

Professionalism in Internships

Career & Professional Development

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An internship provides you with a chance to begin establishing your professional reputation. Be careful not to sabotage your reputation with inappropriate behavior. Remember that your internship site is full of people who could be potential employers, colleagues, or competitors. If you plan to work in the industry, you will see these people in the future. Avoid careless mistakes that will haunt you when you are job searching. Some tips for being a professional include:

1. Avoid missing work. If you must be absent, request permission from your supervisor in advance.
2. Be timely when arriving for your internship hours.
3. Meet deadlines and keep your commitments.
4. Take only the specified break-time for lunch and/or coffee.
5. Dress for success by using cues from coworkers, or by asking about the dress code.
6. Understand that some general office work is part of the job.
7. Introduce new ideas gradually and avoid trying to change too much too soon.

Manage Your Online Persona

Employers are quite savvy about social networking sites, blogs, and other online entities. They will often conduct an online search to learn more about a given candidate. If you use sites such as Facebook or Twitter, or if you maintain a personal website or blog, review the content and consider what messages you might be sending to potential employers. Google yourself. You may want to edit your pages, change privacy settings or clean up your image. Avoid sabotaging your professional reputation inadvertently.

Once you are in an internship, check with the employer about any applicable policies related to your use of online sites. Some companies have a very strict confidentiality policy that may preclude you from publishing any details about the internship.

Shape Your Experience

Don't underestimate your power to influence an internship. You do not have to be a passive participant. You selected this internship opportunity with specific goals in mind. So, at the beginning of your internship, meet with your supervisor and have a conversation about expectations.

Over the course of the internship, ask for more responsibility and actively look for things to do. Consider your goals and look for opportunities to meet them by participating in special events or projects or by sitting in on meetings and presentations.

Handling Problems/Concerns

If you ever have a problematic situation or concern at your internship, address it early. The sooner it is addressed, the more readily a solution can be reached. If comfortable, approach your supervisor to discuss the situation. You can also consult with your Faculty Supervisor or Career Services for help or an objective viewpoint.

Problems or concerns may include the following situations:

1. Being asked to do something that is illegal or unethical
2. Feeling harassed or unsafe at the site
3. Feeling pressure to work more hours than were agreed upon
4. Spending the majority of the internship hours doing clerical work

Build a Portfolio

It is helpful to keep records about what you did while at your internship. Even if your internship experience seems unforgettable, you may need to refresh your memory later on.

Journal about your days at the site. Create a list of your daily tasks and chart your feelings about your work. Which tasks did you like the most? Which seemed the least interesting? Reviewing the list later can help you write résumé content and make career decisions. Record your various projects. Describe the purpose and guidelines of each project and your particular contribution.

Keep professional souvenirs. Ask your supervisor if you can keep copies of any projects you work on: brochures, reports, fliers, etc. These can be great additions to a portfolio when you are looking for a job.

Capitalize on Your Contacts

An internship is an invaluable chance to network with people who work in the business. Network with these valuable resources! It is important to establish contacts with people who are doing what you think you would like to do. They may also be able to help you in future career opportunities or suggest contacts at other companies or organizations.

1. Collect business cards from people you meet.
2. Conduct informational interviews. Ask people for career and industry advice.
3. As you near the end of an internship, ask people if they will serve as a reference for you in the future.
4. Ask for copies of performance reviews or letters of recommendation.

NOTE: As a student intern, you represent ENC and have agreed to follow the community covenant on and off-campus. Please make sure all actions at your internship reflect this commitment to excellence.

I, _____, have read the above “Professionalism in Internships” article and am prepared to apply the principles and the ENC community covenant in my internship.