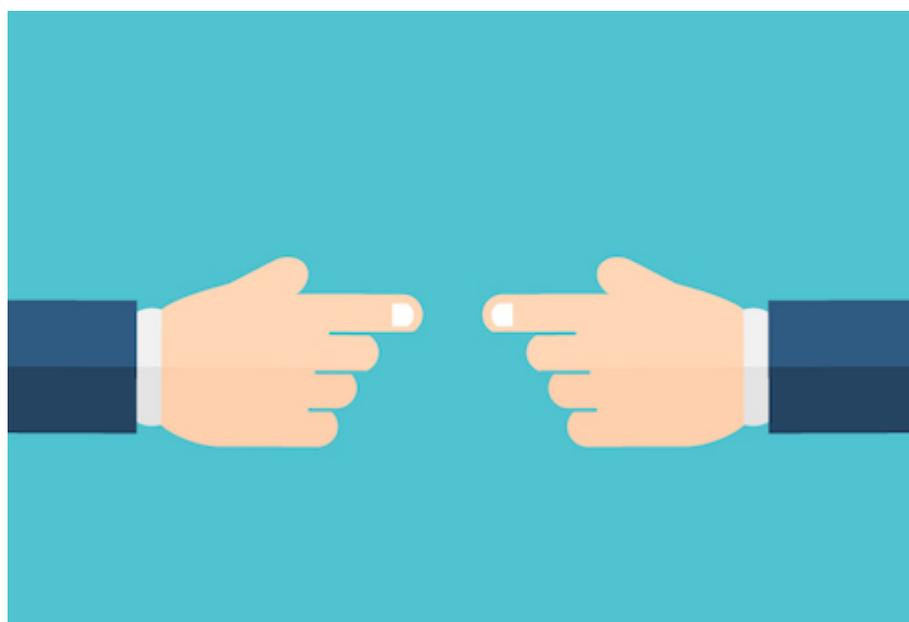


# When Personalization Backfires

*Michael Smart*

A while ago, an earnest, hardworking young PR pro asked me repeatedly during a phone consultation “what not to do.”

She already knows not to rely on generic pitches blasted to the same list. So I talked about how you can inadvertently take personalization too far.



When you're crafting your pitch for your target journalist or blogger, you know it's a best practice to prove in the first sentence that you've researched her and her audience. It's

usually best to keep this focused on her work. I say that because often you might also see something in her Twitter bio or an Instagram post that you could use to make more of a personal connection.

Don't get me wrong; it's great to make a personal connection. That's the ultimate goal of great media relations – just not so soon. So save that thought.

Lead off with the professional reference, e.g.:

I've noticed your posts connecting millennials' job-hunting preferences and big-company recruiting tactics tend to get

shared most frequently on social ...

And then get right into your pitch that propels that connection forward.

There's been an evolution in the last few years among the influencers I interview for my Inner Circle (a "Today" show producer, an editor for The Washington Post, and writers for USA Today and The Wall Street Journal). When I show them pitches, they still register appreciation for personalization at the top, but now they get anxious and even frustrated if that personalization "drags on" into a second point of reference. They say, "I want to know what he's offering here."

So to recap – first professional personalization, then pitch, then call to action. But what about that great personal tidbit you saw that could open the door to a great connection?

### **Save it for your P.S.**

That's where you note that you've visited her alma mater to see your best friend from high school who also went there. Or your quick take on this season of the Netflix show she tweeted about binge-watching.

Just make sure it's:

- Sincere – because relationships only work when founded authentically.
- Specific – because even if you really do LOVE that show she won't believe you unless you prove it with some detail.
- Not stalker-ish – no explanation necessary.

These influencers are so strained by all the pressures of their job that they deserve every effort on our part to make our outreach relevant and accessible on their terms. Helping them do their jobs is what helps us.

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*Michael Smart teaches PR professionals how to dramatically increase their positive media placements. He's engaged regularly by organizations like General Motors, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Georgia Tech to help their media relations teams reach new levels of success. Want to dive deeper into Michael's tips for landing more media coverage? Register for his Secrets of Media Masters workshop: <https://bit.ly/mrmasters>*