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Follow the Yellow-Brick Road: Internships and the Road to Professional Success

DECEMBER 9, 2015 in [INTERNSHIPS & JOB ADVICE](#)

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The summer internship: every college student's biggest dream and worst nightmare. Interning is presented to college students as the next step in building your resume to prepare for the job market, or as I like to think about it, the next step down the yellow-brick road to the Emerald City, the capital of "success." With the checklist mentality often adopted by the millennial generation, the coveted internship has slipped into a line on a resume instead of a launch into independence and maturity.

I knew that this summer was the year I was supposed to find the perfect internship, make the right connections and ultimately be hired after my senior year. In one of many late-night panics I came across a D.C. start-up that was looking for a public relations intern.

The description sounded interesting, the interview went fantastic and the proposed projects gave me more creativity and experience than any coffee-fetching intern could have hoped for. I was excited for the opportunity and the ability for my peers and future interviewers to be impressed by me. I was on my way down the yellow-brick road.

With three heel clicks I was off in my pencil skirt and ruby red slippers toward my new internship. The first day on the job can be a little overwhelming; you have new people to meet, a new routine to grasp and a computer login that never works. This first day however came with the realization that I, a third-year public relations student, was the entire public relations team, the sole leader of the company's rebranding efforts and the organizer of their first major event.

While I got over the shock of this responsibility, my boss was busy giving me the login to social media, the domain to the website I was to create and the media contact list to improve. I wasn't learning by observing, I was teaching. I wasn't giving an opinion for practice, I was giving an opinion that affected the success and future of this start-up and its nonprofit clients.

The D.C. metro's inability to run on time gave me a chance to comprehend just what I had gotten myself into: advising a nonprofit with no prior public relations efforts. I fished through my class notes, textbooks, past internship



Megan Burpo, Virginia Tech University PRSSA Chapter member.



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materials, researched new articles and prepared to pull my weight. Two and a half months later the company succeeded in all of its rebranding, website and event goals.

The internship forced me to learn a lot about nonprofit public relations very quickly. I made mistakes; I winged-it; I was frustrated; I loved it. I was forced to open my eyes to what an internship is: a trial run of the not-perfect and ever-changing real world. I wasn’t surrounded by a bounty of talented public relations professionals but by innovative peers from diverse backgrounds. Maybe my resume doesn’t show a top agency but it shows a level of authenticity I didn’t know existed within thirteen weeks. I am proud of my education, extracurriculars and experiences; but I am most proud that my road leads to the Emerald City, the capital of “dedication.”

Be sure to visit the [PRSSA Internship Center](#) if you are looking to add experience to your resume.

What are some of the most rewarding internship experiences you have had during college?

—
Megan Burpo is a senior public relations major and professional writing minor at Virginia Tech. You can connect and see more of Megan’s writing on [LinkedIn](#), or she can be contacted at meganb93@vt.edu.

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