

I have just one week left in my internship with Catholic Relief Services. In the last six months I've been worked in three different offices: La Paz, Bolivia; Quito, Ecuador and Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Three offices in six months means I have met dozens of new coworkers, adjusted to a new office cultures and adjusted my work style based on the unique off environment. It has been a crash course in how to be an effective intern. I've made all manner of mistakes, but as I wrap this experience up, I'd like to write a few of my key lessons that I wish I would have known before I left grad school:

1. **Ask Questions, unless you can google the answers** – This is a basic, but useful tip. Become well versed in your organizations material. If they've given it to you: read it. Highlight it. Write questions in the margins. Your bosses? Look them up on LinkedIn. Try to know as much as you can about who you're going to work with beforehand. This will help you. Once you've done these two things, go ahead, ask questions! Your supervisors know you're an intern and expect you to have lots of questions, but asking something that was in the material will show them you haven't really read it, and that isn't good. Once your work starts and you have a question about the project, before you send an email asking for help, stop and think to yourself: Could I find this answer out a different way? Does google have the answers? Does one of my colleagues know? Go to them first, then to your supervisors. You will appear engaged, prepared and curious.
2. **Figure out the power structure**-In grad school I took a class on Network Analysis, a data mapping tool that allows you to look at groups of people and understand who has power, who has influence, and who has the knowledge. Think about your organization this way. Ask yourself: who seems to have influence here? Who has worked here the longest? Who is new? It's important you understand not only the formal hierarchy of your organization but also the informal: who sits together at lunch? Who arrives the earliest? Who stays the latest? If there are communication difficulties, where and how do they happen? This will help you navigate you learn who you can go to with questions about your project, or time off, or company culture.
3. **Model your e-mail language off those of your colleagues**- My work is in Spanish, so this was especially important because I had never learned how to write formal documents in my second language". For the first few weeks, I kept a note on my desktop titled, "key phrases" and a list of great sentences from my colleague's e-mail. But this works for English too. Note how your colleagues talk to each other, and when in doubt: always go more formal.
4. **Don't e-mail while angry**- Just wait. When deadlines are tight are people are tired, it's easy to fire off a quick e-mail when you're frustrated. It's better to take a breath and talk to someone in person, or wait five minutes and write it again.
5. **Listen**- Your internship is about learning, and the best way to do this is to watch and listen. Ask if you can sit in on meetings that interest you. Bigger organizations often have webinars or other learning opportunities, make sure to sign up.
6. **Eat lunch with your coworkers**- Having lunch with your coworkers shows you're interested in getting to know them. This is a great chance to find out about what a career in this organization looks like.
7. **Remember personal details about your colleagues**- You want to build repoire with your colleagues, and an easy way to do this is to remember personal details about them. Make a calendar event for birthdays. Write down the name of their

children/spouse/dog/cat. People appreciate the extra effort of a birthday card or asking how their child is doing in kindergarten.

- 8. Show up to meetings prepared-** At my office, everyone is always running a million miles an hour. It is a rare opportunity to get a meeting with a **higher up**, and when I do, it might only be for fifteen minutes. Seize this opportunity. Before the meeting make a list of questions you need answers to. Know which ones are the highest priority. If you're running out of time in the meeting, now is the time to suggest meeting again. Speaking in person is always more effective than a meeting invite that gets buried in their email.
- 9. Take care of yourself-** While you may be working long hours, you need to be prioritizing taking care of yourself. This becomes especially important if you're working on a project that requires you to be in the field often. For me, I make sure I always have probiotics, a full water bottle, Nescafé, a book, and a yoga mat. These five items help me stay physically and emotionally healthy, so I can keep working hard.
- 10. Try to do your best, but remember: everyone knows you're an intern-** On my first few projects, I found that when I hit a point where I wasn't sure how to continue, I would freeze up and stare at my computer screen for hours, worrying that I was an incompetent intern and my supervisor would realize she had made a mistake in hiring me. This was the wrong way to handle it. While there are some things you should know (review tip #1), your supervisor knows you're an intern and expects you to ask questions. If you feel stuck on an aspect of your project, make a list of questions and then go speak to your supervisor. Their job is to guide and mentor you.

An internship is, above all, an opportunity to learn. I hope you can follow these tips, but also give yourself room to make mistakes. I learned most of these lessons the hard way. A new organization in a new environment is daunting, but as long as you approach it with an open mind, a willingness to work and eager to learn, you will do just fine. Good luck!