Maximizing Your Internship Experience

Internships are excellent opportunities to gain real world experience, network, and learn about a new industry or company. In 2011, 85% of MIT students responded that they “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that their summer experience helped them clarify their future career goals. Internships can also turn into full-time offers. In 2012, 25.3% of undergraduate and 15.4% of masters’ students received full-time offers from summer internships. To make the most of these opportunities consider the following suggestions on how to maximize your internship experience.

Before your internship:

- Contact your supervisor to:
  - Confirm the date, time and location for your first day.
  - Identify where you should park and who you should report to.
  - Learn of materials you should read or review to strengthen your knowledge of the subject so that you can be ready to go on Day 1.
  - Clarify the office dress code (if there is any doubt, always dress more formal the first day and adjust once you see what everyone else wears.)
- Set realistic goals for the internship experience.

First week of your internship:

- Set up a regular check-in schedule with your supervisor (daily, weekly, bi-weekly, depends on your supervisor’s preference and schedule.)
- Establish goals and review these with your supervisor early in the internship. See the GECD website on writing SMART goals: http://gecd.mit.edu/career/act
- Learn the culture and follow protocols.
  - Ask questions to learn about what really happens in the organization. Reality is not always the same as what the company website says.
  - Observe your environment. (If everyone is already busy working by the time you arrive at 9am each day, perhaps you should also be arriving earlier.)
- **General Tip:** Starting a new job is exhausting. Understand that you will be tired and avoid planning too many after-work activities during the first week or two of your internship.

Throughout your internship:

- Be proactive and step outside your comfort zone.
  - Challenge yourself to try new things.
  - Ask questions and request guidance, when needed. That’s what your supervisor is for!
  - Ask if you can be involved in projects that sound interesting to you or sit in on meetings.
    - **Note:** This won’t always be possible, but it doesn’t hurt to ask.
- Stay positive.
  - Accept whatever projects you are given with a positive attitude.
  - Be willing to try anything.
- Learn as much as you can.
  - Never turn down an opportunity to attend meetings, workshops, etc.
  - Get as much exposure as you can to various parts of the organization.
  - Ask to shadow areas of the company that you don’t directly work with.
• Network and build relationships.
  o Build relationships with peers as well as supervisors, colleagues, etc. Try to make contacts outside of your immediate work group. Get to know other parts of the organization, especially if there is another area you would be interested in exploring in the future.
  o Connect with the people you meet at your internship on LinkedIn.
  o Be friendly and get involved in any activities including after work outings, sports teams, etc.
  o Conduct informational interviews throughout the summer. For example, invite people for coffee.
  o Ask your supervisor, mentor, or others to introduce you to people throughout the organization.

• Re-visit your goals.
  o Re-visit these goals on your own and with your supervisor halfway through your internship and at the end of your internship.
    ▪  Note: If necessary, you can be the one to schedule these meetings.
  o Keep a log of all the activities you work on. This will help when updating your resume.

• Ask for feedback.
  o Get feedback from your supervisor and others you work with regularly or on specific projects.

Last week of your internship:

• Wrap up all projects. Make sure your supervisor and teammates have any information they need from you to make your transition out smooth.

• Thank your supervisor and any other individuals (mentor, colleagues, etc.) who have been supportive with hand-written thank you notes.

• Ask your supervisor and any others that could talk about your work if they would be willing to be references for you in the future.

• Compile a portfolio of your projects (but ask permission before you take anything with you!) – what were your tangible accomplishments this summer?
  o Keep your evaluations, supervisor feedback forms, etc. and a list of your key accomplishments.

After your internship:

• Keep in touch with your supervisor, mentor, and colleagues and keep them up-to-date on what you are up to throughout the year.
  o Connect with them on LinkedIn.
  o Send periodic updates emails to your contacts – e.g. happy holidays and here’s what I’ve been up to since the summer.
  o Send along interesting articles you see about the industry – shows you are still actively learning.

Additional Resources:

• Check out the GECDD website for online workshops on networking and business etiquette:
  http://gecd.mit.edu/resources/workshops

• Come by the GECDD office to browse books on successful internships, business etiquette, and networking:
  o Internship Success by Marianne Green
  o The Successful Internship by H. Frederick Sweitzer and Mary A. King
  o The Etiquette EDGE by Beverly Langford
  o Business Etiquette: 101 Ways to Conduct Business with Charm and Savvy by Ann Marie Sabath
  o Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands by Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway
  o Networking Like a Pro by Ivan Misner, David Alexander, and Brian Hilliard