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A-HED

# What I Learned on My Summer Internship: How to Work Alone

Some interns logged in from childhood bedrooms, others reported to empty offices

By [Kathryn Dill](#)

Aug. 18, 2020 12:38 pm ET



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Nokia Corporation intern Shivam Dayama and several fellow interns were heading to a socially distanced lunch in their company's empty courtyard when a strange thing happened: They bumped into another group of interns having lunch there too.

"That was the first time we saw other interns," said Mr. Dayama, 19, who worked on 5G projects this summer. "They looked at us and waved."



Summer 2020

internship keepsake

What might be the strangest summer internship season ever is winding up for teenagers and college students around the country. Many spent their entire internships working remotely from childhood bedrooms. Others, like Mr. Dayama, showed up at mostly deserted office campuses. It wasn't all bad, for some it meant rare face time with the only other people around—the CEOs.

"We got a lot more one-on-one time and a lot more collaborative work done," said Chris Rydberg, a Nokia intern entering his junior year at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. "It was just done in a different way."

Mr. Rydberg, who is 20, crossed an immense, largely-empty parking lot at Nokia's Naperville, Ill. campus each morning where he spent the day with six other interns, deliberately scattered around a conference room that can accommodate 40 people.

Some days he and a coworker put on masks and hopped in a Nokia van, hand sanitizing frequently as they drove around performing 5G signal-strength tests. One evening, after

working late, he emerged from the conference room to find the hallways completely dark. No one had triggered the motion sensors in hours.

As Covid-19 pummeled the economy this spring, college students across the U.S. found their summer internship plans in question, or cancelled entirely. Many had offers rescinded and hustled to find alternative options.

A survey of more than 400 employers by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that by the end of April, 22% of employers had revoked offers to summer interns while 46% had made their internship programs virtual.



Annika Bohmann interned in the office at Houston-based wealth advisory Archetype Wealth Partners LLC.

PHOTO: JASON BOHMANN

Many companies truncated their internship programs or delayed them until later in the year while others scrambled to convert them to remote work. Thousands of interns at companies like Google, Amazon and Capital One will finish the summer and add the experience to their resumes having never set foot in an office.

When Annika Bohmann, who studies finance at Texas A&M, learned in May that she'd landed a role with Houston-based wealth advisory Archetype Wealth Partners LLC, she was shocked to find she'd be going into the office.

She donned a mask each morning to report to a largely deserted Houston office tower where she spent the day doing business development research from the desk of an employee working from home. A rotating group of about five people were in the office each day, including the CEO and COO.

Ms. Bohmann, 19 says the office atmosphere was lively. She worked directly with the COO each day, the CEO would sometimes tap interns to help him with projects, and she felt free to ask employees questions about the minutiae of their jobs.

“It’s been a really great look at a small company,” she said. “I don’t think I would have learned as much without the in-person internship.”

Archetype founder and chief executive Jeff Thomas said being an essential business with a small head count allowed him to give staff, including interns, the freedom to decide whether they wanted to come into the office or not. Being in the office let interns work closely with staff, he said, at a time when the company is grappling with how to translate a business built on client relationships forged in person to Zoom.



Jamie Roscoe has been working an industrial engineering internship at food and beverage manufacturer TreeHouse Foods Inc., in Tonawanda, New York.

PHOTO: KAYA DIELESSEN



As companies struggle with return to work plans and cities across the U.S. confront infection rates that recede only to spike again, learning to roll with pandemic-related punches may prove valuable to this summer's interns.

Handshake, a job-search tool for college students, surveyed roughly 1,000 U.S. college students between June 26 and 30th and found that 90% would at least consider taking a completely virtual job after graduation.

Jamie Roscoe, 22, started an industrial engineering internship at food and beverage manufacturer TreeHouse Foods Inc., in Tonawanda, New York, in February, but the pandemic forced many employees to work remotely for much of March and April.

That proved complicated for Ms. Roscoe, who would normally visit the company's cookie manufacturing plant, observing workers and asking questions about processes like dough mixing before using her findings to create standardized training documents. While working remotely, her supervisor, who was allowed into the plant, recorded cycles of work over Zoom, narrating as batches of dough and frosting were mixed. Ms. Roscoe watched from home, asking questions over chat.

Ms. Roscoe said she was relieved when she was able to return to in-person work at the factory full time in mid-June.



Manjusha Chava at work during her internship at Alert Innovation.

PHOTO: ALERT INNOVATION

Manjusha Chava had been working at her electrical engineering internship at industrial automation company, Alert Innovation in North Billerica, Mass., for one week in March when the company moved to remote work.

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“I felt a little devastated,” said Ms. Chava, a 19-year-old junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. “I thought my internship experience would be affected in a major way and I thought being in the lab was the only way I could gain experience.”

She was pleasantly surprised; her boss worked closely with her, calling three or four times a day. Her parents knew that when she was in her room taking calls she was not to be disturbed. She and some others were eventually permitted to return to the office earlier this month.

She said she found after returning to the office that she could complete tasks that would have taken her more than a week working remotely in a day or two.

“There’s just something to seeing people face to face,” she said. “You have emails, you have Slack, calls—you have to really wait for the other person to be available. But when you’re in the office, they’re right there.”

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