

VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS: ARE YOU READY?

by Peter Titlebaum

In light of the worldwide pandemic COVID-19, you need to understand and take more control of your virtual internship. Yes, you are still able to complete this experience. However, you will have to adjust your thinking and actions.

Internships have expected results, and even in this time, there is no reason to think yours will be any different. An internship allows you to get experience and contacts. Your biggest mistake will be not doing your homework before starting this experience.

Typical results of internship, virtual or in person.

1. Landing a job, or getting a solid letter of recommendation.
2. Deciding what you do not want to do after graduation.
3. Gaining a skill that will make you more job/career ready.

It is a new day in light of the pandemic. It could be you just need to get these internship credits as requirements for graduation. While this is understandable, it would be shortsighted. This is an opportunity to take control of a difficult situation. While advice is seldom or rarely taken, you are facing difficult times. You need to know how to succeed at a virtual internship.

Organization skills will be a key component for success, as you will need to be able to work independently. This is a necessary skill to possess and an advantage in the interview process after this experience.

Professionalism takes many forms when you work in a virtual environment. If you have to take part in online meetings, give attention to what viewers will see from your computer. They really do not want to see your unmade bed or a picture that might not be appropriate to all. Think of it as sharing too much information.

If you have to upload forms or letters of correspondence, make sure you proof them, as this says a great deal about your attention to detail. If you do not proofread, you are adding an extra step to your supervisor's workload. This will hurt your chances of getting a great letter of recommendation.

Believe in yourself. Ask your supervisor, "When I do a great job for you, will you use your contacts to help me get a job in the industry?" This will do two things—shows that you are doing this internship to get ahead, not just fulfilling a requirement, and, most important, you are giving your word that this is serious and you will do a great job. This will earn the respect of your boss.

Nobody gets rich from doing an internship, and some are not even paid. This is a test ride, not only for you but also for the organization. What that means is, they are seeing what type of professional you are and if you are the type of person, they want working for them after this experience is completed.

Measurement is key to leveraging the experience. You might ask, “How do I qualify what I am doing?” While you will be doing something different on your virtual internship, it is imperative that you track your experiences. For example, if you are making phone calls, track how many and to whom. If doing research, how will you share this information so it means something to the person reading your resume?

Your goal is to add to your resume. That means adding data in the form of numbers and percentages. Before you start your experience, it would be helpful to look at job postings that you want to apply for when you graduate.

This will help you start thinking in the same vocabulary. A perspective employer will be looking for industry vocabulary, and you will want to come across as a future professional working in that industry.

You might not be ready to start that job today, but it gives you valuable insight into the requirements that you will need to obtain a similar position. Keep this in mind as you do your virtual internship.

You should find a way to address one of the position requirements. This will go a long way in making this a worthwhile experience. It would be beneficial to share this with your virtual internship supervisor. Know your goals and what you would like to get out of the experience. They can help create assignments that will make sure you are more marketable after the experience.

The goal of this experience is to get somewhere on purpose. You should be knocking out a requirement to help you qualify for a job down the road. The virtual internship while maybe not ideal, you still need a plan for success. I hope this helps.

Peter Titlebaum, Ed.D. is a professor at the University of Dayton.

Courtesy of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.