



Internship Reflection

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Reflection of 2011 Summer Internship

Introduction: Job Title and Description

I began my internship with General Motors on May 15, 2011 at the GM Tech Center in Warren, MI. There were about 100 students in my orientation group; we were shown a brief slideshow, gifted with a model Camaro, and directed to fill out all of our paper work. I was then picked up by my supervisor, Rob Thom, and walked to my cubicle in the Global Vehicle Program Management group. My name plate read “Young Engineer Intern” –even though I am a Finance major. As a “Young Engineer” the skills I needed were mostly computer based: Excel, PowerPoint, and Word. The most important trait though, it seemed to me, was having good social skills. It was important to be able to talk to many different types of people and to show myself as a confident and competent part of the organization. The importance of leadership ability is the most significant thing that I gleaned from this experience.

My Supervisor

Rob Thom was my supervisor for the duration of my internship. Originally from St. Catherine's, Ontario, Rob earned a degree in History at the University of Waterloo. He began his career with General Motors right out of college as a line supervisor at the Oshawa Car Plant. Quickly progressing through the ranks, Rob experienced a number of different jobs taking him from Oshawa to Windsor to Arizona and, eventually, here to Detroit. After completing time as the head of education and training of line supervisors, the general supervisor of machining at a

transmission plant, the coordinator for a truck plant and body plant, the implementer of material management systems, and the manager of business at the Arizona Proving Grounds,

Rob finally ended up at the Warren Tech Center as an Engineering Business Manager (EBM). As an EBM, Rob's job is to manage the business and money aspects of engineering activity within the Full Size Truck program and to ensure that the team hits its big deliverables (specific releases, resolving issues, and validation) and the Global Vehicle Development Process milestones.

An Interesting Person I Met: Terry Woychowski

After I had taken the initiative to request a meeting with him, I had the chance to interact with Mr. Terry Woychowski. Mr. Woychowski is the Vice President of Global Quality at General Motors and, as a Michigan Technological University alum, sits on Michigan Tech's Board of Directors. We had about a twenty minute conversation in his office where we discussed MTU, my work experience, expectations, and some aspects of General Motors. Mr. Woychowski is a very inspiring person; he is also a person who commands respect and who some may call a very intimidating person. He advised me not to call myself an intern because it lowers the expectations both that I have of myself and that others have of me. I had a few other encounters with Mr. Woychowski and he continued to strike me as a very powerful and impressive man. From him I learned the importance of appearance, confidence, competence, and leadership which I plan to implement in both my professional and personal life from here on. I was very excited to learn that after my first meeting with Mr. Woychowski my mom received a phone message from Dr. Dale Tahtinen, VP at Michigan Tech, telling her that Mr. Woychowski had called him and told him that he (Mr. Woychowski) was very impressed by my

taking the initiative to meet with him – it was a fantastic growth opportunity and I am so glad I decided to try to meet with him.

Memorable Periods and Positives and Negatives of the Work Experience

My assignments at General Motors consisted of three main projects and an assortment of other small projects and tasks that needed to be completed. Each of these was memorable, had positives and negatives, and will be discussed below. And, there were many other memorable experiences that came with the internship which will be identified and briefly discussed below.

Main Project 1

The first project involved streamlining the program budget process for the engineering business managers. Each program (full-size trucks, performance cars, hybrids, etc.) has an engineering business manager (EBM) in charge of creating a budget for all of the materials needed for that year in the program. My first priority was to meet with each of the eight EBMs and figure out what they did to reach the estimated numbers in their budget. A number of different resources are used in the budget process such as historical costs, finance's spreadsheets, project engineers' estimates, personal experience, and contingency factors; each of the EBMs uses these things in variation. From speaking to many of the EBMs I found that creating one set-in-stone way to do the budget processes may be an impossible task due to the fact that so many rely on their own personal experience when creating these budgets. A lot of the budget process for these projects appears to depend on experience and a gut instinct.

I compiled and reviewed all the information gathered from each of the EBMs into a spread sheet and discussed the results with my supervisor, Rob. Unfortunately we realized that there was no “golden way” to calculate the budget numbers due to lack of information being available on time. So, really, my completion of this project only revealed that there wasn’t a one-size-fits-all way to do the budget process. I presented a summary of my findings to the EBMs and asked that when they enter in their numbers to the budget sheet that they include a comment that states the historical cost.

Main Project 2

The next assignment I worked on had to do with the accessory department. A complex Excel workbook, called the Accessories Calculator, is used to determine the success of specific accessories in certain markets. The first part of this project was to create a user guide for the calculator. Getting familiar with the calculator was my first task – I was given a blank workbook to experiment with. After toying with the calculator I met with the woman in charge of the project to get a more thorough knowledge of the calculator and what my specific expectations were. The next few weeks were spent creating and revising user guides until I had created two separate PowerPoint presentations. One presentation was a guide on how to use and enter information into the calculator. The other was an illustrative and descriptive aid on how the calculator works, what information it takes into account, and what the output means. These two documents will be available for all users of the Accessories Calculator as aids both for actually using the calculator and also for describing the output in order to support the determined success of a given accessory.

From there I moved on to modifying the Accessory Calculator itself. A number of formulas had to be changed in order to capture the new information the Calculator was trying to cover. It was my task to go into the Excel document and manually change the formulas in the Accessory Guide.

Main Project 3

The most time consuming, yet most rewarding, project I had this summer was tracking cost savings initiatives on the new Full Size Truck program. This project had two aspects: 1) the technical portion of actually tracking each cost item, and 2) the leadership portion of being able to get the information needed from multiple sources and making sure each system management team (interior, exterior, electrical, etc.) met their target numbers for cost savings. I learned during this internship that *nothing is ever as simple as it may seem* since I had encountered a number of obstacles with this project throughout the summer. All of the cost savings' items needed specific information and it was part of my job to get that information. Sometimes this would prove to be difficult because not all of the sources had all of the information, or knew what I was talking about, or there were special circumstances that didn't fit the pattern... but, eventually I got what I could after a number of attempts. Although this was a challenging aspect of my project, it gave me the opportunity to meet, interact with, and form professional relationships with a lot of different people. An important part of any job is being able to create positive relationships with those around you. It is amazing what a difference it can make to just walk to someone's desk to have a conversation as opposed to making an impersonal phone call or sending an e-mail. It is true that some people are easier to

deal with than are others, but one just needs to learn how to deal effectively with different types of people. So, such occurrences helped me gain social, relationship, communication, and leadership experiences.

After all of the information was gathered I ended up creating a tracking sheet in order to follow the progress of cost savings' initiatives and to compare the target versus the actual savings. There are a number of different databases in which information is stored, and I needed to grab pieces from all over the place – it seemed odd to me that all of this information was not in one place already, but that is what happens with a big company - things get very complex. Luckily General Motors is determined to reduce complexity. Another issue in the tracking was that since the project is still a ways off from the start of production, not all of the information was available yet. I collected what I could and put it into the tracking sheet I created which will continued to be used by other employees to track these cost savings. Finishing this project made me feel very accomplished; I actually created something of use that will continue to be part of the program and utilized by other employees.

Other Projects

In addition to the aforementioned three main projects I also completed a number of other minor tasks. To complete these few tasks I worked a lot with PowerPoint and Excel, so I got a lot more exposure to the Excel skills that I have been learning in classes. It was also required of me to present in front of a number of employees a few times, which was a fantastic experience. Presenting in classes along with my first few times presenting in front of real adults has helped develop my confidence with public speaking, which is such an important skill

when working in the professional world. For a huge “all people” meeting I created a PowerPoint, allowing me to use my creativity. These in addition to other small tasks helped fill in any lulls in my main projects. Also, in order to learn more about the processes going on in such a large corporation, I sat in on a number of different meetings. Meetings are a big part of GM employees’ work days, but they were not the most thrilling things I attended.

Other Memorable Experiences

Some of the more exciting things I got to experience were called “exposure modules”. These modules are meant to give students the opportunity to see many aspects of the company and not just the area in which the student works. Through these exposure modules I got to tour the Design Center, attend a barrier and roll over test, tour the Lansing Assembly Plant, see the Structural Development Lab (where they have tons of interesting tests going on for validation), and walk through the huge Wind Tunnel in the Aerodynamics Lab. All of these were very interesting and very hands-on. It is amazing how much work, thought, and testing is put into the development of one vehicle. Prior to this internship I had no idea of the magnitude of activities involved in creating an automobile.

In addition to the impression left by my projects and other tasks, I had a number of memorable experiences while I was at GM: a Tiger’s game in a suite with the other Michigan Tech Interns and with Mr. Terry Woychowski, a trip to Chicago with Global Vehicle Program Management Interns, great exposure modules, driving GM products (including a Camaro), and a number of others. But, my favorite experiences definitely took place at the Milford Proving Grounds. The proving grounds have a lot of hands-on activities including test labs and driving

tracks. I had multiple opportunities to go to Milford and drive multiple cars on different tracks at variable speeds. Being able to go through the Ride and Handling track in a 2012 Chevy Sonic was a fantastic experience that I will always remember. Every opportunity I had to go to Milford I jumped on.

The Overall Positives and Negatives and Lessons Learned

While at General Motors I gained corporate work experience, practiced with EXCEL, was exposed to many aspects of the automotive industry, had the opportunity to practice public speaking, and drove a number of cool cars. I also made friends with a fantastic group of interns in Global Vehicle Program Management (not to mention other interns from different departments that lived in our apartment complex). Of course, at times I was home sick - Detroit is not at all like the UP. Although I wasn't expecting to work in a cubicle, it wasn't as bad as I had expected because there were many people around and I still have a level of privacy. At times there were lulls in my work, which can be construed as either a good or a bad thing, but everything evened out. I loved the level of trust my various supervisors invested in me. My direct supervisor gave me flexible hours (typically I worked from about 6:30/7 to 3:30) so that if I ever needed a half day on a Friday I was free to take it, and he treated me like a real employee which I truly appreciated. It was also really great to see so many Michigan Technological University alumni at General Motors. People carry their pride years after graduation and it made me very excited to see a Tech flag and think "that's my school!" Seeing such a network of Michigan Tech people made me feel at home; it was great to have something so important in common with so many people.

Summary and Lessons Learned

Through this whole experience I learned a lot about leadership and confidence. I also learned that it is important to ask for help when you need it and not to be afraid of your supervisors. Also, asking to get involved in things that interest you can go a very long way; if you don't ask about being involved in something you may never get there. In my professional life I plan to be confident with those around me and present myself as a leader – it is amazing how far a good handshake can go. These people skills are also important to my personal life and to developing new relationships at school and a good rapport with professors and other staff members.

Overall, this was a fantastic experience for me and I'm so glad I had the opportunity to come work with General Motors for twelve weeks. I learned a lot both professionally and personally and plan to use those lessons to better myself. I had a chance to be in the work place before I make a decision on where I want to work and what I want to do. This has encouraged me to continue my studies in Finance, to learn more about EXCEL, and to secure another internship to further my knowledge of what is really out there. Without Michigan Tech I never would have had this experience. I am so grateful for all of the opportunities that Tech presents me with and I am more proud than ever to be a Husky.

Samples of My Work

I am unable to include samples of my work due to GM confidentiality issues.