A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

What makes an internship successful? You might think an interesting workplace, a conscientious supervisor, or substantive work assignments make an internship successful. These all contribute a part; however, the key factor to a great internship is you—your attitude, your abilities, and your ingenuity. You may not be able to control your work environment or how your supervisor treats you, but you can control you, and you can dictate how successful your experience will be based on what you do. This booklet is designed to help you learn the principles that can help make the most of your internship experience if you apply them. Whether your internship is a success or failure is really up to you.

TOP TEN INTERN FAUX PAS:

10. Messy and unorganized
9. Emotional instability and immaturity
8. Gossip and negativity
7. Unreliable conduct
6. Lack of initiative
5. Unprofessional behavior
4. Poor time management
3. Lack of attention to detail
2. Improper use of company time and materials
1. Inappropriate dress

FIVE-POINT FORMULA FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

1. Adapt to the workplace – pg. 2
2. Be assertive and have realistic expectations – pg. 3
3. Resolve your own problems – pg. 4
4. Be reliable and creative – pg. 5
5. Be courteous and respectful – pg. 6

Also included:

IN RETROSPECT: WHAT INTERNS SAID THEY WISH THEY HAD DONE BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THEIR INTERNSHIPS (pg. 7)

WHAT EMPLOYERS EXPECT FROM INTERNS (pg. 8)
FIVE-POINT FORMULA FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

1. Adapt To The Workplace

The work environment you will enter during your internship may be completely different from anything you have experienced up to now. It is important to learn all the company policies, written and unwritten, and adapt to them quickly. Understanding business etiquette will greatly help you avoid embarrassing situations and will also lend you greater respect from those with whom you work.

Policies:
- *Always be on time.* Better yet, be early. This shows respect to your employers and their time.
- *Respect work area.* It is likely that you will share your work area with one or more people, so keep it neat. You should also learn where you can and cannot sit. Some people object strongly to others sitting at their desks. A good rule of thumb is to never sit in anyone’s work area unless invited and, of course, to never touch anything on another’s desk. Don’t forget to knock when entering someone else’s office or work space.
- *Don’t abuse company supplies.* Never use office supplies for personal business—particularly stationery, stamps, and envelopes. Do not use photocopy machines for personal materials. Maintain shared supplies and machinery in good condition. Leave things better than when you found them. Never leave a mess for the next employee to clean up.
- *Don’t take too long on lunch and breaks.* If you have an hour for lunch, that means you have 60 minutes before you are expected to be back at work, not 90 minutes. You will be thought of highly if you are always back on time, even if everyone else takes longer breaks. Be certain to know the company policy about checking in and out, even for short breaks. The lunch hour may be an optimal time to develop professional contacts.
- *Address the boss professionally.* Never call your boss by his or her first name until given permission to do so.
- *Learn the rules about the refrigerator/kitchen and snacks.* If you are allowed to use the refrigerator or kitchen area, clean up after yourself and mark all of your items.
- *Learn how to ask for time off or call in sick.* You are not to ask for time off unless you are ill. Make certain to ask during your orientation about the proper procedures for calling in sick or if there is a family emergency. You should never tell your supervisor you are taking time off. You request time off.

Etiquette:
- *Pay close attention,* especially during training. Learn the basic flow of the company, the policies, and what is expected of you on the job.
- *Have a pleasant countenance.* When you are on the job, show that you are happy to be there. You don’t have to overdo your smile, but the way you carry yourself will impact how you perform on the job and will better your interactions with others. Greet people with a smile and make eye-contact when you are being addressed.
- *Dress conservatively,* especially on the first day. It is much better to be overdressed and dress down later than to give a bad first impression. Observe what others wear, and if you have any
questions, ask your supervisor. It is not a bad idea to ask your supervisor prior to your first day of work what you will be expected to wear.

- Be professional on the telephone. Many offices do not object to employees making personal calls, while others do; be sure to ask before making the first call. If you are in a position where you answer the phone frequently, learn what the office’s standard phone greeting is. Always use good phone manners; never leave someone on hold for more than a few minutes. Take good messages—be certain to get the caller’s name, phone number, and purpose for calling. Repeat it back to make sure you have it correctly. In addition, don’t hover when someone else is on the phone. Just leave a note for them to call you, or you can come back at another time. Don’t forget to put your own cell phone on mute to avoid any embarrassing displays of your personalized ringtone.

- Be professional over email. Business email is not for personal use. When forwarding an email, delete all the previous forward marks and any other information from the previous sender (this protects their information). If you do not have the time to type a personal note above the message you are forwarding, you should not forward it at all.

- Respect company meetings. It is extremely rude to arrive late for a meeting, but it is ruder still to not attend at all. Never interrupt another speaker, and pay close attention to what others are saying. It may even be a good idea to take notes. Never leave a meeting until it is over.

- Use a tissue when you need to sneeze. Do not sneeze on your hands or the crook of your elbow (that is where you put your hands when you fold your arms). Because sickness has been spreading so quickly lately, employees are expected to cough and sneeze into the upper arm or shirt sleeve. If you accidentally cough or sneeze into your hands, wash your hands immediately. This will show your employers and co-workers that you care about hygiene, earning their trust and influencing others to do the same.

- Use restroom etiquette. After you use the bathroom, wipe the countertop and sink of any spilled water or soap. Be sure the toilet is clean for the next user. Notify the proper attendant if supplies are low or out, and never leave a plumbing problem for the next employee to deal with. Always notify the proper personnel in the event of a plumbing problem.

2. Be Assertive And Have Realistic Expectations

Remember that your primary objective on this job is to learn, not to change the course of history. The success and value of your experience will be directly proportionate to how open you are to suggestions and to your ability to find learning opportunities. Keep yourself and your internship in perspective. Students easily forget they are still in training and not ready to perform the same tasks as professionals who are out of school and well along in their careers. Be patient, grateful, and maintain a cheerful attitude.

Learn and Develop Skills:
• **Hone your computer skills.** Computer skills are important in any work environment. Any skills you can gain lend yourself useful to others in the work environment.
  
  • **Read everything you can.** Be as informed as possible about current issues, particularly those that impact the business you are working for. Research and learn about topics that are applicable to the company with which you are working. Try to learn all that you can.
  
  • **Become an expert on a topic.** Select an issue that is important to the work you are doing and become an expert on it. The opportunity may arise when you can put your expertise to work and be of major assistance on some project.

• **Use all available training materials.** Some organizations have new employee or intern training classes. Take them if at all possible.

• **Create windows of opportunity out of routine tasks.** Look for ways to make the best of every situation. An errand to another office might give you a chance to meet new people and broaden your contact network. In your projects, pay attention to the little things; it will surprise you at what insights you can gain. A little ingenuity can help make the most tedious task beneficial.

**Volunteer:**

• **Keep your eyes open.** If you become aware of a need on the job, find a way to fulfill it. If you do not have anything to work on, ask politely if there are tasks that other employees or staff members need help with.

• **Don’t be afraid of unpleasant tasks.** Be the first to volunteer for the jobs that most do not want to do. This is very impressive to the staff and could create opportunities to be involved in more substantive work.

**Have Realistic Expectations:**

• **Start little.** You may be required to prove yourself in little ways before being given more significant responsibilities.

• **Ask for help.** Do not be shy or too proud to admit your ignorance. It is better to ask for help when you are unsure than to make a mistake that could be more problematic.

• **Pick up on corrective cues.** Be sensitive to hints that may be directed towards you. They will probably be subtle, but make sure you are willing to make corrections when needed.

• **Take criticism cheerfully.** Making mistakes is part of learning. When you make a mistake, don’t make excuses. Do not take the criticism personally; rather, be grateful for help and promise to do better next time. Ask for feedback and be ready to accept criticism when it comes.

• **Be flexible.** The ability to adjust your way of doing things and adapt to new situations is a sign of maturity and intelligence. When an unexpected situation arises, keep calm and don’t be afraid to ask fellow employees how they might handle the situation.

3. **Resolve Your Own Problems**

Every internship has its own set of problems to be overcome—some more than others. The important thing is to deal with them in a mature, professional manner.
• **Apologize if you are clearly in the wrong.** If in doubt, apologize anyway. It’s no big deal and brings closure to a fruitless situation. On the other hand, accept apologies graciously and with compassion. If there is a conflict, do not get personal in your remarks.

Common Intern Problems:

• **The staff treats me like a second class citizen.** You are the newcomer and, although you will likely be warmly welcomed, some people may see you as an intruder. The best way to deal with this is to learn the routine and fit in as much as possible. If someone is particularly nasty to you, make an extra effort to be helpful and friendly. If that doesn’t work, then just stay out of his or her way.

• **All I’ve been doing is menial work, like stuffing envelopes and sorting mail.** There may be several reasons for this. Your supervisor may not be used to working with interns or may be very busy, forgetting to give you more substantive assignments. If this is the case, a polite discussion of the problem will likely resolve the matter. However, it may be that the staff doesn’t feel you can handle more substantive work. If you have turned in some projects late or poorly done, this may be your supervisor’s way of letting you know you need to improve. Take some initiative and look for substantive things to do. Offer to help. Keep a cheerful attitude and do a good job with the menial work. Once that is done, try to generate your own projects. Don’t forget that the staff may be testing your abilities and attitude to see if you can handle more significant tasks.

• **It is my first day and the staff has overwhelmed me with work.** Decide which is the most urgent task assigned by your immediate supervisor and tackle it first. Explain to the other staff members what kind of work load you have and work out varying deadlines with them.

Serious Problems: If, however, you encounter a serious problem, do not let it fester. Rather than reacting emotionally, try to resolve the problem in a professional way.

• **Discuss the matter with your supervisor.** Often, just bringing a situation to your supervisor’s attention will solve the problem. **Do not go to your supervisor’s boss or another person in the office. Always speak with your supervisor.**

• **Notify your internship coordinator of the problem.** In your weekly reports or in an email, tell your coordinator of the problems you’ve been having. Your coordinator should be apprised of the situation, and he or she may be able to offer specific advice.

If another few weeks pass and you’re STILL having serious problems,

• **Have your internship coordinator or your faculty advisor discuss the problem with your supervisor.** Both parties should be fully informed of the history of the situation and what you have already done to resolve it.

4. **Be Reliable And Creative**

Give every assignment your best effort and follow it through to its conclusion. Success will come through small achievements and dependability. Don’t just do a task, excel at it. Give your supervisor the best in even the menial tasks.
• **Know your deadlines and always meet them.** No matter what your projects is, always complete it in a timely matter. If you have a specific deadline, make sure to gage your work so you will be able to complete all aspects of the project on time. A project with a fuse is often no good if you complete it later than the deadline.

• **Ask questions when necessary, but don’t expect to have your hand held.** In the work environment, everyone is busy and has their own responsibilities to worry about. Be resourceful and try to figure things out for yourself. Personal attention given to interns varies from office to office. Don’t constantly pester your supervisor with questions and requests for help. When given an assignment, ask enough questions to get clear what you are to do and where to start, and then work the rest out for yourself. If your supervisor has to walk you through every step, he might as well have done it himself.

5. **Be Courteous And Respectful**

Be respectful at all times and with everybody. Make sure to use business etiquette as was discussed before, but also be aware of the following points of things you should **not** do in the workplace:

• **Use courteous speech.** Say “Please”, “Thank you”, and “You’re welcome” (not “No problem”) whenever appropriate. Show appreciation for help, and be willing to help others when they ask for it.

• **Do not wear headphones or ear buds at work.** It sends a message to employers that you do not wish to communicate. Don’t even bring your iPod to work.

• **Do not try to sell things** to your colleagues. It’s disrespectful to ask your co-workers to spend money.

• **Avoid talking big.** Do not be a know-it-all. Show respect for co-workers by only offering your “wisdom” when they ask for it. If you flaunt your intelligence, you’ll find that you won’t have many friends in the workplace.

• **Do not participate in office gossip.** Never pass along bits of gossip or stories that are potentially embarrassing for you or someone with whom you work. Avoid idle comments about co-workers’ dress and appearance. If you overhear a private conversation, practice selective hearing. Your best bet for being treated as a professional at work is to keep all workplace conversations professional.

• **Do not speak too loudly.** Be sensitive to how loudly you may be speaking. Consider lowering your voice when speaking both in person and on the phone. A lower speaking volume lowers the amount of tension others feel when speaking with you. If you fear that others will have a problem hearing or understanding you, focus on speaking more clearly, not more loudly.

• **Do not shout or swear.** If something unexpected happens, keep the volume of your voice down and keep your cool. Profanity and yelling offend more people than you may think.

• **Beware of scents and smells.** Save cologne and perfume for social occasions; some people are allergic to scents—even some strong bath soaps. Ask co-workers before bringing air fresheners, fresh flowers, or potpourri into work.
IN RETROSPECT: 
WHAT INTERNS SAID THEY WISH THEY HAD DONE 
BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THEIR INTERNSHIPS

Before: *Improved reading, writing, and computer skills
       *Taken world geography, statistical analysis, and grant writing courses
       *Developed better cross-cultural skills, more informed world view
       *Advanced foreign language skills
       *Stayed current on world affairs
       *Been willing to work internationally
       *Researched potential employers, done better networking
       *Started early, done more than one internship
       *Applied earlier (security clearances take up to 9 months)

During: *Stayed involved in day-to-day operations
       *Asked more questions, listened, and taken better notes
       *Set specific goals, better able to measure progress
       *Proven reliability
       *Been prepared to be accountable
       *Stayed flexible in work hours, accepting assignments
       *Kept personal opinions on “hot topics” to self
       *Been confident without being arrogant
       *Stepped out of comfort zone and shown willingness to learn
       *Expressed interest in traveling and attended meetings
       *Formed appropriate relationships, treated all people in the organization well, from custodians to secretaries to CEO’s

After:  *Written a thank-you note to their internship supervisor
       *Kept in touch with supervisor and co-workers for networking, future letters of recommendation
WHAT EMPLOYERS EXPECT FROM INTERNS

1. Proactive, self-starter, takes initiative
2. Good attitude
3. Positive, enthusiastic
4. Detail oriented
5. Excellent interpersonal skills: establishes rapport with colleagues and clients, good listener, diplomatic, tactful, builds alliances, works well as a team member
6. Creative
7. Mature, doesn’t need to be micromanaged or have constant supervision
8. Confident
9. Problem solver, good analytical skills
10. Organized
11. Adaptable and flexible
12. Reliable, good follow-through, meets deadlines
13. Able to accept feedback and criticism
14. Good writing skills
15. Professional in dress and work habits, strong work ethic
16. Communication skills – foreign language fluency a plus!
17. Computer skills – Microsoft office, EXCEL, PowerPoint
18. Honest, ethical, responsible