

Guidelines for a Successful Work Abroad Assignment

General Tips

- Learn the history of the company.
- Learn the layout of the facility.
- Understand the dress code.
- Set goals/priorities; identify the training planned for you.
- Observe formality of names and titles.
- Be polite.
- Be tactful and diplomatic.
- Ask questions when unsure; take notes.
- Be present every day, on time.
- Understand by observing how much personal information is appropriate to share.
- Avoid expressing strong opinions and political stances.
- Remember that you are representing Georgia Tech.

Be a Team Player

- Do not compete with co-workers.
- Do routine jobs without complaining.
- Do not talk about how the job would be different in the U.S.
- Show initiative, but only after understanding the corporate culture and what is expected of you.
- Develop work relationships slowly after you know office politics.
- Always inform your supervisor of your whereabouts.

Follow the Rules

- Be neat and organized.
- Keep material confidential when needed.
- Learn what punctuality means at your company. Concepts about time and punctuality vary from one country to the next.
- Know the rules about coming in early and staying late.
- Know the lunch break routine.
- Understand telephone and e-mail etiquette.
- Use your time well; don't work on personal things during work time.
- Use a calendar or planner. Never miss meetings or deadlines.

Observe Supervisor's Management Style

- Does your supervisor prefer written or oral reports? Memos or e-mail?
- Does he or she supervise closely or from afar?
- Does your supervisor make decisions quickly or does he or she need time to think?
- Are there good times of the day to approach your supervisor with questions?

Feedback and Reviews

- Ask for informal feedback every few weeks you are on the job.
- Accept criticism without being defensive.
- Do not interpret performance reviews as personal criticism.
- Ask for frequent feedback about your language skills. If you're not sure of the meaning or pronunciation of a term, ask!

Written Communications

- In the workplace, information is distributed primarily through written documents, such as memos, proposals, and progress reports.
- E-mailed documents are very common but hard copies of important documents may be kept. Organize and save important information in computer folders and mailboxes. Back up information regularly.
- As you read documents from others, notice how the information is presented.
- Good writing is clear and concise.
- Proofread for typographical, punctuation, and grammatical errors. If needed, invest in a writer's handbook. Remember that e-mail is a form of communication at the workplace and must be written formally.
- Both format and content help the reader understand the information and course of action to be taken.
- Write for your intended audience using the style and language common to the company.
- Communicating effectively in writing is one of the keys to accomplishing your goals in the work world. Take time to master this skill.

Observing/Developing Leadership Skills

- Job titles may convey authority, but the title does not guarantee that its recipient is a good leader.
- Every person can exert influence to help meet goals; at times, everyone is a leader.
- Keep a journal, noting your observations when someone tries to influence others. What was effective? What was ineffective?
- Using these incidents, note your ideas on how the situation could have been handled more effectively. Draw on your ideas to help solve future problems when you're in a leadership role.

- Focus on the human element by providing consideration, showing concern for people's feelings, solving people problems, and doing your part to keep up morale.

Learning on the Job

- Gain practical experience while applying classroom theory.
- Polish your language skills.
- Attend meetings, listen to discussion, and observe people's behavior and concerns.
- Build your network of professional contacts.
- Conduct information interviews with various individuals at the job site, as time permits.
- Read professional journals.

After the Assignment: Questions for Reflection

- How was this job different from internships/co-ops that you have had in the U.S.? How was it similar?
- How has this assignment contributed to your education?
- What additional skills can you now add to your resume?
- Has the assignment influenced your future career goals? If so, how?
- How did working internationally affect you personally?
- What was your favorite aspect of the international assignment?
- What was your greatest challenge as a co-op or intern in this environment?
- What types of information should employers provide to students prior to international assignments?
- What advice would you give to other students who are preparing to work abroad?