

# A QUICK GUIDE TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS DURING INTERNSHIPS

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## A Quick Guide to Building Relationships During Internships

Internships are an important part of the career development experience for any college student. They offer you the opportunity to explore different career industries and organizations, learn and develop new skills, add work experience to your resume, and build new connections and relationships.

In many cases, an outstanding performance as an intern can result in a full-time job offer. Even if a full-time job doesn't come through, if your manager and your co-workers see how well you perform, they will be your biggest supporters in the job search and in your life beyond Wake Forest. Whether you are getting ready to begin a new internship or have already started one, here are some key tips for making the most of your experience and building meaningful relationships with your manager and colleagues.

### Quick Summary:

- *Show up with a positive attitude and prepared to take on any project or task.*
- *Pay attention, observe what's happening around you, and ask questions.*
- *Practice seeking out feedback to apply to the future.*
- *Build relationships as part of establishing your professional network.*
- *Stay in touch via email and LinkedIn to maintain your new connections.*

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### How You Show Up Matters

Before you even begin to build relationships at your internship site, the initial impression that you make with your manager and colleagues matters! This includes showing up to work on time, dressing appropriately for your work setting, and bringing a willingness to take on whatever projects or tasks are asked of you. Do whatever is needed and do not assume that your education equips you with so much knowledge that executing low-level projects is beneath you. The quality of every task you complete and every interaction you have will affect how you are perceived by your peers and colleagues.

People are paying attention. Even the little things matter. The way that you interact with your colleagues, your willingness to take on the mundane tasks, how well the job gets done – it all matters to the people around you. Before you can begin to build relationships and new connections, show your internship manager and colleagues that you are worth investing their time, energy, and expertise in.

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## Have a Willingness to Listen, Learn, and Ask Questions

After getting settled into your internship – and getting a clear understanding of the organization and your role in it – you can begin to seek out conversations with your manager and colleagues to learn more about their experiences and background.

To start, reach out to 2-3 people who you would like to get to know better. Invite them to have coffee or lunch with you for an informational conversation. You'll want to prepare some questions to ask to learn more about their career path, background and education, and advice for you as a college student exploring future career options, such as:

- *What experiences led you to your current job role?*
- *What is a typical day like for you and what aspects of your job do you find most interesting?*
- *What background or experiences should someone have if they want to get into this type of work or industry?*
- *How do you see this industry, or the skills needed for this type of work, changing in the future?*
- *Who else should I talk to within this organization to learn more about their career path?*

These types of conversations are the building blocks to establishing connections and possibly more meaningful relationships. Be sure to send a thank you note or email following any conversation to express gratitude for the sharing of time and expertise with you. You might also note your interest in meeting again in the future if the conversation went well and you want to learn more from this person.

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## Seek Out Feedback

An internship setting is a great place to practice asking for and receiving feedback. After you complete a project, ask your manager or other colleagues the following two questions:

1. *What did I do particularly well?*
2. *What could I improve upon moving forward?*

Listen carefully to their responses to these questions and thank them for their time and insight. Then, take some time to reflect on the feedback that you received. What did you hear that resonated with you? Was there anything surprising or challenging that you heard? What will do with this information in the future?

Throughout your internship, continue to find those natural opportunities to seek out feedback from the more experienced employees working with you. Then, you can make adjustments, as you're able, based on what you hear to improve your work moving forward. The more you practice asking for feedback, the more natural it will become to seek out feedback in the future!

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## **Build Your Network (and Possibly Establish a Mentoring Relationship)**

Everyone you meet at your internship setting is a potential member of your professional network. Take time to build relationships with your colleagues and manager. Ask questions about their career path and current job responsibilities and seek out advice regarding your own career path and interests. Whether you're hoping to turn a current internship into a full-time job opportunity post-college or simply doing an internship to gain work experience, the people you meet and interact with at your internship are the very same people who can connect you to future work opportunities or serve as recommendations for you. Keep that in mind as you build relationships during this experience.

To take relationship-building to a deeper level, you might also develop a relationship with an employee or manager at your internship setting who is willing to serve as a formal mentor to you. A formal mentor is someone who will help you work towards specific goals, meet with you regularly, ask questions to facilitate reflection about what you're learning, and ultimately connect you with other professionals in your career field of interest during the internship and beyond.

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## **Stay in Touch**

Always thank your manager, as well as the other employees at the organization who have worked with you, for the internship opportunity. Another great way to stay in touch is to connect with your internship manager and colleagues on LinkedIn. If you are interested in working at the organization full-time beyond graduation, stay in touch via email and ask about job openings or possible roles that could be a good fit for you.