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#17-252 Ace your Internship

Going abroad to intern will require new routines and ways of thinking. Prepare for changes with a new frame of mind in order to maximize the benefits of the internship experience.

Introduction

Ace your Internship

Going abroad to intern will require new routines and ways of thinking. Prepare for changes with a new frame of mind in order to maximize the benefits of the internship experience.

Part 1 Manage expectations

Part 2 Embrace a growth mindset

Part 3 Be professional

Part 4 Workplace relationships

Part 5 Mistakes to avoid

Part 6 Additional tips

Part 7 I wanna ask...

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Part 1 Manage expectations

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Interns often have large expectations when they start a new position. It is unsurprising when such grand expectations are not met, and disappointment inevitably follows. Here are some tips to manage expectations better:

- Set flexible objectives, revisit, and accommodate changes
- Avoid idealization, which can lead to unmet expectations
- Ask supervisors and coworkers for advice

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Part 2 Cultivate a growth mindset

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People who have a fixed mindset believe their talents and competence cannot be improved. On the opposite side, people with a growth mindset believe that their abilities can be developed through effort, hard work, and good strategies. As an intern, it is better to have a growth mindset than a fixed one.

Growth mindset

- Embrace challenges as opportunities to learn and improve
- Be persistent when taking on a problem
- Don't give up
- Inspired by and encourage others
- Stay positive and always try the best
- See fear as positive and criticisms as opportunities for improvement
- Have a sense of urgency
- Take initiative
- Learn from failure
- Take on every possible assignment

Fixed mindset

- Avoid challenges to avoid failure
- Not interested in and disregard feedback from others
- Feel threatened when others do well
- Believe that they can only do well in certain things
- Believe that it's too late to do anything
- Avoid criticism
- Procrastination

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Part 3 Professionalism

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Demonstrating professional behavior is essential for the success of any workplace. To interns, it's the most basic rule to follow.

Do's

- Be on time
- Keep a good attitude
- Seek to improve
- Show strong work ethic
- Honesty
- Proper attire

Don'ts

- Gossip and share gossips
- Tardiness or poor time management
- Avoid menial tasks
- Give excuses
- Taking the internship too casually

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Part 4 Workplace relationships

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The ability to build and maintain strong relationships with people in the workplace is essential to a successful internship. Below are things that you can do to boost your internship experience and relationship with coworkers.

- Offer help to, and appreciate help from, others
- Ask questions and listen
- Know when to ask for assistance
- Be friendly when working with other people
- Step out of your age group, i.e., avoid sticking with other interns
- Network within the organization, e.g., go for lunch and say “yes” to team gatherings
- Develop mentoring relationships early on and maintain them

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Part 5 Mistakes to avoid

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While participants should be well prepared for their internship and try their best to avoid mistakes, mistakes are bound to happen. Instead of blaming yourself, learn from them and avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

Inexperience

- Wear the wrong thing (e.g., flip flops, strapless dress)
- Assume or follow others instead of asking the right person
- Taking a day off to go to a beach with friends
- Acting entitled for special treatment
- Chatting with friends during office hours
- Being unprepared (e.g., walking in without researching the company)
- Ignore social graces (e.g., restroom etiquette, meetings)

Proactivity

- Lack of initiative
- Being seen but not heard
- Poor time management (e.g., being late to work)
- Not asking for feedback
- Ask questions with answers that can easily be looked up

Competence

- Failure to meet expectations (e.g., poor quality, late delivery)
- Being unable to deliver as per specifications (e.g., formatting deliverables incorrectly)
- Pretending to know something when you don't (e.g., exaggerating experience and qualifications, not asking for clarification)

Attitude

- Take criticism personally
- Don't listen, ignore instructions or advice
- Don't follow up
- Don't care about and not seeking feedback
- Dismiss the initial small tasks
- Get sloppy, poor work quality, leaving tasks unfinished
- Arrogance

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Part 6 Additional tips

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1 In academia, quantitative ratings play an important part for performance reviews. In the professional world, ratings are rather subjective and qualitative (e.g., first impression, soft skills, etc.)

2 Past participants like to compare their internship, whether with their previous ones or with school projects. This is a common pitfall that should be avoided. In practice, no two internships are the same and thus it is not fair to compare. With the new internship, the focus should be on the unique aspects while avoiding making the same mistakes that have been made in the past.

3 Critical thinking plays an important part in having a successful internship outcome. Often, the same situation can be viewed differently depending on the person's perspective. As examples, one student can feel great about it while another can feel the opposite. In other words, there can be many answers to the same question. The key is to avoid simply seeing the surface or jumping to conclusions. Instead, be skeptical, ask questions, and view things from different angles.

4 An internship is a great opportunity to learn hard skills and knowledge, but it can also be a good chance to practice situation management skills by observing how others do things. Simply put, there are tons of subtle concepts (e.g., finding common ground, conflict resolution, and more) that are beneficial in the long run and shouldn't be ignored.

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Part 7 I wanna ask...

How should I start an internship on the right foot?

Prepare for your internship ahead of time – write down any questions for clarification. Be conservative on your first day, i.e., arrive early and dress properly. You want to make a good impression, so be friendly to your colleagues and respond to eye contact with a smile. When appropriate, clarify any questions about company policies and routines.

How should I obtain feedback?

The general practice is to regularly receive feedback so you can reflect and improve. If you want honest feedback, show your willingness to receive negative feedback (otherwise your supervisor may hold back their thoughts). In addition to your supervisor, colleagues can also give feedback. Be sure to ask for feedback in appropriate situations. Less formal environments can work for this (e.g., inviting your supervisor for lunch). In more formal settings, you can ask for more specific feedback (e.g., “What is one thing that I can do to improve?”).

Should I give a gift to my boss after the internship?

Note that giving a gift is entirely unnecessary, a nice gesture rather than a mandatory one. If you are from overseas, a good idea is to buy something that represents your culture. If you want to show general appreciation for your workplace and colleagues, a shareable gift is ideal (e.g., cake, pizza). If you want to give a more personal gift, handwritten thank you cards (you can even include photos) are always appreciated. If you decide to give a gift of any kind, make sure it is not expensive.

How to communicate excuses at work?

Mistakes are inevitable in life. If you made a mistake at work, apologize for it. The general advice is to be honest about your situation and keep your apology/excuse short. Take responsibility for the problem rather than shifting the blame, and even offer constructive solutions if possible. If you are late to work because of traffic, for instance, emphasize your solution (e.g., “I’m late this morning because of traffic, but I’ll make up for it during my lunch”). Generally, your focus should be on the solution and not on the reason itself. If you must provide a reason, do so carefully and wisely.

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