

# GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR INTERNSHIP OR FIRST JOB

If you have not already considered doing an internship, you should! “An internship is an excellent opportunity for a student to gain practical work experience and evaluate a company,” said **Nichole Smith**, Mgr of Recruitment, **Bunge North America**. “It can help you to explore your career goals and make a solid employment decision upon graduation.” While it is the employer’s responsibility to provide you with a positive and rewarding experience, it is your responsibility to make the most out of it.

Here are a few tips on getting the most out of an internship or first job:

## Adopt the Right Attitudes

It is important to have an open-minded, positive attitude, and strong work ethic. Try to build a strong working foundation with your supervisor — go to lunch or ask for a tour of the town after work.

“Students will be successful in an internship if they are willing to try different things and experience new challenges,” said **Bill Roberts**, Agronomy Sls Mgr, **Central Valley Ag Coop**.

“Also, if students are willing to learn various areas of responsibility and do it with a positive attitude and have a strong work ethic, that can be a big asset to an organization.”

## Master Breaking-in Skills

Employers want to see you learn the way things are before you try to make suggestions for ways to improve. We don’t want to discourage you from being creative and innovative, but it is important that you take small steps to suggest improvements (unless asked) in order not to step on toes. Establish written goals with your manager and be sure to set some that you are confident you’ll obtain, but then also some stretch goals. When you do meet your objectives, make sure to market your successes, if only to your manager, in a non-boastful manner.

“Summer interns can better maximize their summer internship



Make the most of training provided during your internship. The way you approach training will tell your employer a lot about how you will approach your work.

experience by obtaining a simple list of employer goals or expectations, upfront early on in their work period (or ideally even before they start work),” said **Julie Le Sueur**, Sr Recruiter, **Crop Production Services**.

“If early on in the intern experience things are not going as well as was hoped, the intern should not hesitate to speak up to either their immediate supervisor or the HR/company representative who made initial contact with the student,” said Le Sueur. “If after even just one or two weeks things are shaky in an internship, the intern needs to speak up and professionally but clearly communicate their frustrations, needs, etc. So, hopefully, the work situation can quickly be addressed and turned around.”

## Build Effective Relationships

Seek a mentor upon arrival. This can be your supervisor or it doesn’t have to be, and you can have more than one. Continue to network even while in your job, join civic groups, associations, volunteer or extra-curricular activities. Keep in mind that network-

ing is a two way street — make sure that you do not only take from your network, but that you also give back.

“During the course of an internship experience, the most successful interns are typically the ones who take initiative, tackle their work with enthusiasm and most importantly, enjoy themselves,” said **Case McGee**, Dir of Entry-Level Professional Talent at **ADM**. “An equally critical component of a successful internship is the ability of a student to network within the organization. Networking allows an intern the ability to foster a broad range of contacts within and outside his or her field of expertise and creates long-lasting relationships. Taking these factors into consideration will create an experience to remember for an intern at ADM.”

## Manage Interpersonal Relationships

Quickly learn the organization and identify the key players. As you’ve experienced in college, being able to work in teams is also critical in the work world. One way to make this easier and will also help you in other aspects of your career, is to develop

effective listening skills and ask for input and feedback.

Try to be an easy employee to manage. Avoid drama. This can be done through asking questions about projects up front; openly discussing concerns with your supervisor; or avoiding office gossip, for example. Also be aware of possible misinterpretations, such as how a comment could be perceived over e-mail or IM. We all know that some times things can mean something different electronically versus verbally.

### Be Proactive at Resolving Issues

As a first time employee, your job may not be all that you thought it would be. Be willing to be flexible and adjust your expectations slightly to give the job a fair shot. If you are struggling with your job and task, don't be afraid to ask for help. Admitting what you don't know and your ability to resolve the issue is just as important to an employer as showing what you do know. Also, be aware of how you ask questions. If you do need to ask for help, try to develop a few solutions and propose those to your



Organizations can help you get involved with internships and provide additional opportunities for personal growth. (Above) Agriculture Future of America (AFA) member, Zane Unrau, is interviewed by AgriTalk Host Mike Adams.

supervisor and ask for feedback. This is better perceived than if you just go and ask for the answer.

"If you are bored or unchallenged in your work experience, you need to speak up and express what you are interested in doing more/learning more of and your interest in taking on more responsibility, etc.," said Le Sueur. "If you like what you see and experience in an internship, you should also let your supervisor and other managers at the company know that you are enjoying the experience. Employers need to hear occasionally that an intern, candidate, or new hire is happy in their role!"

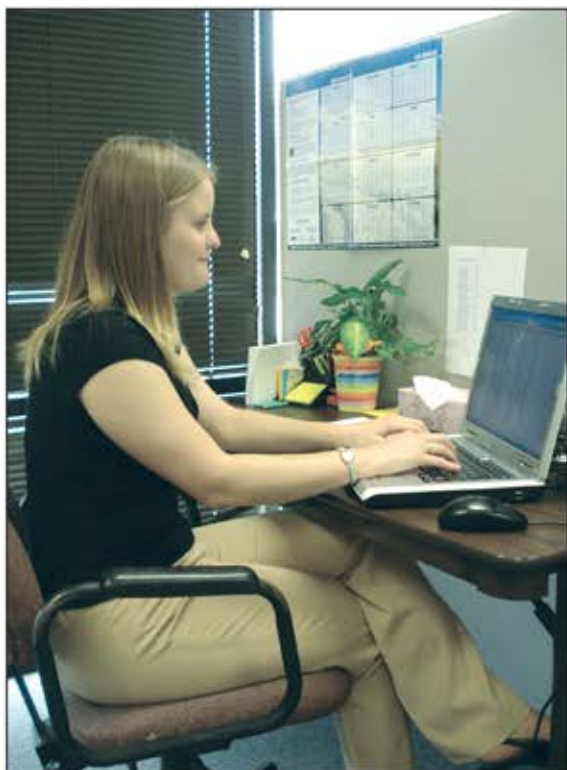
### Continue to Learn

To advance in your career, you will need to continue to learn. Internships provide a unique opportunity to do so. You can explore different areas of the organization and even new locations. Don't be afraid to ask for training. Obviously you can't spend your whole internship doing training, but if there

are things that relate to the job role you are currently fulfilling, see if you can sit in on it.

"Interns can create success for themselves by keeping an open mind about learning various areas of responsibility," said Roberts. "Also, if they are willing to relocate to a new geography to learn different practices at different locations, this is something that can teach them a lot."

After you have completed your internship, you and your employer have a decision to make. You don't really have any say over the employer's decision. If the company or the job was not right for you, you should move on. The job or company culture will not significantly change and all of a sudden become something you'll want to do full time. If you enjoyed your internship, be sure to tell your supervisor and other leaders of the organization. You can be as bold as to say you would be interested in a full-time job or another internship next year. They may not know the opportunities at that point, but if you keep in touch throughout the school year, don't be afraid to ask about future opportunities again. Your future is what you make of it!



Internships can be vital to helping you determine your career path and what fits your personality best, whether it is at a desk or out in the field.