

A Few Words of Advice

The decision to spend your entire semester working, potentially far from home, instead of taking the well-traveled route of classes and professors can be a difficult one to make. After having done just that, we're confident that it was one of the best decisions we made in law school that resulted in an experience that helped illuminate what a legal career looks like, a unique line on the resume with multiple talking points, and an insightful semester of learning and growth that illustrated the synergies that are growing between law, business, and technology. We're excited to share a few of these insights and tips with you now and we're confident you'll leave your seven-month internship feeling ready as ever for your legal career.

Communicating Effectively

Communicating well is a life skill that, when learned and done well, has the capability of drastically improving the interactions you have with peers and supervisors. These improved interactions have the potential to result in desirable work or tasks, improved personal progress, and easier goal setting and accomplishing. Transitioning from the classroom setting to the workplace leads to different communication expectations and should be a high priority as you gear up for your seven-month internship.

The system of task assignments will vary depending on your workplace, but it can be expected that you'll find yourself in a position of having finished a task earlier than expected and need more work or simply wish to find another project in addition to your current workload. Becoming comfortable with walking around, visiting offices, and approaching supervisors when you're in need of more work can be a distinguishing factor in getting new assignments. Taking the initiative and seeking out individuals with a simple, "hey, I've got some bandwidth and would love to help you with any projects you're working on" demonstrates that you're able and willing to work on projects and helps keep you at the forefront of your supervisor's minds when assigning tasks.

Maintaining these open lines of communication is useful when your tasks or projects are not as interesting or relevant to your interests as you would like. This isn't to say that you should constantly complain about every boring assignment you receive, rather you should remember that speaking with your manager with tact if you're consistently given assignments you're not interested in is a polite way of ensuring you get the most out of your internship experience.

Effective communication is a key skill that will help you leave a positive impression on supervisors as well as keep the work you complete during your internship interesting and beneficial for your own future legal career.

Finding Mentorship

When you have communicated effectively and navigated the legal department at your firm or company, you will find people who stand out to you as potential mentors. These mentors might take any number of forms. They could be recent graduates or employees that have been with the same organization for decades. Certain people will stand out as potential mentors. They will be more generous with their time, they will be more precise with their critiques, and they will pay attention to your development.

It is easiest to find mentorship when you demonstrate your interest in a subject area. Go beyond the

normal call of duty and show that you are trying to be useful. In a normal workplace relationship, interns are likely to be delegated smaller tasks and be given opportunities to sit in on issues of larger importance. Signifying that you are doing more than is necessary is an important facet of winning over a mentor. In my experience, people are more willing to help those who are making clear efforts to help themselves. The more you reveal yourself to be willing and excited to grow, the more people will be willing to facilitate that development. This pursuit of mentorship is absolutely imbricated with effective communication. Displaying your enthusiasm and willingness to be a value-add will firmly establish you as a member of the team, which will earn you more projects and more opportunities to learn. Say “yes” frequently, choose carefully when to say “no.”

Mentors are the people who will go to bat for you after you leave your firm or company. They will be the ones to write letters of recommendation, they will be the ones that refer you to other firms or other companies, and they will hopefully be mentors for life. You never know where life will take you, and mentor-mentee relationships tend to involve a lifetime of reconnections. With any luck, your desire to go the extra mile will be reciprocated by your mentor.

Finding Your Niche

Finding your niche increases your value-add within an organization and will provide you with a feeling of accomplishment. However, finding your niche is a process that can be quite complex. A 7 month IFLP internship gives you the time to find a niche and allows you to provide more value than a short term intern, because becoming accustomed to a department and learning enough to do value-add work can take the entire 8 weeks. While the longer duration is going to somewhat relieve this pressure, acclimating as soon as possible is in an intern’s best interest. You can discover your niche by observing your supervisor, your team members, and how your team interacts with the organization at large. While observing these people and relationships keeping the following questions in mind should be helpful:

- How does each person complete their tasks?
- How do their tasks overlap?
- Are there any gaps?
- When do people reach out for help or solicit feedback?
- How are you similar to people already on the team?
- How are you different from the people already on the team?

Answering these questions can help you discern your value proposition and help you carve out a niche for yourself. However, keep in mind these things are fluid, especially in a busy department. Do not just complete this cycle of observation and adjustment once. It must be an ongoing process, so always remember your growth mindset when working in a challenging environment.

Conclusion

The 7 month placement you are about to begin is a unique opportunity and with some proper care and planning you will be able to get an interesting competitive advantage moving forward. Notice that our tips (communicate, find mentorship, and find your niche) all focus on effectively building professional relationships. Keep in mind that you are working in a client driven industry and that these types of relationship skills will serve you well in your future endeavors. We hope you do your best moving forward to make the most of your placement, and we are excited to see what you accomplish. Good Luck!