

# Making the Most of your Internship: Professionalism in the Workplace

## Realistic Expectations

- Determine what *you* are expecting from your work site and your supervisor.
- Think about what *your supervisor and co-workers* are expecting from you.
- Make sure you have a clear job description. If necessary, develop one with your supervisor so that everyone is clear about your responsibilities from the outset.
- Know whom you will report, particularly if you have multiple supervisors.
- Don't hesitate to propose a particular activity or experience you want to pursue – especially if it supports your learning objectives.

## Daily Conduct

- Be careful with your appearance – dress appropriately and conservatively. Dress for the position you want, not the one you have.
- Be friendly; make an extra effort to get along with people.
- Keep personal information to yourself; don't let your life become the office soap opera.
- Be positive and supportive; make others look good whenever possible.
- Keep an open mind. Avoid jumping to conclusions and try to make informed judgments.
- Follow through – cover every angle of a project and be accurate.
- Communicate – keep people informed in a useful and succinct way.
- Listen to how other people organize their ideas and respond to various situations.
- Be assertive.
- Make sure your conduct is such that the employer will want to host St. Olaf students in the future.

## Time Management

- Plan and prioritize your day the day before (or use 15 minutes at the beginning of the day). Research indicates that for every hour of planning, you save three or four hours of work.
- Stay current with a single time management device that reminds you of important deadlines.
- Honor your working hours – arrive a few minutes early and work hard.
- Deal with the worst first – tackle the difficult issues and/or people early in your day.
- Know your rhythms and blues – what part of the day is best for you?

## Networking

- Develop a systematic plan to cultivate informal interpersonal contacts and relationships for three purposes: to compile information on your job search; to gain exposure to the field; and to gather names and referrals, etc.
- Remember that an effective networking meeting has a predetermined purpose, a structure and an agenda, but it is low-pressure, informal and conversational. Do not view it as an interview for a job.
- During breaks, lunch, or slow times ask co-workers about their jobs. Find out what they do on a day-to-day basis and what they like or dislike. Ask how their jobs compare to those of colleagues in other organizations; learn the trends in the profession.
- Get to meet/know the top decision-makers; they can provide valuable insight as to why and how things are done; observe their influence; watch their management style.
- Try to attend trade shows, conferences, and professional meetings/lunches.

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## DOs

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**DO milk the fact that you are a student.** As a student, you aren't threatening and can have more access and opportunities than a full-time employee.

**DO ask for things to do.** Rather than waiting to be told what to do, solve problems and take initiative. This is the best way to stand out from the crowd.

**DO get in the information loop.** Ask to attend meetings and events to learn how things really get done. Remember, decisions aren't always made in a conference room.

**DO hitch your wagon to a star.** Learn from the people who are the superstar performers and most respected individuals in the office.

**DO learn all you can about the industry and your organization.** Talk with people in different departments as well as clients and vendors. Read contracts, letters, memos, press releases, and trade publications to help you become informed on all elements of the operation, and understand how your work fits into the bigger picture.

**DO dress appropriately each day for the job.** Standards will vary depending on your location and job function. If you have a lot of client interaction, be prepared to dress more formally. When in doubt, be conservative.

**DO ask for constructive criticism.** Critical feedback is the most challenging to give and receive, but it's also the most useful. It's smart for you to seek out constructive criticism, rather than waiting for a formal review.

## DON'Ts

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**DON'T be intimidated because you are a student.** People are sometimes too busy to roll out the red carpet, so you have to make the first move to talk with co-workers and supervisors.

**DON'T gripe about the grunt work.** How long you do grunt work depends on what you make of it. Everything has a purpose, so learn how the small tasks fit into the big picture.

**DON'T get involved in the office gossip grapevine.** Gossiping about employees, interns or company business can get you in trouble.

**DON'T burn any bridges.** You never know when you will see someone later in your career.

**DON'T use email, instant messenger, and cell phones while you are at work to make plans with your friends.** Make sure that listening to your iPod isn't interfering with your work or giving the wrong impression to your supervisor and co-workers about your level of professionalism.

**DON'T wear flip flops to work.** Misinterpreting "business casual" to mean just "casual" is a common intern mistake. Open-toed shoes and tank-tops are not appropriate wear in many professional settings.

**DON'T be overly cocky.** You were probably hired in part due to your confidence and leadership skills. That said, don't reject critical feedback you receive, and don't assume you know best.

Adapted from Bradley Richardson's *Top 10 Tips for Interns*,  
Kerry Miller's *10 Top Goofs Interns Make*, and  
Roxana Hadad & Kay Peterson's *Top Tips for Internship Success*