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Professional Internship Summary: Buckle

Aggie Honor Code: “An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do.”

**Introduction**

Buckle is a retailer that carries casual and trendy clothes that heavily emphasizes in creating a positive guest shopping experience through selling great clothes and even better personalized service. Within the stores there’s several different roles including the store manager, assistant store manager, operations manager, freight teammates, leaders, as well as regular part-time/fulltime teammates. The store manager and assistant store manager perform all of the administrative duties, while the operations manager focuses on visual merchandising and helping out the freight teammates, who unpack and fold merchandise. The leaders are a step down from being a manager and a step up from being a regular teammate, because they are keyholders, are responsible for meeting sales goals, and would like to eventually manage their own stores once they gain more experience. Buckle has an internship program as well as a Management Trainee program, which is the next step after completion of the internship because it equips teammates with the knowledge to help them run their own stores. Working at Buckle, you’re given the freedom to introduce whatever product you’d like to guests as long as the process is consistent, which is presenting merchandise with a reason, purpose, and feeling in mind. There are many processes in place to ensure that every time a guest comes in, no matter the store, they are getting the same great service. Managers and leaders are there to impact your sales presentation, help increase your sales, and to make sure you’re hitting all of your hidden opportunities, for example showing denim to the daughter’s mom, while the daughter is in the dressing room. So, they do pay close attention and want to know how your guest is doing, but it’s because they always want to help you have a better sales presentation and make the guest happy.

**Description of Experiences & Activities**

Throughout the internship, I was responsible for completing all of the chapter questions that Buckle assigns. To answer the questions, we had to read pieces on product knowledge, recruiting other teammates, how to better sell accessories and shoes, as well as watch videos on several different categories with the heaviest category being denim. Once I would answer the questions and educate myself, I was also in charge of educating other teammates. Buckle heavily focuses on educating and impacting others’ sales presentations. Everything we read or watched helped us better understand the company and our product to be able to help the guests better, as well as helping us and the other teammates be able to sell more merchandise. I liked constantly learning new things and being able to teach others’ what I learned, so I would like to do some form of educating others’ in my future career.

I also had to attend Leadership Development Meetings (LDMs) every Monday morning to prepare for the week. During these meetings we would go over the previous week’s sales performance of all teammates, the store’s overall sales and the percentage it was up or down from the previous year, and we would make goals based off of these numbers. Every leader and intern would attend these meetings and we would all educate each other on our different departments, as well as roleplay how one should try to sell the merchandise to a customer. Roleplaying is difficult, but I feel like practicing a sales pitch with teammates is very helpful since practice makes perfect. I would carry the goal setting into my future career, because I believe the daily goals that Buckle sets is what makes Buckle such a profitable company.

My major internship project included picking a product category that our store was struggling in and try to increase its sales and sell through. I chose the brand Willow and Root on the women’s side and I had to set sales goals, educate teammates on how to sell it, host trend seminars where the teammates tried on the products and I taught them power statements to use while introducing it to guests, and I had to track the results. I also was in charge of the visual merchandising of this brand, and I believe my choice to consolidate the collection and place it in the front of the store helped with making it more shoppable for guests. During this project, we had to track our results and say what made us successful with this project on a conference call with interns from all over the nation.

Other than these major duties, I performed other duties such as cleaning, maintenance of the store, and cashier duties when ringing up my guests.

**The Internship**

My objectives included learning how to present a sales presentation to guests, how to visual merchandise a store, gain valuable product knowledge, and how to manage a product category and successfully increase its sell through as well as its ranking amongst almost 500 stores nationwide. Each week I better learned how to confidently execute my sales pitch, and how to move onto the next product category to complete an outfit for the guest. It took a lot of practice for me to comfortably show product that the guest wasn’t asking for, but I eventually did it after a couple of tries. To gain product knowledge, I learned from my coworkers and I watched videos on the different brands that we carry, especially when it came to our private label brands and denim. For managing my own product category, I had to choose a brand that I wanted to improve at our store and set sales goals for myself as well as the whole team. I also had to educate the team on how to better sell it and impact their sales presentations by introducing it to the guest or picking an item out for the teammate to show it, if they hadn’t already.

Going into the internship, I didn’t know exactly what to expect. I knew that Buckle was customer focused and that the internship would somehow involve catering to the needs of the guests. However, I didn’t know to the extent that we would be focused on our sales presentation to the guest. I didn’t realize that sales was that hard, until this internship. I also thought it would be revolved more around store management and the administrative duties, rather than the majority of the internship program being sales driven.

Buckle was always open to the ideas I had. I offered ideas on how to visual merchandise the specific brand Willow and Root to increase its sales. I was given the chance to make my idea become a reality by taking all of the Willow and Root tops that were dispersed throughout the store and consolidating it into one area, so it can become a one stop shop for people loyal to the brand and to lower prices.

I would recommend the organization to marketing students that are doing the selling track since it gives great selling experience. Anyone that takes this internship will learn so much about earning trust with customers quickly and building lasting relationships that they would be able to carry over into any job. I would also recommend it to outgoing individuals that are interested in store management since it gives you a lot of opportunity to develop as a leader, and the chance to manage your own store after only a couple years working with the company.

 I wish I would’ve known how heavily it revolved around sales going into it. I think it would’ve been extremely helpful if Buckle in the future could allow the interviewees to shadow them during the first interview. I think shadowing a teammate gives you the best idea on what the internship will be like, rather than just being told about it.

 My greatest accomplishment includes the trend seminars I conducted while trying to grow the brand Willow and Root for my intern project. The trend seminars included either me or another teammate trying on several pieces of the newest collections of Willow and Root while educating teammates on different ways to wear the top. One of the tops we used, we realized that it could be tucked into your pants, tied in the front, all of the buttons could be undone and worn as a layering piece, and the top could be turned around and look cute worn backwards. We were doing really bad at selling that specific top and we would never show it to guests, but once all of the teammates learned the different ways to wear it, we showed guests and it flew off the rack within one week.

**Work Performance**

I used my time management skills to complete my assignments and projects on a timely basis. I’ve always had a creative eye so this helped me when I was tasked with changing up the visual merchandising of the store to grow the store’s sales and therefore ranking in my project’s department. Skills I acquired include how to sell something, whether it be a $7 Puravida bracelet or a $169 pair of Rock Revival jeans, and how to especially sell something that the guest didn’t originally come in looking for. Knowledge I acquired includes how to run a store by setting sales goals and departmental goals for each teammate as well as for the store in general to constantly improve and grow in net sales each year.

Overall, I was satisfied with my performance on assignments, daily projects, and my major intern project. Every day I was assigned 1-3 projects to be completed during that shift. I was in charge of making calls to guests about new product that was just launched or about current in-store events, and sometimes when I would message them pictures of new product, they would ask for me to put it on hold for them since they liked it so much. I was also satisfied with how well I was able to make the Willow and Root brand look cohesively together, and that I was given the opportunity to visually merchandise the front of the store. I was proud that I was able to increase the sales of Willow and Root tops and that I increased it by 19 rankings.

My deadlines were almost always met, unless I was needed on the sales floor more during that week, since the guests always came first. My time was always used efficiently, and sometimes I would even have to come in 30 minutes to an hour early for my shift so I could spend time working on my project in the backroom or preparing my education before going out to the salesfloor.

I would honestly rate the overall quality of my work an 8.5. I won’t rate myself perfect, because I know that I’m not the best at sales. This was my first job in sales, and it was honestly the hardest job I’ve ever had. I’m an introverted individual, so it was difficult for me to break out of my shell at first and to be able to introduce product to the guest confidently. I feel like the sales aspect was made even harder, considering I didn’t know where all the product was placed throughout the store and there’s a ton of denim facts that teammates usually take 3 months to learn before they become denim specialists. With the internship program being only 3 months long, we have to learn all product knowledge at a faster pace. However, every week I improved greatly in my sales, and became more comfortable with approaching guests and giving them a full sales presentation. Aside from sales, I did well at educating other teammates and completing all my intern duties. My intern project was also a success and I’m proud that I was able to take us from a ranking of 59 in Willow & Root tops to a ranking of 20 throughout the entire company.

**Personal Benefits**

My academic and career goals haven’t changed. I will continue going down the retail buying and store management track for marketing to pursue a career as a buyer for a high-end retailer. This internship has just solidified how much I’d prefer to be at a corporate’s headquarters rather than in a store setting.

My internship experience this summer has greatly impacted my personal growth. My determination has gotten stronger, due to me pushing my boundaries with the sales aspect. My discipline has also grown, because a twenty-year-old doesn’t particularly enjoy not having one Saturday off the entirety of the summer. I didn’t like missing out on fun trips with friends and family due to work, but I always performed to the best of my abilities despite external circumstances. I now know that I can do and complete anything I set my mind to. This was the hardest job I’ve ever held, but I set out to do my best and completed it successfully.

Working in retail stores is not easy, but it can be highly rewarding. You have to give up a consistent schedule and your weekends, but getting told “thank you for helping me, y’all are so kind,” while styling guests for upcoming events makes it worthwhile. In regards to the profession I want to go into, observing what brands sold and which ones didn’t, how people of different ethnicities or race gravitate towards different styles, and how the visual merchandising of a store can affect how quickly an item sells, gave me the insight I need to become a great buyer. I hope to utilize all that I learned from this internship to help me when I’m attending markets to buy clothes for the target market of my future retail employer.