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Facing Unexpected Challenges With an Internship

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As with any experience, you may find yourself faced with obstacles in your internship that you hadn’t anticipated. When going into any new situation, we usually assume that everything will run smoothly and that the overall experience will offer what we hoped for; in this case, an opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. Unfortunately, you may find yourself faced with challenges that you don’t feel able to handle. The two important things to remember is always to maintain your professionalism and always work to find ways that are mutually beneficial to both you and the employer that will help solve the problems you are facing.

Below we’ve listed some tips on how to face some of the challenges that you may find cropping up over the course of your internship.

Not What You Expected

One thing that might make your internship go more smoothly is to map out your expectations with your supervisor beforehand. Once you’ve done this, you can always go back and reiterate your expectations. If you didn’t come to an agreement during your interview, you might want to have a discussion with your supervisor as soon as possible to see if you can come to an agreement on what you will be expected to do.

Communicating your discontent will give your supervisor an opportunity to make some changes whenever possible. Always keep your communications on a positive note by letting your supervisor know that you are interested in learning and doing more to help with the running of the overall organization. Employers respect employees (and interns) who show initiative and can communicate their needs and expectations clearly using positive communications that serve to meet both their needs.

Conflict With Your Immediate Supervisor

Here again communicating your needs and expectations honestly can often defuse a stressful situation. Supervisors generally want their interns to have a positive experience and usually enjoy mentoring them throughout the internship experience. Differences of opinion are a fact of life and learning how to deal with personality differences is a great lesson that can be used throughout your internship and your future career. Again being mindful of your supervisor’s goals and expectations, you will often be able to work things out for the better.

If you deal with problems constructively and not ignore them, you will have a much better chance of solving them.

Bored With Not Much to Do

It is an easy one. Ask your supervisor for additional work to do. If he/she does not have any work for you, ask if you can contact other departments to see if they have work that you can help with. If these tactics fail, use your time wisely by reading journals in the field, scheduling informational interviews with co-workers, and offering your knowledge and talents to devise new and better ways to do things within the department.

Office Politics Are Difficult to Handle

As an intern or new employee, it is recommended that you stay away from office politics as much as possible. You want to promote yourself as a professional and engaging in backstabbing, and negative communication will not serve you well in meeting your personal and professional goals.

As a new professional, learning how to handle these types of difficulties is an excellent learning experience in itself. Developing open, honest communications can often diffuse many situations that occur in the workplace. By demonstrating your maturity to handle these and other situations that often occur on the job, you will be providing the employer with a positive impression of your interpersonal, problem-solving, and communications skills and your ability to deal with anything that may come along.