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SPA Leadership – Internship

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Weekly Journal

**Subheading: Internship Search, Application, and First Impressions**

I have made three goals for the semester based on what I want to improve most throughout my time at NFSN. First, I would like to increase my communication skills. For me, this means asking questions more often, asking for clarification, speaking up when I am struggling with something, responding more quickly to emails, and just becoming an overall better communicator with my supervisor and fellow employees. The next all I have is to improve my workplace etiquette. All my workplaces in the past have been schools or camps which have a certain etiquette to them that it's very specific to being an educator, but I have never had experience in an office setting or a virtual office setting before. There are a lot of subtle rules that I don't know about/don't understand and I would like to learn more about. This might include how long to wait until sending a follow-up email, or what kind of language I should use around certain people. My last goal is to increase my confidence. Though this is not specific to where I'm working, nor specific to job “skills”, it is something I definitely need to work on, especially as a woman of color. I know my capabilities and I know that I am intelligent and I have things to bring to the table, but sometimes it is easy to forget this especially when I am the only young, black, female person in the workspace. Increasing my confidence only comes from myself and learning that I have value and that my voice deserves to be heard. All these things will help me in future positions and in school end our overall useful tips for life that I think that I can learn during my internship.

I started my internship before starting this fall semester. So, I started looking for internships very early to make sure that I could secure one for this class since I knew that I would have a deadline of having to have the internship before August. I looked a lot on handshake and indeed for an internship. I found handshake to be super helpful and had tons of great opportunities that I couldn't really find anywhere else. I think that handshake does a good job of matching you with opportunities and it is very helpful end information that it provides. It's also very easy to go to info sessions through handshake and be able to connect with someone after words. I think I applied to two internships before applying to the National Farm to School Network. One of the internships I applied to I did not receive and the second internship I applied to I did not hear back from at all. this was all okay with me because I started so early and I was not worried about finding one right away, I just decided to apply because they seemed interesting to me. The way I found the National Farm to School Network prove to me how important it is to foster connections, just like every adult, especially my dad, tells me. One supervisor that I worked under at my old job, sent me an email saying that an organization that was related to the one I was already working at was accepting applications for a new intern position. I thanked her for sending me this email and decided to apply to the position. This ended up being the position that I acquired and I'm still in! I knew that I really wanted this position, so I went to my career counselor for help on my cover letter and resume. After writing a cover letter and submitting my resume I was granted an interview. This was Not my first interview, so I knew how to prepare for it. I spent hours watching YouTube videos and going on to websites looking for sample interview questions. I made sure that I wrote down all my answers to these common questions and made sure I had easy reference to all of my past experience and different things that I was passionate about. Then the interview came, and I felt very prepared and it was very easy to have a good conversation with my interviewer. After a few weeks, I was offered the position! I decided to take this position because it involved work that I didn't have experiencing but at a topic that I had experience in which would make the transition easier for me. I also review the website and YouTube to assess if I wanted to align myself with this organization. They seemed to have similar values as me and I wanted to work for them so that is how I chose my internship.

I got pretty lucky with finding my internship, but I do have advice that I think I could give to future SPALP students about searching for an internship. I would suggest using handshake and indeed. they are both very user-friendly sites that will help you easily find jobs. The way I have found work in the past was scrolling through maybe hundreds of different opportunities, saving them for later, and then making a chart where I right down how interested I am in this position, what is involved in applying for the position, and when the due date is. If the due date was approaching quickly, I could choose a position that was very interesting to me and also did not require too much work to initially apply. The next piece of advice I would give is to prepare for the interview, especially if you get nervous easily. I would not call myself someone who is bad at speaking to others, but there are times I get flustered when having to give an on-the-spot answer. So, making sure that you know/remember enough about yourself and your experiences and your passions that you can freely speak in an interview to make it more like a conversation than a one-sided interview.

Though the first day of my internship was a few months ago, I can still clearly remember it. The woman who interviewed me, Lacy, ended up being my supervisor for the beginning half of my internship. She is such a kind person and made it so easy for me to feel comfortable doing this work. The first week or two of my internship did not involve a lot of brain power, I just had to complete a lot of training and info sessions, etc. I also had to be orientated by a few different members of NFSN. I had to set up meetings with a few people to learn more about NFSN and the work that I would be doing and the basic workplace etiquette that I needed. Socialization was easy for this organization. All I had to do was attend a few meetings and do an introduction about myself to the whole team. From then on, I met with different people one-on-one to create a better bond with people in my workplace. Though it is harder to read body language on Zoom, it's easier to get over any nerves resume so it was easy to socialize with people and feel like I am a part of the team. it can be quite scary to work at a new place. My organization made it very easy to transition and made sure that I had everything that I need to feel comfortable and to do my work best.

**Mission, Vision, Initial Observations**

My internship is at the National Farm to School Network and the overall mission of NFSN is to increase Farm to school endeavors Across the Nation. This means and increase access to local food and nutrition education which would help to improve the health of kids, strengthen local farms, and help to create a strong community. There they envision a world where farm-to-school programs are readily available, there are strong local food systems that ensure the health of children, families, farmers, the economy, and the environment. The mission and vision are the main reasons that this company appeals to me. I'm very passionate about environmental justice and food Justice which perfectly aligns with the values of NFSN. I agree that it is foundationally important for kids to have access to healthy and culturally relevant food and no child should have to live without the nutrition they need. I also believe that we should be supporting farmers specifically local and sustainable farmers who make a living off their land and are constantly being forgotten. Lastly, I think that allowing kids to learn where their food comes from and how to garden and how to protect their environment will create overall more sympathetic beings in the future whether they eat healthfully or are environmental advocates or become people who simply care about themselves and one another. When I started, I had questions about the call to action (and the mission/vision/values). So many organizations like to have a big, beautiful, broad statement that drives their company, but they can put on the front page of their website. But there are so many of these organizations that don't take a second look at this statement and don't follow through on the things that they say that they want to do. NFSN’s call to action is this: “In Fall 2020, National Farm to School Network released a Call to Action for ourselves and for our entire food system: By 2025, 100% of communities will hold power in a racially just food system. This Call to Action is guiding all of our work over the next five years, from policy advocacy to resource design to partnership cultivation.” NFSN’s call to action seemed a little bit intangible and unrealistic. And I was honestly curious about how they work to achieve this, where they got these numbers from, and what things are continuing to do to follow through on their mission. As I have been here for a few months, I have learned that the people who wrote this statement are not the same people who work at NFSN now. And everyone working there now wants to change this statement and improve the wording and their goals.

Though my workplace is virtual, I can sense when there is tension. There was never tension until I heard about a racist incident that happened before I was hired. There was a woman being called out by a black employee on constant microaggressions and a negligence towards people of color, even though our entire organization is built on equality and equity which includes racial equity. There had been meetings and a process of removing this woman for a long time. I caught the tail end of this and attended a meeting that was talking about the final decision to dismiss this woman. This meeting obviously carried a lot of tension because a lot of people just did not know how to react to this. And I could tell that some people had disagreements about how the situation was handled and how it should continue to be handled in the future.

**Office Dynamics & Communication**

The communication at the national Farm to school network is highly important. I realize that it is very important in non-virtual environments, but it is even more important here because we can't just walk over to the next cubicle and ask Joe about the project. It requires much more time and communication between everyone. This is why we have a document with everyone's best contact information. We place our contact that includes our email and our phone number and any other way that we enjoy being contacted. We have this whole list that we can access so that if we're trying to reach one specific person we know if we should call/FaceTime/email/Gchat/etc. that person. We also have frequent meetings about different projects and initiatives.

My responsibilities are of a supportive nature. Most of the things that I do are to aid someone else in completing their project. Though this is my type of work, I still feel like I am contributing a lot to the organization. I also have had a few projects where it is completely my own and I don't really have to report to anyone, such as writing a Blog. I meet with my supervisor every Tuesday afternoon and she gives me a rundown and check in for any new responsibilities and old project I've been working on. I am always able to email her or text her if I have any questions. She updates our check-in sheet before my meeting with her so I can look at the sheet and see if there's anything I already have questions about before we even have our meeting. I am getting better at asking questions and clarifying things even when I think set a task is simple. It helps to make the work much easier on me and can improve the outcome. One thing I have noticed about this organization is that there is no standards or guidelines that are necessary to be followed when doing our work. I think that this has to do with the fact that we are a nonprofit and aren't working to achieve a certain monetary goal. So, our work is evaluated by the outcome. I think that this is a great way to work because it really makes you try as hard as possible to achieve the outcome especially when you know it is helping to benefit Farmers or heads for families. The main problems I have encountered so far are related to technology or two past documents. This organization Is relatively new and there are lots of very new employees that are growing and switching positions. This means that there are a lot of documents that are not made in the most efficient way. So, a lot of my job has been to really organize these resources to make sure that future Generations at the national Farm to school network can easily access and understand certain information.

Career advancements are very apparent at NFSN. My current supervisor, Trisha, I was in my position a few years ago. This has inspired me and helped me understand how I can grow within This organization. There is also another woman I work with who used to be in my position as well, demonstrating that my position is likely to lead to a permanent position here. I would love having a career at NFSN And it seems like a high probability. If I continue to do my job well and continue making connections with my coworkers and supervisors, I think that I could secure a career right out of college. The only thing that seems to be a parent in nonprofit work is that a lot of people use this as a starting position and don't stay for many decades. This is what I have observed, and it might be more so at the national Farm to school network because it is not even a decade old.

**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Dynamics**

One thing that I love about the national Farm to school network is that our work is based around diversity equity and inclusion, so it compels us to include these values in AR workplace and everyday lives. There are a fair amount of people of color and women at the organization. And if the sun would also be a good place for anyone with physical disabilities especially because it is online. Though there was a racist incident in the past, I think that this propelled NFSN to prioritize diversity equity and inclusion and really make sure that we are creating a safe environment for everyone. everyone in the workplace seems to have an equal voice. When I join meetings with all the employees which is only about 16 people, everyone is able to weigh in and give their thoughts about a topic. I think this facilitates a very equal and inclusive workplace.

**Week 5 - Sept. 26-30 – OPEN – feel free to use this space to answer questions from other weeks or add perspective you feel is important.**

I want to use this free space to talk about my trip to San Diego. (I’m really glad this prompt came right after my trip!) Since my organization is a virtual, the company pays for our trip to a designated location for us all to meet in person. This typically happens annually or every two years. This helps us to get to know each other better as individuals and create a stronger team. Though I did have to miss a few classes, I'm so glad and lucky that I got to go on a trip to meet my co-workers. I only spent a day and a half there so that I would not miss too many classes, but I think that within those 36 hours I got to bond with all the fees people I had known online for a few months. This helps me learn so much about our team dynamic and the wants and needs of each person on my team. We did have a few meetings about our organization, but we also got the opportunity to Do facilitated team building exercises and hang out at the beach or pool in the nice weather. This was an overall great experience because I learned so much in such a little amount of time. This included work etiquette, how to interact with coworkers, and how to gather information about people in a short amount of time. I think it took a lot of vulnerability for us to grow closer, but I think it was worth it.

**Networking**

Networking with something that I wanted to improve upon this year, and I think that I am doing a better job. I have updated my LinkedIn/Indeed/Handshake/etc. profiles to reflect my new position and new skill set. Doing these things has have helped me to reflect on my position and think about how much I've learned. I have also improved my networking with other organizations and within my organization. I have learned that people just love to talk! I didn't think it would be so simple to create meaningful connections, but it is so much easier than I thought. I try to keep up with any new people that I meet so that they will remember me, and I can support them and what they need and they can hopefully support me in the future when I move into future endeavors.

**Goals & Inner Journey**

I am excited to say that I think I have made good progress in each of my goals. Though it has been a relatively short amount of time, I think that I have learned a little bit more about communicating with others. I am learning how to use my voice, how to ask questions, and how to create connections with other people. I have also learned more about workplace etiquette. This is one area that I think I could probably improve on more by writing down things that I notice. Because there are a lot of behaviors that I see but I sometimes can't specifically a reflect because I don't fully understand them. Lastly, I have definitely grown in my confidence. Especially after meeting everyone in person during our San Diego trip, I learned how many people at a facade like and respect me. This has grown my confidence a lot. I have also been growing my confidence on my own and learning what my specialties are that I can bring. I think that I work well with my new supervisor, Trisha and our brains are very similar, so it is easy to talk to her and receive instruction from her. One thing that I would like to improve for the rest of the semester is my balancing work and school. Sometimes I can get very pigeon-holed until one area. After a meeting with Trisha, I get very motivated to do a bunch of work actions and sometimes forget about certain pieces of homework I have. Sometimes I get very excited about writing an essay for a class and forget that I have to work on a project. I'm a person who will always get stuff done no matter what especially when I am passionate about it; I just know that I need to manage my time a little better!

My leadership style is definitely along the lines of charismatic leadership, servant leadership and authentic leadership. These forms of leadership I always try to duplicate because they play on my strengths.

I love this internship so far and would highly recommend it to another student. The most surface-level part of this is that the internship is virtual and only 15 hours a week, so it is doable with a college student schedule. There are times where I must cancel plans with friends or stay up extra late, but I think that the experience that I'm gaining from this internship are helping me a lot. I also love the culture of NFSN and the work that they do is genuinely so impactful, and I am happy to be a part of it.