

An internship at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can be a great way to gain real, on-the-job professional experience that prepares you for a potential long-term career at VA. The following tips will help you make the most of this valuable opportunity.

1 Establish Rapport

It's a good practice to take the initiative to introduce yourself and exhibit a positive and friendly attitude toward everyone you meet. Also, remembering people's names sets a good example and helps you to establish instant rapport. Always remember – getting to know people at VA can lead to great opportunities.

4 Find a Mentor

Learn from those you admire and develop mentoring relationships you can continue long after your internship has ended. Experienced professionals enjoy sharing their expertise and want to assist new professionals entering the field. Good mentors are people who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise and want to see their mentees succeed in the field. Remember that the best mentorships go both ways: Be a resource for your mentor as well.

7 Be Positive and Enthusiastic

It is important to be as positive as possible in your communication, emails, text messages, Gchats, instant messages, tweets, wall posts, LinkedIn announcements, and other interactions. Show your enthusiasm and motivation and ask to be included in meetings, email chains, and professional workshops. It is much more rewarding and productive to work in a positive and enthusiastic atmosphere. For further reading, see *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie.

2 Be Innovative

As a new member of the VA team, you will have fresh eyes and new ideas to bring to the Department. Use those strengths to introduce innovative approaches whenever you have the opportunity. And don't wait for permission if it's not necessary – our Veterans need your help now, not later. Check out *Scheming Virtuously: A Handbook for Public Servants*, by Nicholas Charney of GovLoop.com.

5 Try New Things, but Play to Your Strengths

Whether you are great with people, ideas, analysis, art, strategy, policy or communication, leverage your strengths and interests – they are what set you apart from others. Apply your strengths to new challenges to see great results, and don't hesitate to work outside of your comfort zone and try new things. For further reading, see *Now, Discover Your Strengths!* by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton.

8 Don't Forget the 5 P's

Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance. Few things impress your colleagues more than being the most prepared person in the room, especially in meetings. When a new topic or challenge comes up, seize the opportunity to research and master the topic. Your office will thank you – and you will be in a better position for employment.

3 Make the Most of Your Work

If you see an exciting work opportunity, even if it's outside of the scope of your assigned responsibilities, express your interest to your supervisor. Interns who identify office needs and ask to take on new challenges to develop skills demonstrate the initiative, drive and motivation that VA is looking for within their employees. For further reading about how this can make for a great organization, see *Good to Great* by James Collins.

6 Communicate Clearly

Good business communication means clear and concise speaking and writing. Prioritize your communication by making the most important point first and providing supporting information second. It will be significantly more effective – and appreciated. Focus on developing your communication skills, both written and verbal. Proofread your written work carefully. When communicating with your co-workers, choose respectful, tactful, and professional language at all times. For further reading, see *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath.

