My Summer Internship Hunt Experience: A Comedy of Errors (and Lessons Learned)

Hey everyone, grab a snack and settle in because I'm about to spill the tea on my first summer in the good ol' US of A as a fresh-faced undergrad. Picture this: wide-eyed international student armed with a GPA that looked decent on paper and a burning desire to "make it" in the land of opportunity. My mission? To snag a killer summer internship that would catapult me to career stardom. Spoiler alert: it didn't quite pan out that way.

Let's just say my internship hunt was less "glamorous montage" and more "slapstick comedy." I applied to everything – from tech giants to tiny startups. I even considered becoming a dog walker if it meant a paycheck (okay, maybe not, but you get the idea).

The interviews? Oh boy, the interviews. I'd walk in, trying to project this image of a confident, capable young professional, but inside, I was a jittery mess. I knew my stuff, technically, but presenting it? "Selling myself?" That was a whole different ball game. I’d fumble through answers, my voice cracking, and my carefully rehearsed talking points vanishing into thin air. It was like trying to perform a complex magic trick while wearing oven mitts.

I remember one interview where I was asked about a project I'd done. I started explaining, got lost in the weeds, and ended up rambling about a completely unrelated meme I'd seen that morning. Yeah, not my finest moment.

The rejections started rolling in, each email feeling like a tiny stab in the back. "We regret to inform you..." became the soundtrack of my summer. I'd wallow for a bit, indulge in some comfort food (mostly ice-cream), and then reluctantly dust myself off and apply to more places. It was a vicious cycle.

What did I learn? A whole lot, actually. And looking back, I wish I'd done a few things differently:

* **Confidence is Key (Duh):** I spent too much time worrying about what I didn't know instead of highlighting what I did. Practice, practice, practice! Rehearse answers, record yourself, and get feedback from anyone who'll listen.
* **Control the controllables:** I spent way too much time worrying about things I couldn't change – the economy, the competition, the interviewer's mood. Instead, I should have focused on what I could control: my resume, my interview skills, and my attitude.
* **Patience, Grasshopper:** This is the hardest one for me. I'm naturally impatient, and the constant rejections made me feel like I was going nowhere. But job hunting is a marathon, not a sprint. You have to keep pushing, even when you feel like giving up.

Next, instead of just saying "networking is important," I want to talk about something deeper: **owning your story and being proud of it.**

Look, I'm not going to lie. I'm an international student at a pretty swanky university. So yes, I'm privileged.

And for a while, that made me feel…weird. Like I had to downplay my background to seem more "relatable" or "hardworking." I'd try to avoid talking about where I came from, or how I got here, because I didn't want people to think I had it easy.

But here’s the thing: everyone has a story. Some people have faced incredible hardships, while others have had more opportunities. And guess what? That's okay.

Instead of hiding my privilege, I realized I needed to own it. Not in a bragging way, but in a way that acknowledged the opportunities I've been given and expressed genuine gratitude.

Here’s how I started to reframe it:

* **Gratitude is Key:** I began to focus on being thankful for the support I've received. Thankful for my family, for the education I'm getting, and for the chance to be in the US.
* **Use Your Platform:** Being privileged doesn't mean you can't work hard or make a difference. It means you have a platform to do more. I started volunteering and looking for ways to use my skills to help others.
* **Authenticity Wins:** Trying to be someone you're not is exhausting. People can see through it. Be yourself, be honest about your background, and let your personality shine.
* **Your Story is Unique:** Even if you have a privileged background, your journey is still your own. The challenges you face, the lessons you learn, and the goals you set are all part of your unique story.

I wish I had understood this during my internship hunt. I spent so much time trying to fit into a mold, trying to be what I thought companies wanted, that I forgot to be myself.

Now, when I interview for early career jobs, I talk about my background openly. I acknowledge my privilege, but I also emphasize my drive, my passion, and my commitment to learning. I talk about the things I've done, the challenges I've overcome, and the goals I've set for myself. And you know what? It works. People respond to authenticity. They appreciate honesty and vulnerability.

But, even with my initial internship woes, the tide eventually turned. After a period of relentless applications and a bit of luck, I landed an internship at Concepta Innovation, a growing startup. It was a world away from the corporate giants I'd initially targeted, and it was exactly what I needed. At Concepta, I quickly learned that 'wearing different hats' wasn't just a cliché; it was a daily reality. One day I'd be brainstorming marketing strategies, the next I'd be diving into data analysis, and then I'd be helping troubleshoot a software bug. My manager at Concepta was instrumental in making it a truly valuable experience. They didn't just see me as an extra pair of hands; they invested in my learning, ensuring I was exposed to various aspects of my field and actively sought to broaden my understanding. They prioritized my growth, making sure I benefitted from the internship as much as they benefitted from my contributions. It was a refreshing change of pace, and it solidified my understanding that finding the right environment, and the right manager, is paramount

.

>>>>> Fast forward to today, and I'm focusing on early career jobs. I'm still learning, still growing, and still occasionally having those "oh-my-gosh-did-I-really-say-that?" moments. But I'm also more confident, more resilient, and more grateful for the lessons I learned from my first summer when I had the guilt of not having anything to do.

Every rejection, while it stung, taught me something valuable. It showed me where I needed to improve and gave me the motivation to keep going. I'm still working on my patience (it’s a daily struggle), but I'm learning to appreciate the journey.

So, to all the fellow fresh grads out there, especially the international ones, who are navigating the crazy world of job hunting: you're not alone. Embrace the chaos, learn from your mistakes, and remember to laugh along the way. And to anyone out there who's feeling insecure about their background, remember this: your story is your superpower. Own it, be proud of it, and use it to make a positive impact. And yes please, be thankful for your opportunities.  
  
More importantly, remember that you are capable, and you will find your place. And if you ever see me at a career fair, come say hi, and we can laugh about our internship fails together.