

I was a medical student and accidentally blew up on Tiktok. Now I have a new side hustle as an influencer.

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Norman Harris is a Temple University medical student. Norman Harris

This as-told-to essay is based on a conversation with Norman Harris II, 25, a third-year medical student at Temple University in

Philadelphia, who works as a student influencer. It has been edited for length and clarity.

For you: Insider Today newsletter — the day's most fascinating stories.

- **I'm a medical student and have become an influencer after a TikTok video blew up almost overnight.**
- **How many hours to dedicate to being a Tiktok influencer and a medical student is a balancing act.**
- **I was a child actor, and creating content allows me to have a creative outlet.**

I'm in the early stages of being a student influencer. My TikTok blew up almost overnight, and now companies are reaching out to me for partnerships.

While there are many partnering opportunities, I'm careful about who I work with. I want to preserve my brand — being a medical student at Philadelphia's Temple University who wants to make a social impact while having a comedic flair.

I've always had a social-media presence, so I didn't expect one video to skyrocket my TikTok influence.

The video that started it

It was the first day of my OB-GYN rotation in August. I walked in, and within 10 minutes, I helped deliver a baby.

Afterward, I lunched in my car, turned on the phone video, narrated what happened, and posted it on TikTok. By the day's end, about 35,000 people had liked it, and it had a million views. The next day, the "likes" had doubled and it had 2.8 million views.

My popularity and following soared. It's still crazy to realize how quickly the video propelled me into the influencer space.

Walking a tightrope between two careers

Being a student influencer and a medical student takes work — determining how many hours to dedicate to each profession is a balancing act. But my priority is becoming a doctor.

Usually, I wake up at about 6 or 6:30 a.m. I have to be at the hospital or the clinic sometime between 7 and 8 a.m.

I do pre-rounds on my patients, checking their vitals and making notes on their overnight stays. Next, I prepare for my 10 a.m. rounds. I'm on the job until sometime between 3 and 5 p.m. When I get home, I usually have a nonnegotiable 30 minutes to an hour of doing nothing. After I relax, I study for the exam I have at the end of each rotation. It's not easy finding time to work on my videos, but I use any extra time I have to create content.

I started as a YouTuber after graduating from Howard University. I was on a Fulbright scholarship teaching English to children in Durban, South Africa, and wanted to share my experiences because it's rare for Blacks and other underrepresented minorities to earn this scholarship. Then COVID hit, cutting my nine-month program to nine weeks.

When I became a medical student, the YouTube videos became too long to edit. Since TikTok clips are shorter, I began transitioning over to TikTok. I realized I could present my authentic and comedic self in 30-second increments.

A newbie at establishing partnerships

Since the viral video, some companies have reached out to me.

A new, Black-owned company that makes medical scrubs wants me to make a video of its products. A Chinese-based suture company wants me to create a "how-to" video on using its kits. That partnership could take a little longer since it's outside the US. It could create a long-term relationship or just be a one-time thing.

But I've turned away other companies because the products didn't fit my brand.

A fragrance company asked me to create a custom scent and sell it in exchange for a percentage of the profits. Another company wanted me to promote a video-chat service. I don't know how well received nonmedical products would be with my followers; I need more time to see what kind of content they want.

I'm still new to the industry because I went viral so fast. I'm researching the best rates. Sometimes, the company's budget is not where I want it to be, so I meet people in the middle. I'm charging \$500 for the scrubs video because it will be on both my TikTok and Instagram accounts. I'm charging \$300 for the suture-kit video because it will only be on TikTok.

My childhood acting career helps

I enjoy creating content because I can showcase my creativity and intelligence. Many people don't realize I used to be a child actor. My kindergarten play, *What If Zebras Lost Their Stripes*, kick-started my career. A stranger saw it and anonymously covered the costs of three-times-a-week acting lessons over a few years.

I had two managers — one in my hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, and one in Nashville. I've been in a music video for the Christian-rock band, Leeland, and I've made straight-to-DVD movies for the book company Lifeway.

I'm grateful for my acting experience, but in high school I was in a peer-mentorship program and realized I wanted to focus on academics. I chose schooling over acting — also, another absence from school would have gotten me kicked out.

Now I get the best of both worlds: I'm becoming a doctor and using my imagination online.