

5 TIPS TO NAVIGATING AN INTERNSHIP DURING A PANDEMIC

Ever wonder what it's like to work at a tech company over the summer remotely? I'm Karen Alarcon, and I am a sophomore at the University of California, Berkeley. I hope by sharing my experience you're able to take away **5** tips that will help you navigate yours.

A bit of background about myself, I'm a first-generation Latina from Orange County California. I have been passionate about cybersecurity since my sophomore year in high school, where I was first introduced to forensic analysis. Ever since then, I have been proactive in my efforts to learn more about cybersecurity by working at industry-relevant security conferences like BlackHat, Cyber Security Summit, and ShellCon.

1. Go to company info sessions

As a first-year, I was very curious to find out about all the opportunities different companies had to offer. I will admit I was also drawn in by their swag and their yummy food. I would often attend many informational sessions to learn about the opportunities offered by each company and ask the recruiter questions. One of those companies happened to be Microsoft where I learned about their internship for freshmen and sophomores which was the Explore Program. As an Explore Intern, you get the opportunity to work at Microsoft as a Software Engineer and Project Manager where you'll work with two other interns as a pod, and you'll be assigned a manager as well as a mentor.

As a 2020 Microsoft Explore Intern on the Build Orchestration team, I worked with Charissa, Jenny, Nate, and Ryen to make an AzureDevOps extension which has now been deployed for internal use to show the expenses incurred by the Microsoft Office Teams. I truly hit the lottery by getting the opportunity to work with my team. I learned so much from all of them! In this

process, I learned new technologies such as Cosmos DB, Typescript, and C#.

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2. Schedule one-on-ones

A couple of key takeaways from my experience are that communication is very important, especially when working remotely and that it is crucial to be intentional when communicating. One of the ways that I was able to work on my communication skills was by scheduling one-on-ones with multiple professionals across Microsoft. I found these meetings very helpful when networking and making friends. From these conversations I learned the notion of taking control over your career, which means being proactive with the work that you are doing. This concept was foreign to me since I had never stopped to think about the trajectory of my career or what that even meant for me. I have always been very driven by my curiosity; which is why I took it upon myself to ask others who have had careers in Software Engineering, Consulting, and Project Management, what it meant for them to manage their career effectively and how they accomplished it.

3. Be prepared before your one-on-ones

Before I met with them I had an outline of questions that I wanted to ask them, and eventually, these conversations began to flow naturally. Some examples of questions I would ask are "What does taking control over your career mean to you? What do your one-on-one meetings with your manager look like? What does a day in your role look like?".

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4. Be intentional

On being intentional with your work, I learned that it means taking on tasks that will help you grow as a professional by developing new skills. For example, if you aspire to be a manager, you might take on the task to mentor an intern since you'll be responsible for managing that intern and be able to guide them to the resources they need. For me, this meant taking on the role of

creating the connection to our Azure Cosmos Database given that I wanted to learn about back-end development.

5. Manage your manager

Lastly, I learned the idea of managing your manager or also known as managing up. What it means is that when you talk with your manager you communicate your professional needs and your goals of where you want your career to be in the future. I always had this misconception that your manager is someone that is feared and that you just do whatever they say but I was very wrong. Your manager is someone that should care about you and your career and they should present opportunities to you for your growth and development. Through having these conversations with your manager you are proactively taking steps towards taking control of your career and you are seeking opportunities to grow as a professional.

Overall, my experience at Microsoft was incredible even with the limitations of working remotely! I had a great time and I truly felt supported and encouraged to grow as an engineer and as an early career professional. I hope you were able to take away that it is very important to schedule one-on-ones and reach out even though you might not know the person, and that managers are there to support you. Remember the worst that someone can say is no but in my experience, most people are willing to talk with you especially if you're excited to learn from them. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to have an internship as a freshman and that I was able to explore my passion at a young age. I consider myself very fortunate that I was able to complete my internship in its entirety. I'm humbled to share that I will be going back to Microsoft next summer as a Software Engineer Intern on a security team. I can't wait for another great summer! Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Key Takeaways:

1. Apply to internships early even as a freshman
2. Be open to talking with people outside of your team
3. Schedule one-on-ones and prepare questions beforehand
4. Go to Information Sessions for companies to get to know them
5. Your manager is there to support you and help you grow as a professional

6. Be intentional about your work to develop skills that make you stronger as a professional

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