

Five Factors for a Successful Virtual Internship

By: Rahul Lohana and Claire Patterson

The Reality of Virtual Internships

With virtual internships emerging as the new normal for the foreseeable future, it may be best to examine what makes a successful virtual internship. To make the most out of your virtual internship, it matters what you put in. Aspects such as self-care, communication, morale, cultural fit and openness to learning impacts the quality of the internship.

Self-care

Find a middle ground between consistency and flexibility. Creating a routine can enhance productivity and bring structure to your life, the latter of which is sometimes difficult to achieve when working remotely. Try to work around the same hours most days and in the same location. However, don't forget to take advantage of the autonomy provided by the digital workspace as well. The ability to adjust your hours and location as necessary, can help you tailor your professional responsibilities to your lifestyle and preferred work habits. Perhaps you are most productive first thing in the morning or prefer to take an extended lunch break; experiment with your schedule to find what works best for you.

Communication

Although collaborating via digital platforms reduces spatial barriers to communication, it is important to recognize that it sometimes introduces an emotional disconnect between team members. In order to counteract this effect, make a conscious effort to build relationships. Set up virtual coffee chats with coworkers and supervisors to accelerate your integration into the group and facilitate meaningful relationships. LinkedIn is also a great tool for networking with other professionals in the industry. Take advantage of the flexibility that remote work has introduced into everyone's schedules and connect with someone you might not have had a chance to meet in an in-person work environment.

Morale

Working from home can sometimes become monotonous, so facilitating social interactions within your team can increase engagement and morale. Get creative when planning virtual get-togethers; online escape rooms, web-based game nights and digital happy hours are just a few ideas for bonding with your coworkers. Additionally, conducting regular team check-ins can boost employee happiness and ensure everyone is on the same page. Frequent socialization, even in a professional context, helps improve mental and emotional health and also provides an opportunity for everyone to continue strengthening their interpersonal skills while working remotely.

Cultural Fit

It can be challenging adjusting to the culture at a new firm, even more so virtually. Nonetheless, the best course of action is to attend any and all social events; these include board game nights, virtual happy hours, or playing charades over video. Additionally, connect with everyone – that’s right, everyone. Try to reach out to your colleagues, supervisors, and people from other departments to learn about their work and what they like to do outside of work. Finally, if possible, attend a social in person so you can get to know your team outside of a formal setting.

Continuous Learning

Learning extends far beyond the classroom and a virtual internship offers the flexibility to learn at your own pace within the firm. Developing a knowledge base on market news or specific industries and developing a skill set in software (Excel, Power Point) can prove valuable over the life your career. Additionally, the firm offers a wealth of resources from previous projects and research reports to give in-depth insights into the inner workings of the company. Thus, taking initiative to continue your learning and broadening your horizon can lead to new opportunities and interests down the road.

About the Authors



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