

12 Rules for a Successful Internship or Graduate Assistantship

- 1. Work in advance to align your expectations to the actual internship experience.** Don't allow an inflated expectation for your internship experience to lead to frustration and disappointment. Even if you are very good at what you do, it is very difficult to contribute in substantive ways in the short time you have with your agency. Find little ways to contribute – sweep up after and stack chairs after an event, look for those kinds of opportunities to pitch in. That's how you make an impression and a difference.
- 2. Do what is asked of you.**
Get your work done. Make deadlines.
- 3. Don't mistake your boss's affable nature for weakness.**
If your boss has worked with interns in the past, she knows that she holds your academic career in her hands. That is a huge responsibility and if you have a good boss, she will work extra hard to be sure you succeed. Don't take advantage of this.
- 4. Don't confuse directness with meanness.**
Your boss owes it to you to provide direction. She might not have time to explain the reason for everything you are asked to do. Thank her for being direct and for not being ambiguous.
- 5. Your boss has honored you when he has taken the time and put forth the effort to provide feedback.**
Don't take offense at your boss's feedback, suggestions and criticisms. Providing these is a fundamental part of every leadership position. It is also among the most difficult parts of a leader's job. Don't fall for axioms you learned in class like "Say two positives for each negative."
- 6. Don't judge.**
Observe, looking hard for the value. Don't focus on the out-of-date equipment and the less-than-perfect gear. So you learned the "industry standards" in class. That's great. Maybe you can get a job in a program that meets those standards, maybe not. Take a moment to appreciate that the professionals in the organization are putting together quality experiences for their clients. One does that with the tools one has.
- 7. Get through this.**
You need this to graduate! Don't challenge your peers and bosses on every point. Look for win-win outcomes. Keep unsolicited criticisms to yourself. Get through it, if that's what it comes down to.
- 8. Be on time.**
Be on time, that simple.
- 9. Don't complain to your internship advisor about the program your boss is running.**
It is so easy to criticize. Instead, look for ways to present challenges in a positive light. If your advisor encourages you to talk in negative terms about your employer – tell your boss! She has a right to know and a right to decline future interns if the environment is not positive and good for the agency.
- 10. Don't blame your failures on your boss.**
We are talking about *your* failures. Don't blame *your* failures on your boss. Sure, if your boss failed to provide the tools you needed, explain that. But, if you failed to learn a skill or make a deadline, take ownership of that. Better yet, do what you have to do to get it done in the first place.
- 11. Stay out of the politics.**
It takes at least six months to learn a job, a lot longer than that to figure out the behind the scenes politics. Don't ruin your experience by trying to swim with the sharks.
- 12. Be intentional about making the best of every day.**