



Making the Most of Your Internship

First Thing to Realize: “It is a multi-week interview for a full-time opportunity”

The Basics

- **Be on time.** It sounds simple, but punctuality speaks volumes about your professionalism.
- **Put in your time.** Take only the specified break-time for lunch or coffee and always return on time. Do not leave work at the end of the day earlier than expected—in fact, stay longer than others for a while. And that trick of shooting off an email to a supervisor when working into the wee hours? Oldest one in the book. Do not use it more than twice.
- **Avoid missing work.** If you must be absent, request permission from your supervisor in advance.
- **Dress for success.** Take cues from your co-workers and dress appropriately. Do not sport wedge sandals if the other women are wearing closed-toe heels every day. Even if you see supervisors taking business casual to new levels, wait for a formal go-ahead before you break out the muscle shirts. If you look the part, it will be easier for management to picture you fitting in full time.
- **Do not be the “needy intern”**—resist complaints about office supplies, equipment, cafeteria food, working conditions—and do not demand improvements or changes.
- **Do not talk business in the bathroom.** It puts people in an awkward position; plus your boss may just be hiding in a stall.
- **Observe email etiquette.** Mind your language and subject matter in emails to co-workers and supervisors. An email with profanity to a fellow intern could get forwarded to the CEO. No matter how funny that forward from your uncle is, it’s best to have a chuckle and then chuck it.
- **Drink in moderation.** No one will remember the great job you did on a project or the novel idea you thought up if there is a better memory of you having too much to drink. You have a right to a social life, including getting a drink with co-workers; but, proceed with caution wherever alcohol and work mix.
- **Do not gossip.** Your co-workers might be dishing it out, but it is best to turn a deaf ear to gossip. You are new on the scene, and cannot afford to get caught up in the crossfire of office politics.
- **Be alert.** It is bad to get caught flat-footed by your professor and even worse by your boss. Doodling or daydreaming during meetings will attract negative attention right off the bat. If you have to be brought back to reality during meetings, there is no way you will be brought back after your internship.
- **Forgo digital distractions.** Smart phone use might be part of your regular assignments, but limit your use to professional duties. That means playing iPhone games or rudely texting while being given instructions could have your supervisor sending you an OMG message later.

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The Virtues

- **Stay positive.** No one wants to work with a grouch. The three most important attributes in getting or keeping a job are attitude, attitude, attitude. If you maintain a can-do, positive attitude during your internship tenure, you will be someone coworkers actually want to be around full time.
- **Be modest.** Do not thrust yourself in front of managers every time you do something right. Your superiors will be watching, so there is no need for you to point out your every accomplishment.
- **Stay on the safe side** with your new colleagues. Do not discuss religion, sexual orientation, or other private topics.
- **Do not be a cling-on.** It is good to make sure your internship supervisor knows what you are doing, but do not incessantly check in. For instance, there is no need to interrupt her and announce you have hit another milestone in your internship project every time it occurs.
- **Be in the know.** Show an interest in the company and learn as much as you can about the industry. Read trade magazines and web sites to gain even more knowledge.
- **Help others** – and go out of your way to do it. Stay late and offer assistance when others at the company are overloaded with work. It is never too early to act like you are already an indispensable part of the permanent workforce.
- **Network through socializing.** Although getting the job done is of paramount importance, do not underestimate the importance of building a social connection with co-workers.
- **Network by finding a mentor.** Building relationships and cultivating champions who can fight for you to get hired is key. Network with other interns and employees, including those outside your functional area, to learn more about the people and roles throughout the organization. They may also be able to help you in future career opportunities or lead you to other contacts. Identify someone whom you trust and admire to mentor you and provide feedback.

Your Performance

- At the beginning of your internship, meet with your supervisor and **establish mutually agreed-upon goals** so that you know what is expected of you. Most managers would rather answer 20 questions when you get the assignment than have to answer multiple questions every day for weeks. If you do not understand how to go about an assignment, ask your supervisor for clarification and what resources are available to you. Just be smart about whom you seek answers from and when. Do not collar the CEO at a cocktail party and ask her a question about workflow.
- **Prepare for a final presentation.** A majority of internships will involve presenting the results of your project, including recommendations, to your supervisor and senior management toward the end of your

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internship. This is why it is important to establish mutually agreed upon goals at the beginning. Do not wait until the end of your internship to prepare the presentation. Set up an outline for the presentation as you proceed through your project and seek feedback from others periodically. If a presentation is not requested, consider asking if you can provide one. There is no better way to solidify your capabilities and contributions with decision-makers.

- Understand that some **general office work** is part of the job.
- **Introduce new ideas gradually** and avoid trying to change too much too soon. Do not try to conquer your project in the first week or suggest your work will turn the company around.
- Gradually ask for more responsibility and **actively look for things to do**.
- **Keep a daily journal**. Create a list of your daily tasks and chart your feelings about your work. Which tasks did you like the most? Which seemed the least interesting? Reviewing the list later can help you make future career decisions.
- **Record your various projects**. Describe the purpose and guidelines of each project and your particular contribution. This will make further development of your resume much easier.

Your Internship Project

- **Don't immediately ask a question** when you are stuck on the project. Try to work through it and, if that doesn't work, work ahead of the issue. This will let you compile a list of 3-5 questions or ideas and discuss them at the same time instead of continually interrupting your supervisor.
- **Reach out to the cross-functional partners** that are involved with your project. This shows your manager that you have initiative and are able to work independently but remember to be respectful of others' time.
- You are going to be frustrated at times and feel like you are in way over your head. This is normal. **Your manager doesn't expect you to walk in day one and know exactly what to do**. Be realistic with your expectations but surpass your supervisor's.
- Most of the time, the internship is in the same group and it is filled every summer. **Ask your supervisor if there is an employee that held your internship in the past** and reach out to them. They often can provide valuable insight from having been in your shoes just a short time ago.
- The project is usually an area that needs process improvement. This is your opportunity to **show your innovative abilities and the value you can provide** to the company. Some companies will give you an offer solely based on your project performance and final presentation, so understand how important it truly is.

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- There are times when a project will be team-based. If you are a graduate student, you are expected to lead the group and **show management capability**. This does not mean you are entitled to that role. It is a delicate process and you need the other interns to want to follow your leadership.

The Exit

- If not already scheduled, **arrange a final meeting** with your immediate supervisor to discuss your work. Be prepared to discuss any and all projects you have managed. Be open to feedback. Ask for a letter of reference.
- **If an offer is made**, congratulations! you did all of the above and more. Show your appreciation and enthusiasm for the opportunity. Get clarity on the time frame for a decision and do not negotiate any terms immediately—you will want some time to think about the terms and any potential areas for negotiation.
- **If an offer is not made**, keep the lines of communication open in order to continue the relationship. Send articles that might be of interest to your boss, and check on initiatives that you helped jump-start. The trick is to maintain top-of-mind awareness without being a pest about it. An occasional email containing relevant content will do the job. Although your employer will probably guess that you are keeping in touch because you would like a fulltime offer, you will want to wait for the appropriate time to ask about a fulltime opportunity.
- **Time for reflection.** Whether you get an offer, do not get an offer, or decide this is not the company you want to work for—now is the time to reflect upon your experience. Ask yourself the following questions. What were your goals before the internship? Did you accomplish them? What did you accomplish above and beyond your established goals? What did you fail to accomplish? What new skills, equipment, or office technology did you master? What was the most important thing you learned from this experience? This internship experience will be at the top of your resume for a while and future interviewers will ask similar questions to those above.