

# Michael Osborne

Audio Consultant, Executive Producer, and Host



## **What is your current occupation?**

I'm an Audio Consultant, Executive Producer, and Host. I own a small consulting business called 14<sup>th</sup> Street Studios where I help clients develop, launch, and manage podcasts for a variety of clients. My specific responsibilities vary project to project, but in general I lead creative development, production management, technical assistance, and marketing strategy. Given my background in the sciences, I attract a lot of business from academics and science communicators. I also have three original podcasts (well, kind of – the third one is scheduled to launch in late November 2021, so as of this writing there are only two public shows).

## **What is your educational background?**

I have a PhD in Earth Sciences from Stanford, where my research focused on climate of the past (aka paleoclimate). I also have a BS in Geology for UT Austin, and a BA in Sociology from the University of Montana.

## **A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?**

Yes, I've benefitted from a lot of fluidity. I've long been passionate about environmental issues (esp. climate change), and before grad school I considered a lot of different pathways. I thought along and hard about law school and policy school, before eventually deciding to get an advanced science degree. My thinking at the time was that lots of people tend to be wary of science, so, if I had the aptitudes necessary for a science degree, that was a "rarer" skillset. In the middle of my PhD I began transitions to a career in science communication and audio

production, but I was far enough along with my PhD that it made sense to see it through to completion. I'm very glad I did. Even though I knew by the end of grad school that a career as a research scientist was not for me, I learned things in my PhD experience that would prove very useful later on. Honestly I wasn't conscience at the time of everything I was learning, because that's kind of the nature of a PhD. Rightly or wrongly, the fact that I have a PhD says something to would-be clients about my commitment to environmental issues. It also gives me a leg up as a science communicator, as I have a better understanding about what it's actually like to *do* science.

Since you're asking about the geoscience workforce, I'll also add that I've seen a lot of people with a geoscience background follow a wide range of different pathways. One of the advantages to working as a science journalist is that it's part of the job to meet a lot of different folks from across industry, academia, non-profits, and government, just to name a few sectors. The fact of the matter is that the climate crisis is arguably the greatest challenge of our day, and if you have a reasonable understanding of the science then there's no shortage of opportunities. And maybe this is obvious, but in my opinion you'd be hard pressed to find any subdiscipline in the geosciences that is not affected by climate change somehow (or, maybe it's better to say affected the global environmental crisis).

**Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?**

Right now the podcast market is very hot, and there is also a healthy demand for skilled science communicators. I'm not sure if in, say, 5 years from now there will still be the same demand for audio producers specifically, but I am confident that there will be a need for science storytellers in *some* medium.

My basic philosophy is that creative outlets generate positive internal feedback loops, and that by giving attention to creative impulses you are inevitably going to develop marketable skills. Personally, I discovered that by diving into storytelling via podcasting, I actually became a much better scientist. My writing and presentation skills improved, and I gained perspective on the process of science overall. In my experience, employers are always looking for dynamic, interesting people, and by pursuing creative passions you will nurture your own curiosity. People (and employers) respond to that.

**What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?**

I mean, not to be too blunt about it, but so much in life boils down to who you know. So, yeah, it's an important question. I tend to be aggressive about putting myself in front of people, but that's partly just my personality. I guess I have two suggestions. The first is cliché, which is that it really is good to approach conversations with the attitude of "How might I help this person?" If you come off like someone who has a networking agenda, then you can leave a bad impression.

If, however, you approach new conversations with an attitude of being of service to people, or just being helpful, then opportunities will naturally present themselves.

The other suggestion is to lead with curiosity. So much of what drives a healthy career is figuring out what ideas turn you on, and I think it's enormously healthy to experiment with your own curiosity. Maybe that sounds corny or obvious, but I connect with people when I find shared interests.

I guess I'll also add that one of the great benefits about podcasting is that networking is kind of hardwired into the experience. You meet a lot of people when you're recording a lot of interviews, and having a podcast is an excellent excuse to call someone you've never met. I think that's true for any communication oriented project.

### **What does a “typical” day of work look like for you?**

I know everyone says this, but it REALLY varies for me. At any given time I'm working on between 5–8 different podcast projects. About a third to half of my day is usually meetings, and outside of that, I spend a lot of time listening to audio rough cuts. I like to build my day around what I have to listen to in order to keep production moving and stay ahead of deadlines. I will often load up my phone with audio and take a long walk (most of the time it's not good to listen to audio while staring at a computer screen, since that's not how an audience listens). I'm antsy, so I try not to sit in one place for longer than 2 hours at a time.

Maybe it's better if I talk about how I structure my routine. I tend to be significantly more productive in the mornings, so I like to front-load my day with any task that requires brainpower. I'm often on my computer in the evenings, but that's mostly because I really love what I do. One of the great benefits of my work life is that I have a lot of flexibility, so I take advantage of that when organizing my day. I'm usually unproductive in the hours after lunch, so, when I can, I lower my personal productivity expectations. That being said, I take on a lot of work. Someone once told me that if you want something done, give it to a busy person. That's true for me. If I have 3 things on my to-do list, I'm likely to procrastinate. If I have 15 things on my to-do list, there a good chance at least 12 of those things or more will get accomplished.

### **What is the best part of your job?**

Oh jeez, I could drone on about this for HOURS. I love what I do. Let me give you three:

- 1) I am always learning about new stuff. Every project I'm involved with and every story that comes my way is a fresh look into a part of the world that I knew nothing about beforehand. I'm a lifelong learner, and I've discovered that science communication and audio storytelling offers an infinite well of newness. And when it comes to podcasting specifically, I've discovered that I learn best through dialogue and discourse. I read a lot,

but the biggest moments of learning for me usually come through conversation.

- 2) I get a dopamine hit every time I publish a story. It's fun to be active in the podcast space.
- 3) Audio is a fundamentally collaborative medium, and I work with great people. I also tend to be involved in mission driven shows, and, regardless of how they're received, it's very gratifying to be working towards something that feels meaningful.

**Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?**

I said it, above but it's worth repeating: Find a creative outlet. I can't emphasize enough how it's helped me during periods where I really had no idea which direction I was heading.

**Connect:**

I'd love to hear from folks!

[www.linkedin.com/in/michael-c-osborne](http://www.linkedin.com/in/michael-c-osborne)

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GENERATION ANTHROPOCENE

- Genantho.com
- <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2021-4-fall/critic-s-notebook/3-must-hear-climate-podcasts>
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/top-five-conversations-about-earth-age-humans-180955822/>
- <https://news.stanford.edu/2017/04/21/stanfords-generation-anthropocene-podcast-back/>

RAW DATA:

- Rawdatapodcast.com
- <https://medium.com/prxofficial/how-does-google-know-how-to-answer-your-questions-9a35ab46228e>
- <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/october/podcast-big-data-102715.html>

There's also a smattering of stuff to be browsed at <https://www.mikeosborne.org/>