

THE IMPACT OF INTERNSHIPS

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Internships during high school helps to ensure post-secondary success through career exploration and other work-based learning opportunities. I remember my first internship during 11th grade in high school. I was excited and anxious when I received the news that I was accepted into the program. However, the excitement turned into nervousness because this was new uncharted territory that I had never entered before as a young person. I always excelled in high school with As and Bs, honor roll, etc., but, this was my first attempt to actually working with business professionals where I was expected to learn and contribute outside of the classroom.

This is the kind of story I share with the interns in our program. **I want them to understand that I once sat where they are. The nervousness, anxiety, and excitement are all normal. This is a chance to learn, explore, and grow before adulthood really kicks in.** You know the “adulthood” that consists of paying bills, raising a family, punching a clock, navigating the world of employment and, in some cases, unemployment.....LIFE.

Growing up in a rough neighborhood and raised by a single parent brought its own challenges. The internship was an opportunity to see something bigger and greater than my surroundings. I had a great rapport with my supervisor and departmental staff. My supervisor (Clare) would always compliment me on the work that I was doing in the Corporate Marketing department of a large insurance company. How could I remember her name and the name of the department so many years later? This is how life changing it was for me. I was given projects where I not only made significant contributions but more so met time sensitive deadlines. This is where I saw my time management skills really come to fruition and be

an extension to my classroom learning. It was during my internship that I learned about W-2s and W- 4s and had my first real encounter with taxes. I was expecting to receive “gross” pay for hours worked but to my surprise then, the net is what I would have received. Quite shocking initially to say the least.

The skills learned during an internship are so valuable that it helps students develop both personally and professionally. In our program students learn about the job application process. They must submit an application and other required paperwork such as I-9 to determine employment eligibility. There is a competitive interview process, frequent check-ins, worksite

visits and employer evaluation at the end. The results of the employer evaluation is shared with each intern as a professional development tool. Similar to our annual evaluations completed at our own place of business. In addition, students learn how to complete and submit timesheets, how to dress for an interview, and how to manage his or her time. Time management is a crucial component as interns juggle academic work, extracurricular activities and internship experiences.

We try to make the experience as real world as possible. Our interns complete career readiness training, produce resumes, participate in workplace tours, mock interviews and other experiential learning activities. We do allow time for reflection to really take in what they have learned over a period of time. Internships is a great tool for career exploration. Like myself, I was unsure of my career path right out of high school. An internship will give you a guide through means of exposure and awareness. From my own internship experience, I knew I did not want to go into the insurance field. I always tell the interns there are two things they will gain from the experience (1) they will acquire skills and hopefully get their interest peeked into an area they had never considered or (2) they will know what field or industry they wish to stand clear of. Either way, it is a *Win-Win* situation.

For me, my current role is full circle. I am a product of the environment in which I was born, raised, educated now currently employed through. I once sat where my interns are with anticipation early

on and then sense of satisfaction when completed. It opened doors for me and I hope each encounter will do the same for them. I encourage them to show up, give each task their best, learn as much as they can along the way, keep their resume updated, create their own network, and explore, explore, explore. Within the 1st year of implementation, our team placed over 300 students in an internship.

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Tamara works for Hartford Public Schools as the Assistant Director of Career Pathways, Internships and Business Operations. Tamara is an experienced presenter with expertise in internships, partner development, and community engagement. She regularly presents to teachers, students, parents, and administrators about program opportunities and youth workforce development strategies. Tamara holds a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA), 085 School Business Administrator Certification from the State of Connecticut, and Project Management Certification from the University of New Haven. In addition to her role with Hartford Public Schools, Tamara holds an adjunct professorial position in the business department at Asnuntuck Community College where she teaches on campus and within the Department of Corrections. She was recently recognized in the Women of Distinction Magazine as a Leader in her field and received a Community Service Award from a local non-profit agency. Tamara is an Advisory Board Member, an Author, a Philanthropist and Mentor. She spends her time volunteering with various organizations to include community food drives, women empowerment conferences, and fundraising efforts for Cancer Awareness and Juvenile Diabetes. She resides in her hometown with her husband and their children.

