
Making the Most of a Virtual Internship This Summer

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As college students embark on the coveted summer internship, their expectations have taken a big shift, given the remote workplace environment. Perhaps instead of renting an apartment in a new city, you are back in your childhood bedroom. Or discovering the best ramen in the neighborhood has been replaced with a parent-prepared lunch. Don't forget to hide posters and other high school relics from your Zoom background before the call with a team you've never met in person.

Resiliency and flexibility are paramount in times like these. What this in mind and a few tips to follow, a virtual internship can still be a great learning experience and a résumé builder.

Stay Positive: Yes, the summer is not what it should be, and your hopes and dreams for a normal fall aren't looking that great either. But look on the bright side. Ask your supervisors about key learnings from other adverse times their business has gone through. Remember, you're lucky to be working, and everyone on the other side of the Zoom camera is counting on you. They are just as invested in helping you succeed. So put your best foot forward each day. Dress as if you were going to the office, be professional, and, most importantly, be nice.

Meet People: Don't get discouraged by the lack of casual chats by the coffeemaker or post-work socializing. You can schedule one-on-one video "coffees" with colleagues in your office and attend virtual happy hours on Zoom. People move around from firm to firm, and you never know which one will be your next boss or your future client. Even in the largest cities around the country, the business world is much smaller than you think. Stay in touch with everyone you can. LinkedIn is a great professional database—and just one of many online resources. Use your chosen tool to make the connections and reap the rewards of a robust network for the rest of your career.

Learn Beyond Your Role: Let's face it. You are the most junior person at your firm. Your Slack channel is filling up with administrative tasks that may not seem to make a big impact. But remember that you are playing a vital role on the team while building fundamental skills in multitasking, managing expectations, and meeting deadlines. Focus on learning the bigger picture from your supervisors. How does your firm make revenue? What do the various departments do day-to-day? In my first job, I learned an incredible amount by just listening. Since my phone never rang and the floor, I was on was very silent, I could hear a woman who sat about 15 feet away from me speak to her clients and colleagues. Eavesdropping in on her work calls taught me about the proper language of business and how to speak in a professional setting. Sure, you may not be 15 feet away, but you can ask colleagues if you can join their internal and external calls while on mute. Take notes.

Observe your Managers and Colleagues: Discovering who you want to be when you "grow up" is both a process of selection and elimination. Seek out those who seem happy in their role and ask them about their professional path. Look around and identify what you don't want to be doing. Assessing your professional likes and dislikes can inform you what types of jobs you can see yourself doing in the future. Take it all in and begin to be self-reflective of the type of career you want to pursue.

While it is a very strange summer for all, congratulations on landing a prized internship, the grit and hard work that got you the job are just the beginning of the journey. Make the most of the experience and have fun!