

10 Ways to Make the Most of Your Summer Internship

Chart Your Course: Before starting an internship, create a checklist of what you hope to gain from your experience - list the skills you want to develop, people you want to meet, types of projects you would like to work on, and ideas you have about the organization. Also, think about whether there is an opportunity to tie your summer experience to a thesis topic of interest, and if so begin your research. As the internship progresses, check off items on the list to ensure that you're making the most of your experience.

Clarify Expectations: Be sure you are clear about your goals for the summer, but be especially clear about your manager's needs and priorities, because meeting these will be central to your future opportunities with the organization. Sit down with your supervisor at the beginning of the internship to make sure you share the same expectations, timelines, etc. If your employer has not put much thought into your role for the summer, be proactive in assessing potential needs and propose projects that would be important to the organization (i.e. data and analysis with related recommendations to management, survey/research, monitoring & evaluation, market/investment assessment, report writing, etc.).

Volunteer for Extra Assignments: During slow periods, track down your supervisor and volunteer for extra assignments. With your supervisor's approval, offer to help another department or group of interest to you. The more initiative and enthusiasm you show, the more responsibility you'll get.

Be Adaptable: All internships - and most jobs for that matter - involve some lower-level, mundane tasks. It is important to remember that you are there to contribute and the type of contribution the organization needs from you may not always be what you want to do. Your willingness to show that you are team player goes a long ways towards selling yourself for future opportunities.

Use Your Intern Access: Because interns tend to be viewed by other employees as energetic "visitors", you often have access to meetings and areas of the organization that other employees don't. Make the most of this access to learn about the inner workings of the organization and the people who work there. Ask to attend higher level meetings to understand how decisions are made.

Network, Network, Network: When passing executives in the hallway, don't hesitate to introduce yourself and talk with them about the organization. Seek out Tufts alumni or other contacts in areas that interest you and go out to lunch with them. If you are in a city with an active alumni group, attend at least one event. Coordinate with alumni relations and your classmates doing internships in the same geographical area and organize a Tufts summer event where you invite all local interns and alumni in all sectors to come together. Through friends, family or on-line research, identify other professionals to meet while in the area.

Bond with Your Fellow Interns: Be sure to meet and share ideas with the other interns at your organization - even ones that are not in your particular department and/or are not from Tufts. Your fellow interns can be a powerful source of information about the organization and good people to add to your professional network. Ask them to introduce you around their department and vice versa.

Always Be a Tufts Ambassador: Remember that singularly and as a group, you are Tufts Ambassadors. Your success as interns is one of the most important factors in the marketplace's perception of Tufts.

Participate in "Extracurricular Activities": If your organization offers interns access to field trips, brown-bag luncheons with executives, barbecues, tickets to social events, or other traditional internship "extracurriculars," by all means, participate. Some interns' most memorable and rewarding experiences occur outside the direct scope of employment.

Stay in Touch: After your summer ends, keep in touch with co-workers through periodic calls or e-mails. This is an easy way to get organizational updates and keep your name fresh in the minds of employees when hiring decisions are made. Even if you choose not to return, those contacts may be invaluable sources of leads to other opportunities.

5 Questions to Ponder During and After Your Summer Internship

Is this a job, firm and/or sector in which I can see myself working for the next three to five years?

Are the lifestyle implications of this career something I find attractive?

Are the colleagues who work in this career/sector people with whom I identify and are the "stars" people that I admire and want to emulate?

Does the career evolution in this sector appeal to me long term?

Will this career/sector help me develop the skills and knowledge I enjoy using and that will keep me challenged?