

10 KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

HUNTER COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF FILM AND MEDIA

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1. MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN

Never underestimate the value of an assignment. If you feel you are not being challenged ask your supervisor for more responsibility. Always ask what you can do to help and ask others what you can do to help them as well. Always be PROACTIVE! What can you do to turn a mundane task into a creative one?

Let the proper people know what part of the business interests you most

Speak up and make suggestions. You don't want to be a smarty pants but don't think your opinion isn't valued just because you're an intern. You have more power than you think as an intern (sometimes it is easy to feel that you don't have enough experience, or you are inadequate in one way or another). What you do have is being in touch with "youth today", and you offer a valuable perspective from a very sought after demographic. If you have an idea, share it. Just be sure you can back up those ideas.

If you are not involved in your companies' dynamics, try to figure out why? What way do you feel like you could contribute that you are not doing now? What would you like for them to do for a greater role? Identify what a realistic concept of what you could do there, and then suggest it to your supervisor.

Ask questions to many of the employees to get an understanding of what different positions have to offer. What's a typical day like for a Public Relations Director? What does an Account Executive do? What do you like best about this job?

2. INTERNSHIP ETIQUETTE

Internships don't equal a free ride. Many interns go into the internship with the notion that they're not getting paid so it's not a real job. Not only is an internship a precursor to your work career, it's your chance to meet professionals in the business and gain valuable contacts. Holidays at Hunter College are often not holidays in the work force.

An internship isn't like showing up for class, you're there to learn but not in a passive way. Interns who only observe are often forgotten. It's the interns who get just as involved with projects as employees, if not more, that stand out.

Imagine you had to pay someone to do what you do. Act accordingly.

Make an effort to be more involved. For instance, if you don't know Excel and that would help you get more responsibility, then learn it at night)

Be willing to work hard and do what is asked of you. Don't check for emails from your friends, make personal calls, text message or surf on the Internet. If everyone knows you as a slacker, who will want to hire you for their production?

As mentioned before, interns are viewed as potential employees. If you're goofing off now, the bosses won't think you'll be any different when they're giving you a paycheck.

3. FINESSE

How you approach offering your opinion or problem solving is the key to success: Never take an accusatory tone with your colleagues

Belligerent and hostile will never get you anywhere. Imagine a 15 year old telling you everything you're doing is wrong. Don't bash a co-worker's idea just because you don't like it. Make suggestions on how they can make that campaign even better

Always be positive – before you blurt out and say something think about how you can phrase it in a positive light. Negative energy brings a company down; no one wants to be around someone who is always a downer. Make sure your supervisor knows that you've completed an assignment (xyz task is complete, what else can I do to help?)

4. BE PROFESSIONAL

Be respectful and show up in professional attire.

Don't miss time, everyone gets sick and that's perfectly understandable. Missing once or twice during your internship is okay if you have to. But don't dismiss your internship as something you don't have to take seriously because you're not getting paid.

Most interns are getting college credit and you don't want a report to follow you back to your internship director. Plus, you could secure a job for yourself or burn your bridges. Remember, professionals in the business you come in contact with during your internship can help you get a job at their company or somewhere else.

People hire you or want to work with you again when they know they can depend on you. They need to know that you are going to be there on time, that you don't call in sick. As an employer, the number one thing you look for is someone who you don't have to worry about, who you know they are

going to be there and do a great job. Eventually, companies need to hire people and if you are a proven commodity, it lets the employer know “at least I know this person is talented and dependable”, the other candidate may have a better GPA but you are a proven commodity.

Internships often lead to full- or part-time positions within the company. The more you treat your internship as an opportunity to enhance your career, the better your chances of turning your internship into an opportunity for more responsibility and even a paid position. It is really like a long job interview.

Always keep the channels of communication open with your supervisor. The worst thing you can do is to lie or try to do something behind your employers back.

5. DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

The real world of media is not as glitzy once you are on the inside. Don't let your expectations create a negative mental framework. Is there a position in the company that looks interesting to you? Does this seem like something that you want to get more involved with? Are you thinking that the entire field of _____ is not what you want to do? If the latter is the case, this is not a negative; it is a positive. This is why you are doing your internship, to see what is appealing to you, now you can check this off the list and try another field for your next one.

Even if you decide that you don't want to work in this field, continue to be professional. You can still get a valuable work reference from this position.

6. NETWORKING

Networking is not networking; it is building relationships on common interests. It is remarkably like making new friends. Don't just network with the employees, but the other interns and other supporting staff at the company too. These people can help you in ways you never may suspect. Always treat everyone with respect, like the administrative assistants – they have a lot more power than you think. If they like you, they can help put in a good word for you. Try to take lunch with your colleagues. Also, sometimes working late or parties outside of the office are good opportunities for people to get to know you personally better. Try to participate in events after work, even if you're tired.

7. TEAMWORK

Working in groups is part of your learning experience. Learn how to negotiate. Don't forget this is a temporary job; it will go by quickly so wasting time in a disagreement with a co-worker can be very unproductive. Always be a team player. Keep discussions about the idea, not personal attacks.

8. PROBLEM SOLVING

Identify the problem. Did they give you a false set of expectations? Is the supervisor a problem? How? Many problems can be avoided by asking the right questions during the interview process.

If you are in a situation where you are being left alone, help your supervisor see where you can function and help out. Keep an eye out for an area where you can help and make a suggestion that can free your boss up with some of their time. Some supervisors have a tough time delegating, come up with a solution and ask to implement it in a polite way, sell it as time saving for her/him.

9. PERSONAL ERRANDS

You can say no to personal errands, explain that you are receiving academic credit for this internship and that you have to report to the school what your responsibilities include. Explain that your credit is dependent on this and if you are not doing fieldwork it may jeopardize your academic credit.

10. THE FUTURE

Always ask your supervisor for a reference letter before you leave. The first week of December for the fall or May for the spring. Give your supervisor two weeks to complete this letter. Have it made out in a general salutation: "To Whom It May Concern:..."

People move on and won't remember specifics about you and your performance, and this is what you want in a letter of recommendation so make sure you ask for it while you are still there.

If you are thinking about the summer and spring, certain deadlines are coming up quick like for some journalism positions for the summer.

Now that you've done one internship, you know how important researching the right internship is. Plan ahead; don't work from a position of desperation. Start thinking about internship opportunities that you would like to check out and start applying two months before the next semester starts.

Think of questions you can ask in your interview that will prevent negative situations arising if you accept the position. Asking questions in an interview is a sign of intelligence and maturity.