

# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR INTERNSHIP

## Now that you're about to start...

### GATHERING INFORMATION

- For the first several weeks, soak up all the information you can. Ask for literature that can help you understand your job, the organization, and its environment (annual reports, newsletters, memos, specific publications relevant to your duties, organizational charts, policies, procedure manuals, mission statements, etc.)
- You may be overwhelmed by all the information you receive in the beginning. Not to worry. Work hard on the tasks assigned to you, continue to make a positive impression on those around you with your interest and dedication, and the pieces of the puzzle(s) will start to come together sooner than you might think.
- ASK QUESTIONS. There may be many people who can help you. Seek help from as many sources as is reasonable.
- Learn the communications systems (computers, phones, etc.) of your office as soon as possible. These will be essential to your success and keep you in the information loop. Don't exaggerate your experience with these systems. Proper training at the beginning will make a world of difference.
- Ask about the history and goals of your organization, and of your functional area within it. Ask about the larger social, political, legislative or other context within which your organization operates. This framework can give you a better perspective on your tasks, and on your ability to make a difference on the issues and problems which you are assigned.

### INTERACTING WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR

- Use discussions about the Learning Contract as an opportunity for you and your supervisor to establish clear expectations and goals for your internship.
- Ask your supervisor to describe his/her management style. Under normal conditions it can take months to assess someone's management style and expectations. As you don't have months in which to do this, you can speed this process by asking your supervisor to describe:
  - His/her preferred method of communication (e-mail, phone, face-to-face conversation).
  - The type and level of feedback you should give and receive (Who can you approach with concerns? Does the supervisor want to see your work at the end of a project or at intermediate stages? What follow-up is desired?).
  - How deadlines for your work will be established and communicated.
  - His/her expectations for your performance.
- Ask your supervisor to help you prioritize your assignments.
- Establish with your supervisor if he/she wants regular (sometimes weekly) summaries of your accomplishments. If so, will you be holding regular meetings, or does your supervisor want those summaries on e-mail or through some other means?
- Note that much of the above will be established as you complete the Learning Contract; other issues will be worked out throughout the course of the internship.
- As much as you ask questions, LISTEN. The answers you're given, and the ongoing feedback on your performance will help you to do the best job you can, and to get the most out of the internship experience.
- Give positive feedback to your supervisor when and where appropriate.

## **NETWORKING**

- Ask colleagues to share memorable cases or experiences with you. You can tap into their knowledge and learn from their successes and failures.
- Ask to meet with people outside of your department and/or functional area. A broad range of contacts can help you to get a better picture of the entire organization and how the units relate. Try to meet people who've had experiences that interest you.
- If there are several interns in your organization, get together with them. Share your experiences. Discuss problem-solving strategies, and which have worked better than others. Learn from their insights and challenges. Use each other as a peer support network.
- See if your organization has any Madison alumni on staff. They will frequently be invaluable networking contacts, and will have an appreciation of your academic preparation and the particular challenges you may be facing. You may be able to build mentoring relationships this way.
- Attend all employee social events to which you're invited. These will help others with whom you work feel more comfortable with you, give you an entry into organizational culture, and offer good networking opportunities.

## **GENERAL TIPS**

- Don't become frustrated if the progress of projects is slower than you expected. Some projects may take years from start to finish and may entail a level of detail beyond that to which you're accustomed. Use that as a learning experience about the demands and requirements of the professional world, and of the kind of contribution that you're able to make.
- Try to maintain the proper balance between getting to know your co-workers on a personal level, and spending too much time socializing. Building interpersonal relationships can help you work more smoothly and collegially. However, excessive socializing (especially during working hours and/or in the workplace) can send the wrong message about your work ethic and professionalism.
- If you are interested in future employment opportunities with the organization, ask your supervisor to explain the hiring process. Do not assume that a strong performance as an intern will necessarily lead to an offer. If your supervisor thinks that you're a strong candidate for full-time employment, he/she may help you to begin the process. Even if there are no immediate openings with your organization, your supervisor may have suggestions of other organizations in similar fields with whom you might apply.
- Keep in touch with the JMC Field Experience Office and the Director of Field Experience about any issues, difficulties, concerns or questions that arise over the course of the internship. If you find yourself in a difficult situation and aren't sure how to address it, the Director can often be a source of suggestions and support. If you and your supervisor are not communicating effectively, the Director can sometimes intervene to alleviate that situation.
- Most of all, establish and maintain a strong work ethic throughout the internship. **YOU WILL GET OUT OF YOUR INTERNSHIP WHAT YOU PUT INTO IT.**