

Intern program, Life at Nuance

Advice To An Intern

[Beth Conway](#) | Executive Vice President and Chief People & Places

July 25, 2019



It's not easy knowing what type of career you want to pursue when you're not entirely sure what options are out there. Participating in an internship programs can help you figure out what you're are passionate about... and (equally important) what type of things you don't particularly enjoy.

Let's face it: it's hard to know what type of career you want to pursue when you don't know what is out there. Many enter college feeling like we have to know exactly what major we want to pursue and that somehow we're not *driven* – or worse, could meander without gaining meaningful experience – if we don't exactly know what we want to do for the rest of our lives. Wow – that is a lot of pressure!

I've been working in Human Resources for more than 20 years, and in that time, I have had a lot of conversations with high-school and college students, as well as recent graduates, and my advice to them is always the same: If there is something you're interested in learning more about, apply for an internship and then get as much experience as you can to figure out what you are passionate about – and what you don't particularly enjoy.

Internships are incredible opportunities to gain exposure to different career paths and industries that you normally might not consider. They're a way to quickly immerse yourself into a field, and realize what *specifically* interests you, and equally important, what doesn't interest you. This is something I know firsthand, as I had two six-month internships – one in retail management at CVS, and the other at National Public Radio (NPR) – when I was in college. Vastly different industries, vastly different experiences, but both *equally* valuable to helping me figure out my professional interests and teaching me lessons that have stayed with me throughout my career.

Below are my top three pieces of advice for anyone who is thinking about interning or wrestling with the big, scary question of "What do I want to do with my life?" (and believe me, we have *all* asked ourselves that at some point – or at many points – in our careers).

Learn as much as you can about the field you're interested in... you might be surprised what you find out.

I was an English major in college and was thrilled when I was accepted into the NPR internship program. It was a perfect match on paper: cutting-edge journalism, exposure to editorial calendars, and deadlines. I had the opportunity to produce an episode of Car Talk (which was *very cool*), helped to facilitate their fundraising efforts for their bi-annual telethons, and publishing the monthly newspaper. While I definitely enjoyed my time there and learned a lot, I realized that there was so much that had to happen behind the scenes that hadn't occurred to me, like relentlessly chasing articles and selling advertising spots for fast-approaching deadlines, organizing volunteers and fundraising efforts, and playing an elaborate version of Tetris that involved cutting and taping articles and ads to large sheets of paper to layout the newspaper. That internship was invaluable in helping me better appreciate the incredible work that goes into an operation like NPR and refine my vision of what I thought I wanted to pursue with my career. It also gave me a lot of experience that I still leverage to this day.

Get out of your comfort zone and try different things.

Confession Time: I LOVED going to CVS when I was in college – and I still just might spend far, far too much time wandering the aisles to this very day. There is literally something for everyone. Hungry? Check out the snack aisle. Seasonal allergies? They've got you covered. Need some candy and a birthday card for your roommate? No problem. Needless to say, serendipity struck when I saw that there was an internship position available for a regional retail manager at CVS. Although I wasn't entirely certain what was involved, I knew I had to apply... and I'm glad I did! That job that gave me my first exposure to daily business operations and overseeing a team; but, most importantly, since I trained at the local store and travelled to many different locations across the region, I was able to experience first-hand the difference between a well-run retail location, and one that was struggling. Certainly, inventory management, balancing the registers, and loss prevention were all important. However, what really made an impression on me was seeing the distinct effect different leadership and management styles made in creating happier, more productive employees, and fun work environments where people collaborated and gave their very best – and I discovered that was something that was important to me.

It was that job that made me realize I wanted to go into Human Resources so I could help companies be successful in serving their customers AND their people. It was that job that helped me understand that I could have an important impact in creating cultures and organizational structures where people could do their best work, and feel recognized, and valued for their contributions. It was that internship that changed everything for me.

Manage your career by gathering experiences, not necessarily titles.

Milton Bradley did us wrong. Anyone who has ever played Chutes and Ladders is familiar with the game's objective of making a series of strategic moves to get to the top. However, in the game there is one coveted path that consists of a single ladder to the top; and, if memory serves me correctly, enables you to bypass 56 squares. It's essentially the Hail Mary Shot of board gaming. The problem is that we tend to imagine our careers in terms of that single ladder. It's an enticing plan: Who wouldn't want to fast-track to their end goal?

There are two challenges to that approach. The first is that those situations, while they do happen, are not common. Not many people who are early in their career walk into work one morning only to realize they've been relocated to a corner office or have been given the lead on a major project of their dreams. It takes a lot of hard work, lateral moves, pivots, twists and turns to get there – gathering a multitude of experience at every step! The second challenge is that the world of work is rapidly evolving and companies are looking for employees and leaders who have not only have strong skill sets, but who have a deep understanding and knowledge of the scope and skills required of their colleagues across different teams. Breadth and depth.

One of the best ways to gain that insight, is to collaborate and work on different projects that give you exposure to a myriad of teams, ideas, and skills—and those projects might not be hanging off a wrung on that tall ladder. That's okay! Expose yourself to new people, projects, initiatives— those experiences will only make you a stronger, more valuable contributor. In fact, at Nuance, we have pods or tiger teams that are fluid groups of experts who come together to solve a specific problem, and then go back to their regular day jobs. The result is increased visibility to new ideas and opportunities, better results, and more

professionally satisfied people. It's a win-win-win!

So, if you're considering career options or are [interested in learning more about the opportunities that exist](#), apply for an internship. Try something new. Meet incredible people. Learn with each opportunity and assignment. It will help you clarify what is important to you in a job—and that's the first step to building a long, successful, and satisfying career!

And, to all the interns out there: Happy #NationalInternDay!

Tags:



About Beth Conway

As Nuance's Chief People Officer, Beth is passionate about creating the best employee experience in order to support customers and drive key business outcomes. She is relentlessly focused on finding new and innovative ways to attract, develop, and retain talented people, so that Nuance continues to stay on the cutting-edge of Conversational AI technology. Prior to joining Nuance in 2018, Beth served as SVP of People at CA Technologies. She holds a BA from Siena College, as well as professional certifications from the Society from Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the HR Certification Institute (HRCI).



[View all posts by Beth Conway](#)