

Episode 1 - THE INTERNSHIP LANDSCAPE

Buffy Gorrilla: This is Starting Somewhere - a ten episode podcast from the University of Melbourne all about internships - finding one, landing it, and making the most of the experience.

I'm Buffy Gorrilla. One of my first jobs was in an Italian deli and now I'm host of this podcast.

Ben: And I'm Ben Pawson, I was fired from a hairdresser's as one of my first jobs and now I'm co-host of this podcast.

Buffy: So, we're clearly the best people to help you start somewhere

Hamish Taylor: My internship involves going out every day and interviewing a range of different people about a daily issue. An example of that is I started on new years day so I was very tired after new years day. I had to go out and ask people whether they had already broken their new years resolution. It was a really, really fun experience.

Buffy: I met Hamish in the bustling lobby of the HWT building, it's a rust-coloured office tower on Melbourne's Southbank. It was modern once. It was a humid day and he was dressed in shorts and sunglasses - it was his day off.

And where are you doing your internship?

Hamish: Oh right sorry. Sorry, I'm, well I was the editorial intern at The Herald Sun. I sit at a desk on level 12, smack bang in the middle of the newsroom which was a really incredible environment to work in, it was just constantly, even in the early hours of the morning, it was just constantly bustling and full of people who just were curious and inquisitive and quite like minded to me so it was a great experience.

Buffy: Hamish is one of the many people we spoke to who are doing an internship. But how did he get the internship? What did he do while he was there? Did it help him find a job? Spoiler alert!

Ben: Yes.

Buffy: And who could not apply for it because it was unpaid and they couldn't afford to work for free?

Ben: That's what this podcast is for - and we'll explore all of those questions and more through stories from Hamish and others like him. Chances are if you are starting out and live in this world, you will have noticed that internships are having a moment. In 2016 over half of people under 30 had done at least one Internship.

And only half of all internships are connected with study. And over 80% of internships were unpaid in 2015.

Buffy: Sounds like internships are a thing and we'd better understand them.

In this episode we look at the landscape: what actually qualifies as an internship? We answer the questions: Where did they come from and why is it a good idea to do one? What can an internship do for you? And how do companies perceive 'interns', and what do they want from you?

Ben: if you know nothing about internships - this is where you start! But if you do know some things, you may want to stay tuned because over the next nine episodes we will dive into the nitty-gritty of getting an internship, navigating office politics, doing video interviews and getting rid of your digital dirt.

Buffy: For starters, this term 'intern' can seem a bit wooly. For some organizations the intern is person who gets coffee or the underling who answers the phone. For some people the intern is just cheap and enthusiastic. But for other companies the intern is an actual team member who gets to dig into a real life project and gain valuable professional experience.

Ben: So how do you actually define intern?

Buffy: A Human Resource professional should know and a HR professional who has done an internship - even better! We found one: Haley Smeding from Tandem Partners, an HR firm, describes it:

Haley Smeding: In my opinion an internship is somebody with less experience who is looking to gain further experience within a particular area, and then is being given the opportunity by an organisation to come into the environment to gain that experience. And so for me, the way that I view it, is that the experience must be relevant, and link back to previous studies. So for example, getting coffee isn't actually growing them any valuable experience, therefore shouldn't be included or counted as an internship.

Ben: Michelle Lau cops to having to break out Google to define an internship.

Michelle Lau: Living in New Zealand, I was kind of in a very small little bubble, never really heard of internships before. Like I saw it in movies and stuff, obviously. But when I came here, I actually Googled it and I found it was a pathway to a great career, and I was like, gotta get into those.

Ben: Michelle recorded an Intern Diary, that you'll hear in episode 4 - DAY ONE - when she tells us how her first day went. And here's what Google says they are. Just to round out our definition:

Google: Intern - a student or trainee who works without pay in order to gain work experience or satisfy requirements for a qualification.

Buffy: So now that we know what an internship is, how did we get here? The point where its on your course curriculum and you seem to be stressing about it. A bit later we'll look at : why internships? What do they do for companies and what do they do you for you? But first let's back it right up...while it might not help you land that dream internship, knowing how we got to this point is quite interesting and will make you seem smart and give you an edge up on trivia night.

Ben: I always like a competitive edge - so to help us we tracked down Dr Robert Shindell from Internbridge.

Buffy: Hey Dr Shindell - what's Internbridge? Can you please explain.

Robert Shindell: Intern Bridge is a research and consulting firm. We survey students all over the United States every year about their internship experiences. We gather that data. We analyse that data, and then share it back with both higher education and employers to help employers build better internship programmes, but also,with higher ed to help them prepare their students better for the experience.

Buffy: Thanks Dr Schindell! So, what about some history....

Robert: The concept of an internship, or work integrated learning, whatever terminology you want to use, experiential learning, dates back to Mesopotamia and the dawn of man. That is: I know something - I'm going to teach it to you. That could've been the best way to carve a spear or an arrowhead or something like that. How to make great cave drawings. You don't just tell somebody how to do that. You show them. They practise. You critique. Then they get better at it. That's the concept of experiential learning, that kind of progressed into the more contemporary internship. In the, let's say, 70s and 80s, especially in the states, firms started to say, "Hey, the students have the summer off from school. We have some extra work to be done. Well, why don't we just hire this college student?" And it kinda evolved like that.

Ben: So learning was at the heart of an internship. Now it's like a compressed apprenticeship or at worse cheap labour?

Buffy: Or anywhere in between? I feel it's a spectrum...

Robert: Now we're at a place where employers are saying, "This is where we're going to get the next generation of leadership for our organisation. How do we connect with them as early as possible, so that we can keep them longer than we would, let's say, a new hire," and our studies show that students who do an internship with a company that are then hired, are likely to stay with that company for about 20% longer, sometimes up to 50% longer than a student that graduates and just goes to work there as a full timer on their first day.

Ben: So learning while doing has history, and it started in Mesopotamia! Who knew?

Buffy: And now smart companies want them, okay, are we good?

Ben: Sure, maybe an internship is just gussied up apprenticeship, which I cannot help but associate with being a blacksmith for some reason.

Buffy: I think that'll do for our definition of what an internship is...next in our survey of the landscape we look at some of the things internships can do for you. From getting you out of the classroom and into a job, to helping you figure out which job you want to get into.

So if you're lucky enough to know what you want to do when you grow up great for you - or as Ron Swanson might say - "bully for you". Most people don't, which is why internships can really help.

Ben: An how can they do that?

Buffy: Ben, I'm glad you asked. What we learnt was that they can help you rule something out - or give you a window into a new profession - or they could even be a stepping stone into that profession. All in a super low risk environment. It's just an internship, it's not a job. It's four weeks, three months, part-time, full-time, whatever. Which is great! Here's Dr Robert Shindell again.

Ben: Have you ever done an internship?

Robert: Have I ever done one? Yeah. I did when I was back in college. I did a couple of them, including student teaching.

Ben: Right, and how was your experience then?

Robert: It was interesting. Student teaching as a form of experiential education, was incredibly meaningful because the main take away was that I knew that I did not want to be a high school teacher. It had a positive, negative effect.

Ben: So that's another benefit of an internship. It's as good at showing you don't want to do something as much as you do want to do something.

Buffy: Well said Ben!

Ben: Why thank you, but it doesn't end there. Getting out of the classroom and into the workplace is something that everyone has to do, no matter what your career path, and internships can help. Alex Alvaro, a graduate student, agrees with us:

Alex Alvaro: I think there are things that you pick up that you just cannot get anywhere else. Being able to observe, just how things operate on a day to day is priceless, and you really can't get that anywhere else. You can't get that from a lecture or from doing uni work.

Buffy: So what Alex just described is Work Integrated Learning.

Ben: Work Integrated what now?

Buffy: Work Integrated Learning is something we'll be hearing about a lot in Starting Somewhere. Professor Alan Blackman from Griffith University has been practicing and preaching work integrated learning for a long time. Here's what he has to say about how it relates to internships:

Allan Blackman: I think an internship is just one element of Work Integrated Learning. It covers a spectrum of things and the internship is one end, and things like case studies, perhaps, are at the other. It's a process that provides a bridge for students from their academic life to the workplace, ideally, and helps them to develop employability skills that they might not have developed to that point.

Ben: And an internship can really help you get a head start and build a great network. Here is Matthew Blundell, a graduate of the master of International Relations.

Matthew Blundell: I think developing a skill set is one of the real assets of undertaking an internship; however, if you're in the right place, you usually get invited along to meetings, to events, to dinners, things like that, where you have the opportunity to network with an enormous amount of people from different walks of life, and they really help you sort of explore your passions.

Ben: Matthew knows a lot about using his network for find opportunities. We'll hear more about that in episode 2.

Buffy: Now you know what you can get out of an internship, where can you find them? Under rocks?

Ben: Or in trees?

Buffy: Some undergrad and master courses have them as an elective - so that sounds easy and anyone can do one off their own back, If you've got the time. But juggling it all can be hard - and that's something we'll try to help you with in

episode 6. But some of you listening might have to do an internship as requirement of your course, like doctors, dentists, healthcare students or lawyers.

Ben: So those are the ones where you really can't just walk into the job with no experience, that would be dangerous, like surgeons, of the tree or human-kind. Which makes sense.

Buffy: And we'll talk to some of those people too. Like Dr Laura Raiti

Laura Raiti Internship in medicine is the first 12 months post-graduation from your medical degree. It is a provisional registration, so from a medico-legal point of view you essentially work at your accredited hospital, health service, for internship. You have supervised medical practise and you have to complete certain rotations to make that your accredited internship. You must do medicine surgery and emergency: 10 weeks of medicine surgery, 8 weeks of emergency medicine, as a minimum, and then there's two more rotations throughout the year which can be repeats of those other things.

Buffy: Thanks Laura, we'll hear more about the super formal internships that medical students go through later. That's one way of getting into an internship - become a doctor. Others of you might have the option to do an internship, like Michelle:

Michelle Lau: I actually didn't know there was an arts internship subject available at Melbourne Uni until Georgia and Brooke were talking about it,

Ben: So Georgia and Brooke work for Keep Left, a PR company in Melbourne where Michelle is doing her internship

Michelle:and I was like, "Okay, well have a little Google." Then I found this arts internship subject. Yeah, I don't know why, I just never heard about it. I think 'cause I lived at college. I think a few people did it, but it just never occurred to me that it was such a cool subject that I could do.

Buffy: For some students it's a subject, but it's not a requirement. That's one more piece of the internship puzzle falling into place.

Ben: Yep, so if it's optional, it's course credit, real world experience, and the uni helps you find opportunities - sometimes. It sounds like a no brainer way to make the leap from classroom to workplace. And the data backs it up, we said at the beginning nearly half of all internships are done as part of some kind of study.

Tess: If your degree offers an internship I would highly recommend it. It's a great way to get experience but also knock off some course credit and also fit it in with your studies, you have a lighter course load during the semester.

Buffy: That's Tess - a law graduate who makes the case - if it's there as part of your studies why wouldn't you do an internship? That's what I did and it really worked out well for me, but more about that in a future episode. Or you could choose to do one at any time. What else are you going to in the Summer?

Ben: Work, work in hospo, swim, sunbathe, read, drink, travel, anything really?

Buffy: I guess whether you want to do an internship depends how much you want to kick start your career? And this experience can definitely help. They give you real world experience, a network of people who know you and your work and they help you narrow down what exactly you want to do. We had a conversation with Charis Palmer from The Conversation - which describes itself as a guide to the latest developments and discoveries from the university and research sector.

Buffy: How many of your interns go on to have full time jobs with The Conversation?

Charis Palmer: It's a good question, I would say at the moment, we've got six full time editors who were former interns. We have a team of 20 editors so that is a pretty high percentage. We have former interns working in newsrooms all around the country. We follow their careers pretty closely. We just did a report and it was amazing to see where some of them have ended up all over the place. You know, producers on some of the most well known t.v. and radio shows in the country. People working in The Australian, The Age newspapers. The outcome to me seems great. The first place we look while recruiting is former interns.

Buffy: So some internships definitely do lead to jobs. We spoke to ANZ bank, and they have a pretty formal internship program where a number of the interns go onto the graduate recruitment program.

Cholena Orr: My name is Cholena Orr and my title is graduate programme manager. Within ANZ, we make early offers to graduates who have done internships, so we will assess them over the eight weeks and at the end of the eight weeks we'll go through a calibration session and make decisions around who we make offers to. So I'd say it's critical.

Buffy: So that sounds great for the intern, they get skills, a network, experience, everything you need to blast off a great career.

Ben: What do companies get out of it? Why are they offering these opportunities, continuously? Remember we heard from Dr Schindell of Internbridge about the history of interns? How in the 70's and 80's interns were just cheap labour to now

where they are realizing that really good people are doing internships and if they get them young they get them for longer. And they might find the next generation of leaders among their interns. Which is certainly what ANZ are looking for and others we spoke to, but maybe in a more informal way.

Buffy: But once again, it's a spectrum. Some internships are for no pay, long hours, menial tasks for little reward except maybe some of that course credit we've been talking about. Some of the people we talked to however, who run companies and hire interns appreciate what they bring to the team - as long as everyone is on the same page.

David Bacon: I found it really rewarding just working with these people, understanding I guess their mindset and what was important to them, also seeing them grow and improve. What I learned is there was a big gap between what the business thought they'd get out of the internship and what we could actually get out of them, and also with these individuals, what do they want? I think that was one of the biggest questions. They didn't necessarily go in there knowing what to expect.

Buffy: That's David Bacon- a user experience designer at Telstra Health. He's working to bring health products and services into the 21st century.

Ben: It's interesting to see this mismatch, and we'll be diving more into this in episode three when we look at how you can stand out when you apply for an internship of your own and how you can make your expectations clear.

Buffy: But interns can be valued as well, The Conversation has a pretty good intern program that will feature in episode eight, in our review of places that are doing it right :

Charis Palmer: Interns are largely younger and so often plugged into a different zeitgeist than some of the editors. So, if they can bring ... If that's something that they can bring just being who they are and not having had many years in the workforce which are skills that we don't necessarily expect because we do spend a bit of time training people.

Ben: We've heard that companies and interns sometimes want different things out of an internship. It sounds more like dating than recruitment to me.

Buffy: I guess does, and in the absence of an internship tinder (I want 20% of that idea if any app developers are listening), you'll have to settle for us, your hosts, over the next nine episodes walking you through the details of finding and getting your ideal internship.

Hey Ben, pop quiz - what have we learned so far?

Ben: Internships get you out of the classroom and into the workplace. They are either compulsory, or optional, or as an experiment, or as a first step.

Buff: We easily found both Government reports and a really handy annual survey from Interns Australia that build the case that more and more industries prefer or expect people to have some internship experience before they get a job. For those of you, like me, with an interest in The Arts, Media and Comms or not-for-profits - these are the sectors where you'll find mostly unpaid internships. Check the links to those surveys in the show notes, so you can plan accordingly.

Ben: If you want it there are opportunities out there. But you have to want it. Because there's a ton of people who also want it. Which can lead to pressure.

Tess: It can be highly competitive and I think in any situation in which you're up against friends or people you know. At least in my approach, the best way to deal with that is to do your own thing. I think it's easy to fall into a trap of comparison and a competitive bubble.

Buff: That was Graduate Law student Tess again, telling us how she deals with the pressure. I never really felt pressure to do an internship when I was an undergraduate, but I did start to feel the pressure when I was working through my masters - did you Ben?

Ben: Same, all the savvy kids were being accepted onto placements before I had even thought about it. But that was in France, where I did my MBA, and it was international students that felt the most self-imposed pressure. I think they were the ones who wanted to stay in Europe and get that valuable international experience.

Buff: I wanted to know if there was pressure to get out there and get interning and try to learn and who or what was at the root of that stress... is it our parents?

David Bacon: I'm a father of three beautiful children. The oldest, Gigi, is finishing year 12, she's doing year 12 this year, and then I've got the others in year 10 and year 8. My thinking has changed from sort of looking after them in the moment in school, towards thinking about their futures and leaving home, and what are they going to do when they leave school.

Buff: That's David Bacon again - father of three. He works in the city in an office his daughters, Gigi and Coco say is less fun than his last office.

David: As parents, we all want our kids to go and get a university course. There is, "did you get what you wanted to, did you get your first choice?", so even though we don't actually put pressure on children, that expectation that we've created as parents, as the educators and stuff like that, it's really great. It's quite unusual, because I don't know if that level of expectation, certainly that level of pressure doesn't appear in the workforce.

Buffy: So while not conclusive, parental pressure seems minimal - at least in the Bacon household. But in the Berger Household...

Lauren Berger: My mom found out about internships and so, she would suddenly call and pester me about them frequently.

Ben: That's Lauren Berger, AKA, The Intern Queen, we'll be hearing a lot more from her in future episodes.

Buffy: Anders Furze is a journalist, writer and cultural commentator and felt the pressure came from the most obvious and recurring place.

Anders: The pressure came really from me, I'd say, because I knew that particularly as a journalist, studying journalism is not going to get you a journalism job. It's just not. You've got to combine that with practical application and training, you know you learn through doing, and the Master of Journalism was incredible for me because it opened up all of these wonderful doors. But the doors were in and out of the classroom, I guess. So I knew very early on what I wanted to do. It's the pressure from the industry too, because there's far fewer jobs, and the competition is a lot more fierce. So the days where you'd come out of school, do a one year cadetship and off you go you're a journalist, long gone. I'm not saying it's impossible, but you do need to be looking for any chance to develop those skills alongside your studying.

Buffy: The desire to get the benefits of an internship is starting earlier and earlier. We spoke to 17 year old Aysha Ahmed, a public high school student in Chicago, Illinois, who had just been accepted onto an Internship at the University of Chicago Cancer Research Centre.

Aysha Ahmed: I was never pressured. I was always nervous and always had anxiety over not being the perfect student. It was always an option for me to do an internship.

Ben: So this pressure seems to be coming from us. Is there anyway to use this pressure for good? Lauren Berger gives us her positive take on the benefits of an internship.

Lauren: None of my friends were interning and I went to a really large school. To be honest, didn't feel like my teachers cared what I was doing. It was really just, internships were an opportunity for me to sort of, do me and for me to learn and be challenged in a unique environment that I wasn't used to.

Buffy: If you are feeling this pressure and you think an internship is for you, Ben and I are here to be your intern guides - and help you along your journey for lack of a less cheesy word. In this series we talk to everyone you need to, so you can relax and focus on Starting Somewhere.

Buffy: In the next episode of starting somewhere we'll guide you through the process of finding your ideal internship. One step closer to getting you started somewhere.

Starting Somewhere is brought to you by the University of Melbourne External Relations team. The producers and editors are Buffy Gorrilla and Ben Pawson. Our supervising producer and original concept is from Dr Andi Horvath. Thanks to everyone who has made Starting Somewhere a reality. Stay tuned for future episodes.