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## **MORE THAN “JUST AN INTERN” ADDING VALUE TO YOUR INTERNSHIP ORGANIZATION**

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Interns can serve as a great source of innovation for employers. Every organization, big and small, for-profit and non-profit, is challenged with how they can do things better. This may come in the form of doing more with less, improving efficiency, driving down expenses, increasing productivity, or increasing customer satisfaction. It all comes back to improving what they do, and the ideal resource to task with this responsibility is their intern(s).

If your employer fails to explicitly identify this as an area of responsibility for you, volunteer to work on it. Why? First, it's a sure-fire way to stand apart from your peers. After ensuring that you are exceeding expectations as it relates to your regularly assigned tasks and responsibilities, consider volunteering to take on the added responsibility of looking for new and better ways of doing things. Avoid brainstorming and investigating new ways of doing things, if doing so will compromise your “regular” work.

Though it sounds like a lot of extra work, it may be easier than you think. You have the benefit of being completely new to the environment. If you simply make a conscious effort to look for improvement opportunities, they will come to you. Here is a word of caution, however. It's not as simple as going to your supervisor or manager and saying, “I know how you can do better at your jobs.” You'll have to back up your statement. When asked to support your recommendations, do not use words like “I think,” “probably,” or “I like this way better”. If you say those things, be prepared for a less than supportive response.

### **Making Your Case**

The key is to back up recommendations with data. Tell your employer that you have already developed the “business case” to support your ideas. They'll love it. What is the “business case”? It is simply the facts to support your idea. Be able to demonstrate how your recommendation improves the business by influencing a key performance driver / metric. What are these you ask? Typically they deal with things related to service, cost, and quality. Think of it as an experiment. Formulate your hypothesis, then test it (if you do “x,” then outcome “y” will be achieved). Absent a “lab” where you can actually perform the test, gather current statistics and/or historical data, formulate fact-driven assumptions about how the introduction of your recommendation would change the environment and produce a new set of outcomes. Then present the findings to your employer in a clear, concise manner. Your employer will be thoroughly impressed.

Still trying to wrap your head around this data thing? Well, here are a couple examples that may help.

### **Example One - Marketing & PR Internship**

You are in a Marketing and PR internship with a small to medium-sized business. Your projects and assignments relate to promoting the company's products and services to both current and potential customers. You are writing a lot of ad copy, primarily for traditional print (e.g. local publications, including the Yellow Book and others). Also, you assist with promotions that air on radio and TV and sometimes via print. You've noticed that overall, the approaches are pretty traditional. There appears to be little to no use of social media.

Additionally, the employer's website appears to be underutilized as a tool for lead generation and attracting new customers. You begin to wonder if the company would benefit from exploring some of these new technologies. A simple cost/benefit analysis would be a great place to start.

Find out the costs associated with all of the existing marketing methods. Then, see if there is information concerning outcomes, or the benefit of those current approaches (e.g., how many leads each month, quarter, or year originate from a Yellow Book, Radio or TV ad). If you're lucky enough to find all of this information, you'll be able to estimate the cost per lead (BTW, that's a key metric).

Now, take a look at some of the ideas you might suggest. How much would it cost to make the improvements and/or take better advantage of existing technologies? Once you know the cost, you'll need to estimate how many potential leads you can reasonably expect to generate via these methods. You'll likely need to do some research, but you should be able to find some key industry benchmarks. Armed with that information, you should now be able to estimate a cost per lead for the new methods you are suggesting. Now, compare the dollar amounts. If you can demonstrate that your new approaches will cost less than the traditional means, you're likely to catch the attention of the business owner, giving them reason to pause and consider what it is you're proposing.

### **Example Two - Purchasing & Procurement Internship**

Your purchasing and procurement internship with a small to medium-sized manufacturing firm is off to a good start. Your primary project for the summer is to research and analyze new suppliers in several critical purchasing categories. Service, cost and quality are all very important; however, you get the impression from your manager that cost (without compromising service and quality) are of the utmost importance. The firm is feeling pressure from its competitors and wants to be able to find lower-priced suppliers, so they can in turn pass those cost savings to their customers.

During the internship you notice that the purchasing process is very labor-intensive. It is oriented towards a manual (e.g. lots of paper), rather than an automated process. There seems to be duplication and wasted effort throughout (e.g. information on a paper order request form has to be keyed into a separate ordering system). You wonder if there is money to be saved with improvements to the process? To know for sure, you begin to document the current process - every step performed by every person. You gather information on how much time it takes each person to complete each step. With the current step documented, you associate a cost with every step. This means you will consider the amount of time it takes to complete each step and the rate of pay for employees (e.g., a five minute step performed by someone making \$10 hour costs the company \$0.83 every time it's performed; that's just straight salary).

With that complete, turn your attention to a future, or alternative, state design. Take the new system you have formulated, and perform the exact same exercise as done for the current state - document each step, estimate the time to complete it, and estimate the cost of every step. When finished, you can compare the total cost of completing an order via the old process, as compared to your new process. Which is cheaper? Assuming it's your future



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state design, your manager will want to explore your idea further to better understand what implications there might be when implementing your new way.

It probably won't be that simple. But if you commit to doing these things, here's the worst that will happen:

- 1.) You will fully commit yourself to your employer
- 2.) You will do all that you can to advance their business and make them better
- 3.) You will be able to conclude your internship with a sense of pride and satisfaction.

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