What's Up, College Station? Transcript
Season 4, Episode 44

Grace Hallowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today I'm joined by Marissa Harris, our HR manager over employee experience here at the City of College Station. Hi, Marissa Harris.

Marissa Harris: Hi, Grace.

Grace Hallowell: I am so excited you're here. This is your first time on the show with the set the way that it is. It's been quite some time since we've talked, and we are here to talk about employment opportunities. Veterans Day is coming up, and we love hiring veterans here at the City of College Station. Tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

Marissa Harris: As she mentioned, I am the HR manager over employee experience, which is really just the employee life cycle. I handle the team that does recruiting, training, development, and anything that goes into equipping our employees to do their work with excellence.

Grace Hallowell: What is your favorite part about your job? You have a very unique position, and it's different every day.

Marissa Harris: My favorite part of the job is getting to know the people who work here. We have a diverse set of employees who work here because they love their community and want to serve the people they live with. I meet a new person every day with a skill set used to better the quality of life for our community, and I find it really convicting to meet people compelled by public service.

Grace Hallowell: How does what you do impact our residents?

Marissa Harris: My team has a little phrase: "We serve the people who serve the people." Our goal is to hire the best people possible to meet the basic needs of our community, equip them to be as excellent as possible, and make sure they love coming to work every day.

Grace Hallowell: What changes for you going into these fall and winter months as opposed to the summertime?

Marissa Harris: Hiring-wise, our new fiscal year budget gets approved, creating a good amount of new jobs and a bit of a rush. We also have quite a few recognition events: an employee veteran recognition lunch, employee service awards for milestone years of service, and Employee of the Year. That keeps my team pretty busy, but it's a really fun part of my job.

Grace Hallowell: Now going to the topic of employment opportunities for veterans, we are committed to recruiting and hiring veterans. Can you give us an overview of the city's veteran recruiting initiative and how it has evolved?

Marissa Harris: I'm an Air Force brat—both of my parents are Air Force, my dad was an F-15 pilot, and my mom was a personnel officer—so I am personally passionate about honoring veterans. We have averaged around 11 to 12% of our employee population as veterans the entire time I have worked here. We partner with different branches and programs that help transition military officers. Additionally, years of service with the military count toward our retirement, which is a huge benefit.

Grace Hallowell: What type of career opportunities are available across city departments for veterans?

Marissa Harris: You name it, and we probably have it. A lot of our veterans end up in public safety, technical roles like mechanic work in our fleet department, facilities maintenance, and logistics. Almost any role in the military has an equivalent here.

Grace Hallowell: How does the city's recruitment process help identify opportunities that align with veterans' military backgrounds and training?

Marissa Harris: We have a good relationship with local veterans organizations. Our recruiter attends veteran career fairs like Red, White and You. We look at open roles with good skill-set requirements for veterans and create marketing materials to make it easy to identify transferable skills, even if they aren't familiar with the specific job title.

Grace Hallowell: We are also hiring anyone who has the skills and heart of public service. Can you walk us through how the city recruits and hires new employees?

Marissa Harris: Because we have many different departments, the process looks a little different depending on what you're applying for. All available jobs are housed on our city website. Applications are directed to the department hiring manager, who reviews qualifications and skill sets, usually followed by a phone screening, an in-person interview, reference reviews, and pre-employment requirements. Our recruiting team walks everyone through all the steps.

Grace Hallowell: What advice would you give someone preparing to apply for a position with the city?

Marissa Harris: Look at the requirements and qualifications of the job and don't get too caught up on the title, because public sector titles differ from the private sector. Try to translate your skills into the language used in the job description so the hiring manager understands what you bring, even if you haven't worked in that exact role before.

Grace Hallowell: What are some common things applicants should avoid when submitting an application or interviewing?

Marissa Harris: Fill out the application as completely and thoroughly as possible, and tailor your resume to the role you're applying for rather than using a single generic resume for every job.

Grace Hallowell: Thankfully, you will not be eliminated by AI at the city; humans review every application, cover letter, and resume.

Marissa Harris: Yes, thankfully. A lot of work goes into the reviewing process, and we take pride in the fact that real human beings review them.

Grace Hallowell: Do we provide internship, part-time, or seasonal employment opportunities?

Marissa Harris: In the summer we have seasonal positions, and we have part-time non-benefited and seasonal positions open throughout the year. For internships, we offer fall and spring opportunities, but our main internship program is the E3 program over the summer. It's a large investment in developing interns through subject-matter expert training on project management, time management, and portfolio presentations.

Grace Hallowell: How do we support employees who continue to serve in the National Guard, reserves, or active duty?

Marissa Harris: Our city manager is actually a Navy reservist, so he is passionate about taking care of actively serving employees. If a city employee's city pay is higher than their military pay, we bridge the gap so they don't lose income. We also comply with USERRA, and supervisors go above and beyond to support the employee and their family.

Grace Hallowell: What is your advice to someone considering working in local government from the private sector?

Marissa Harris: Don't discount your experience. Moving from the private to the public sector brings a diversity of perspective. The stability and purpose of using your skill sets to serve your community are very fulfilling. The predictability and pace—knowing you won't get a call from a CEO at 2:00 in the morning—provide a nice change of pace.

Grace Hallowell: Where can people go to find information about current job openings?

Marissa Harris: Visit our careers page at CSTX.gov/careers. You can view current job listings and sign up for job alerts to receive an email as soon as a posting fits your criteria.

Grace Hallowell: Now for our lightning round! What is one job you dreamed of having as a child?

Marissa Harris: I wanted to be an astronaut. I was actually an aerospace engineering major before switching to international business.

Grace Hallowell: If you could shadow any city employee for a day, which department would you choose?

Marissa Harris: For an adventurous day, I would choose police or fire—maybe high-rise station six, where they handle high-rise fires.

Grace Hallowell: What is one office essential you can't live without?

Marissa Harris: Chameleon cold brew—dark roast, about 60% water and 40% cold brew concentrate.

Grace Hallowell: If you could give a new employee one piece of advice, what would it be?

Marissa Harris: Build relationships, never be afraid to ask questions, and take notes so you don't have to ask the same question twice.

Grace Hallowell: What is the best part about working for the City of College Station?

Marissa Harris: Definitely the people. The people who work for the city are some of the most generous and encouraging people to work with.

Grace Hallowell: Thank you so much for joining me today. And that's what's up.