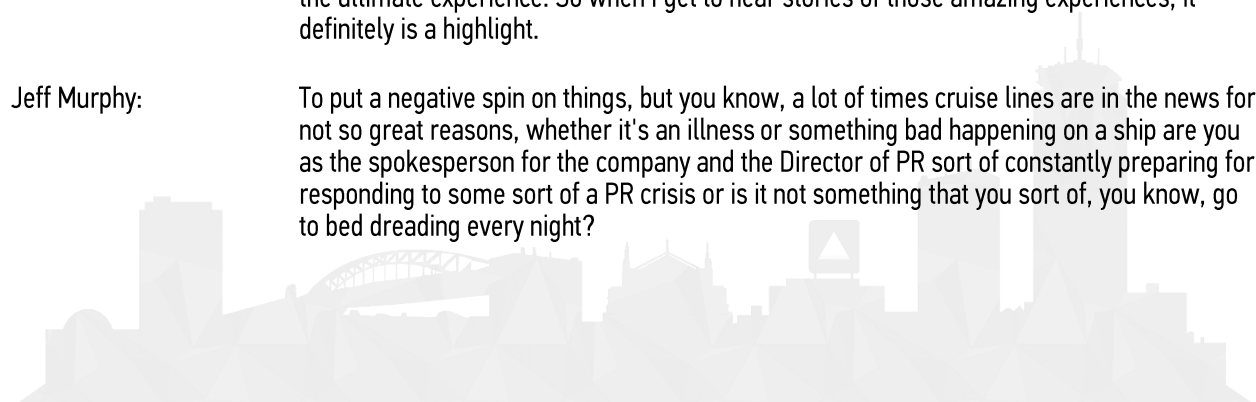
Jeff Murphy: So I was going to ask you, I know that you had worked on the Cunard Line brand, is that what led you to your current role?

Negin Kamali : Sort of, you know, sixteen years is a long time to be at an agency and I was feeling the opportunity to make some change. My current, the Vice President of Communications here at Princess, actually was my Cunard client at the time and he, there was an opportunity that presented itself here at Princess where he now is, and it was one of the opportunities I couldn't pass up. So again, we worked together. I kept in touch, we continued to actually be on the board of the Public Relations Society of Los Angeles together as well. And that led to us, I think me coming here.

Jeff Murphy: So I'm curious if you could tell us a little bit more about your role as Director of PR for Princess Cruises. I'm guessing that in your, in your occupation, no two days are the same, right? Can you tell us a little bit about your life and what is it about PR that makes you happy?

Negin Kamali : Well, I love that from the tactical element that I am able to speak to a journalist quote, "sell them a story" and then it appear now online or in print, and that, I'm able to actually create that opportunity. Um, it is, one of the reasons that I got into PR was because of media relations and it's a huge enjoyment of mine to identify journalists who I think might be interested in the story, sell them on a story and then have them actually write about it. So that continues to be something from a tactical standpoint that I love. Now that I'm here at Princess representing the brand. Obviously on a daily basis, we are working to create memories for the guests that sail with us on their vacations. And that's a big job people spend save up and spend to go on a cruise and we want to make sure that they're enjoying the ultimate experience. So when I get to hear stories of those amazing experiences, it definitely is a highlight.

Jeff Murphy: To put a negative spin on things, but you know, a lot of times cruise lines are in the news for not so great reasons, whether it's an illness or something bad happening on a ship are you as the spokesperson for the company and the Director of PR sort of constantly preparing for responding to some sort of a PR crisis or is it not something that you sort of, you know, go to bed dreading every night?





Negin Kamali : As any good PR person would say it's important to have a crisis plan and also to practice. So we actually initiate yearly or twice a year, crisis drills, to prepare us for various situations. So, we have that part in terms of preparing and then, we're lucky that our predecessors in the department also have, we have an arsenal of documents that we can utilize for preparation for anything that may come up as it comes up. But no, things are always popping up that we have to deal with and ensuring that the message is accurate. That's getting out to the media and to the public.

Jeff Murphy: The other thing I wanted to ask you about, as I was thinking about your career, you know, you started working full time in PR in '98, right? So you, you've been in PR the entire time that we've experienced the rise of digital and social media, and I can only imagine that you've had this sort of front row seat to how that has changed your industry or maybe it hasn't, but I'm wondering if you just sort of comment on how things have changed in your industry over the last 20 years.

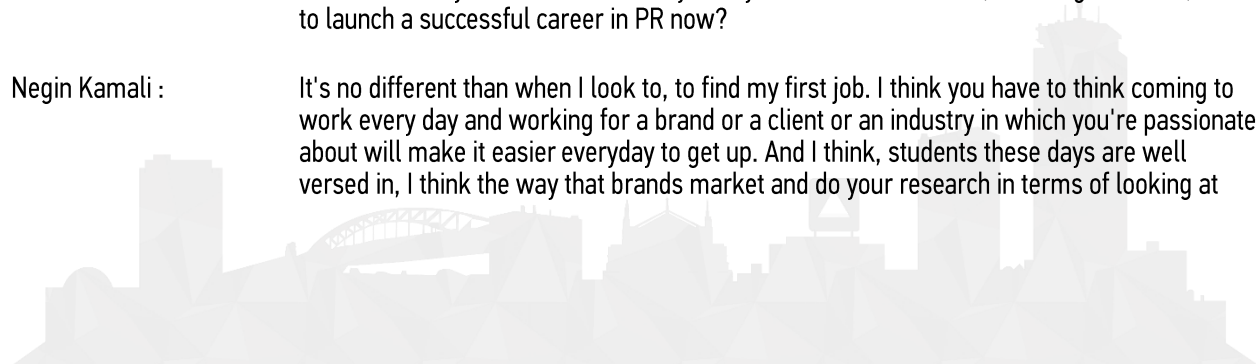
Negin Kamali : I mean, when I started in PR there was no Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. So, you can literally see the difference in terms of what has changed. You know, when I started in PR there was, I believe still a travel reporter or editor at every major daily paper in the United States. And it is, you know, it is sad to kind of see the kind of decline of our print colleagues, you know, but it is a nature of the kind of diverse media habits of the country now. So, you know, so I have seen that that total shift and one of the other important aspects, of the growth in my field was I kept up as best I could with the changing landscape. And I'm by no means a social media expert, but I have led integrated marketing campaigns within Golan, you know, social media reports here at Princess. So I think it's important to kind of see where, as you see things that are changing, try and get an understanding of those changes. And I think the biggest question right now is where are we going to be in five years with PR?

Jeff Murphy: That was actually something that I was hoping to chat with you about, would you care to make any predictions about how digital will continue to change PR, or what sort of changes you see coming down the road in the next five to 10 years and how do you see yourself being a part of that?

Negin Kamali : I mean I think that, you know, here at Princess, we are content producers and publishers. We have a magazine that's produced every quarter that reaches a million people that's more than some online sites and magazines now. So how can we leverage, you know, we have a Facebook page with more than 2 million followers. So how can we leverage the fans, and those, that sail with us? So we sail over 2 million guests to communicate directly to them. You know, minus the reporter, right? So I think that there is going to be an evolution into the content space in a much bigger way. And I'm just trying to figure out how we can incorporate that, or be a part of that.

Jeff Murphy: So when we started talking about your early days of your career, you talked a lot about, you know, learning resiliency, looking for opportunities to always grow and stretch yourself and make sure that your work is seen by superiors when, if you haven't yet, I know that you'll start to have both students and other alumni that are going to reach out to you through the Career Advisory Network. What will you say to them about how to, how to get started, how to launch a successful career in PR now?

Negin Kamali : It's no different than when I look to, to find my first job. I think you have to think coming to work every day and working for a brand or a client or an industry in which you're passionate about will make it easier everyday to get up. And I think, students these days are well versed in, I think the way that brands market and do your research in terms of looking at



brands that you enjoy using, being a part of the way that they're contributing to the world and go after either the agencies or the, or the brands themselves are opportunities within any one of those places.

Jeff Murphy: So as a spokesperson for Princess Cruises, are you constantly being tasked with setting sail on a voyage to some new exotic destination? And if so, what's the next one on your calendar?

Negin Kamali : Well, I have not sailed as much as I would like. My team last year did an enormous amount of sailing. They went to Japan, and the western Mediterranean, and the Caribbean and the Mexican Riviera. I'm actually heading, for my next destination, to the Caribbean on board, a Caribbean Princess for the launch of our Ocean Medallion technology. So it's an exciting trip in January.

Jeff Murphy: Well, I hope it's not all work. I hope you get a chance to kick back and enjoy it a little bit, but Negin, thanks so much for carving out some time to chat with us on the Proud to BU Podcast. I really appreciate it.

Negin Kamali : Thanks so much for having me.

Jeff Murphy: Let me thank Negin Kamali once more for joining me on Proud to BU. She has got a great story to tell and I really appreciate her taking the time to share it with our audience. If you'd like to connect with Negin, you can find her on the BU Career Advisory Network by visiting [bu.edu/alumni/can](http://bu.edu/alumni/can). Thanks again for listening to the Proud to BU Podcast. If you like what we're doing, please be sure to subscribe, rate, and review. Proud to BU wherever you download your episodes. I'm Jeff Murphy and no matter where your path takes you, be Proud to BU. Proud to BU Podcast is produced by Boston University Alumni Relations. Our theme is from Jump and APM Music. To learn more about Proud to BU. Visit [bu.edu/alumni/podcast](http://bu.edu/alumni/podcast).

