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Introduction

When I was originally looking for an Internship I greatly struggled with finding a place to just respond to my application. I changed my resume multiple times and tried places that were close to me, far from me, and even in between, but no matter how much I applied I was either getting turned down or I received no replies at all. I used platforms like linkedin and handshake and then moved onto trying to apply directly onto the website of the company that I was applying for but still nothing. After all of my struggle I had a conversation with my grandma and she told me to contact the school board office of the town that I grew up in and currently stay in, Surry County Virginia. This was near the deadline of finding an internship so I was getting very nervous about being able to even do the summer semester just because of this hurdle. When I contacted the school board office they told me that they would ask the lead of tech at Surry County Public Schools and they did and I was contacted and told that they would allow me to be an intern at the three schools.

My biggest expectation coming into this internship was one that I hoped that I received enough practical experience so that I could apply it to a job afterwards. I have a big fear that I will end up somewhere and I would be a burden or a person who is just clueless, so having some sort of ground experience would help build my confidence within the field. I wanted to learn more about hardware, software and what the normal protocols are not just at this company but at most companies. That is because if I can do it here when I go to a space with my peers I can participate and add to the discussion or task for the day so practical experience is definitely one of the big things that I wanted to take away from this experience. Another outcome that I was hoping to have while being at Surry County Public Schools was that it would inspire me to do things on my own. Whether that was at home doing homelabs or at the job site taking initiative and being excited to take charge. I wanted to be sure that this was the field that I wanted to be in and not just a money grab. I believe if you go into a career with the mindset of just wanting money then you will be miserable so truly knowing that this is something that I would want to do for the rest of my life is a must. I want to make this field not only a job but a hobby. It will push me to be better wherever I step foot in any building. Lastly I hoped to Gain some strong soft skills like communication , teamwork and even leadership. Now This outcome goes sort of hand to hand with the other outcomes that I wanted but I want to put emphasis on this because you can have these soft skills in one place but not another. Specifically I want these soft skills in the tech-field so it can become second nature to me. These skills are slightly undermined in an academic setting so being able to learn this while interning will boost more of my skills.

Surry County Public Schools is a very small school system that is located in a rural area in Virginia with neighboring counties like Sussex, Prince George and Isle of Wight County. Surry County has three main educational buildings which is Luther Porter Jackson Middle School (the oldest building), Surry High School and Surry Elementary school. The IT department is a very small team of 3 people without the interns and volunteers that operate, manage and supports all three schools plus the school board office that is located in the town of Surry County which is about a 10 min drive from the other 3 schools. I went to this school from K-12 so coming back was very welcoming, not to say it would not have been for a random intern but it was very welcoming the first day. On the first day I met the team and I walked to the main office where we did most of the projects. They have moved offices on multiple occasions but, every office has been located within the highschool. When I first showed up I dressed very business casual as a first impression but I was informed that in the upcoming weeks I would not have to do that

because it would just be us and the maintenance team in the building for the most part so I could come comfortable if I wanted as long as it was appropriate.

Management

The management within the IT department at Surry County Public Schools is very collaborative and team oriented. I believe it is this way because there are not that many people in the IT department so when they have the people they will use them and teach them because they are always appreciative of the help that is given to them. The way of IT management is the head of the IT department David Trombley who keeps track of the plans for IT infrastruc, the budget and the business. He also does a lot of physical work as well, especially with the bigger projects but he is the Head of the IT department and has been there the longest. Then there is Stephanie Johnson who was my supervisor. We usually get work from David and we would work together with the other interns or volunteers. We did anything that needed to be done. Any support that needed to be done we did it and any projects that needed to be done we had our hands on it most likely we started it first. Lastly there was Mr. Sour who was a history teacher before but now he works with the IT department. He works more directly with the teachers and staff. Things like how to work powerpoints and teaching them the right way to operate things. Since there are not as many teachers on site during the summer he helped David out way more than what he would probably usually do.

Working under Stephanie was very informative and I learned a lot. She has been in IT for 15+ years and she showed me everything and taught me as we were doing projects. Always found a way for me to engage and explained things in a way where it was easy to pick up and follow her lead. Even on my first day at the school she showed me how to add people into a domain as a user and how to give people admin rights by using me as an example. I think that was a neat way to teach someone because It shows you first hand how it works and you are seeing your name in this group or another and it made it easier to pick up because I was the example. The Team does wish that the company would put more people under payroll because there is a lot of work that needs to be done even though the schools system is very small compared to other schools systems. When I graduated from Surry County High School there were only 50 graduates in my class. Even though they do not have many permanent members under the IT department they do get a lot of people from multiple sources. One of those sources is Career Choice which is a program within the county that gives mostly young people the opportunity to work in certain careers temporarily for a certain amount of time or until they run out of the budget to pay those people. So that includes the power plant in Surry, The school board office, Front desk opportunities, IT and more. They also get students from the school directly. Especially seniors that do not have a class during a period. And lastly there is my case where I called the school board office and asked to be an intern and they accepted my request and I became an Intern until I finished my hours with them. The management from Stephanie was not hard, very open and willing to allow us to learn from our mistakes. No micromanaging or anything like that. She always tells me “there is nothing

you have access to that I can't fix". Her doing that just gave me the confidence to try things without being scared.

Duties and Projects

Throughout the internships I had a lot of duties and all together we did a lot of projects throughout the three schools that allowed me to learn a whole lot and help the schools systems infrastructure a whole lot. My daily duties entailed me using various software. One of the main sites that we used for ticketing was called School dude. Every morning I would log onto this site and check the incident section of the ticketing page and that is where teachers and other staff would post issues that they had whether that was for a student or for themselves. If there was a ticket that needed to be done either I would go alone or with Stephanie to solve the problem. At the beginning of the internship this platform was used way more often but slowed down in the middle of may because the school year ended and a lot of teachers and staff were not there so we did not get that many tickets. The summer was mainly for projects that could upgrade the building's infrastructure. The ticketing system is a great benefit for the schools because it allows for teachers and staff to be helped in a timely manner. It has a que to let the IT technician that is viewing the ticket to prioritize the people that may have been waiting longer than others. It also allows Technicians to assign themselves to certain tickets so that other technicians that are viewing School Dude will know that they do not have to touch that ticket. It keeps everything running smoothly. Another one of my duties that was used more often at the beginning of the internship was the asset management application called One to One. We used this platform to manage any and every device that was owed by the schools. One of the bigger projects that we had to do was, all of the graduating seniors had to turn in their chromebooks that were issued to them when they were in elementary. We powerwashed all of these chromebooks and in One to One we assigned them to the turn in group with their corresponding chargers and put them on the shelf. We had a spreadsheet on excel that showed us all the students that did not turn their chromebooks in yet and we contacted their homeroom teacher to escalate it. If the student still did not turn in their chromebooks they were threatened with a fine and possibly not being able to walk across the stage on their graduation day. The chromebooks that do get put on the shelf they eventually get assigned to incoming kindergarteners for the next year. Any damaged chromebooks get sent for repair by attronica if they do not pass warranty. Teachers also had responsibilities at the end of the school year. Teachers were required to reset their passwords before the end of the school year because they would be forced to reset them at the beginning of the school year if they did not do it then. When that happens it causes a lot of build up on the ticketing platform because a lot of staff have difficulties understanding why they can not log in. To combat that we tell them to reset it before the school year ends.

As the summer progressed we started a bigger project which was the set up of brand new lenovo desktops in 2 rooms that needed an upgrade plus those two classes use more complex software so they needed new equipment in there. One of my main duties within this project was using a bootable drive to install windows 11 onto these 20 desktops. After installing windows onto the desktops I joined them onto the schools domain and used an active directory to rename them and move them into the correct group which was sectioned from the Domain name—> Computers-HS—>Class Room Desktops → to the actual room number. After adding them to the domain I gave the teachers that were assigned to the rooms admin rights on all the desktops in their rooms so that when they needed to change something or add something they had the rights

to do so. Then we pushed all the software to the desktops that were on the previous desktops, mainly adobe applications. These classes needed a lot of applications within adobe because one of them was a photography class and the other class was a tech class.

Once we completed that task our next project became a project on accident. We realized that a 2 desktops in one classroom would display all printers in all 3 buildings when logged into as a student. This was a problem because students should only have printers pop up in the school that they were in. So we logged onto this desktop that was running chrome OS with multiple student accounts and with all of the students it was displaying all of the printers which was a problem. We went into another room to just test this further and we found that it worked properly. We tried troubleshooting in many ways power washing, checking chrome policies in google admin and even re-enrolling them. After doing all of that troubleshooting we found that the problem was the VLAN. The VLAN was connected to an admin VLAN because that was the old IT office so it gave the device admin permissions which was to see all of the printers in all buildings. Using powershell and IP configurations we found out the correct port to put the desktop on and it ended up working properly.

I also have been given permission to do a lot of work in an active directory. I was allowed to update all the students accounts to the correct school. For an example in active directory if I had a class that was in 8th grade moving to 9th grade would have to be moved from middle school to the highschool in active directory. More things that I have done in the active directory included me adding new students in the school system to their correct class group and creating their user accounts with their passwords. Also enrolling their chromebooks and signing them into their chromebooks so that they can use them at the beginning of the year. After the device is enrolled I have to also move their device to the correct group in google admin so the device receives the correct permissions.

Some hardware related work that we did later was install some ram into the new desktops that we had put in the two rooms. So 20 sticks of ram were installed into those PCs (one extra stick for each PC). This is where I was pretty unfamiliar with where it was and how to insert it properly and it was very easy. My only issue with it was I was very nervous to break the ram or break the motherboard with how hard I had to press down on the ram for it to click but my supervisor reassured me that I was not going to break it and then it went smooth for the rest of the installation. This allowed these two classes to perform tasks that regular PCs would have a little bit more trouble doing and since these two classrooms took on more heavy duty things it was only right to give them these sticks of ram. We had one Pc that did not take the sticks of ram well. After it was inserted we would not get any display from the monitor. Originally we thought it was the monitor but we swapped out multiple monitors and we still have nothing. Somehow the PC had clunked out so we had to send it out for repair.

In the final weeks we worked with inventory involving the printers and Some add-on batteries for switches we had been sitting on since 2018. The printers were a pretty easy task to get down. We had a lot of old printing resources that we did not need anymore so we created a spreadsheet and made it so that whenever we ran into something that was old we threw it in the trash and we did that for all 3 schools. Only problem was that within the 3 schools one of the bigger printers was receiving way too much toner like 60 plus. There was something wrong with the logs on the xerox side where they were sending 2 boxes a day for a few weeks and that caused a backup in inventory. Ultimately we contacted xerox and told them that it was way too much and we needed to send some back. We were able to do that and once they came to pick them up they took all 60. Crazy thing is in order to decrease pricing on the big printers that they

were leasing from xerox they decided that they were going to stop doing business with xerox and they have now been in discussion with another company to supply their printers and had a walkthrough the 3 schools with some of the companies employees so they could map it out and decide what are the best locations for printers throughout the campus.

One of our last projects that we did was to utilize these backup switch batteries that we had. These batteries have been around since 2018 and David knew that they spent a lot of money on them and they needed to be used so that if the power was to go out then all systems would not go down due to the lack of power to the servers. We checked out each server room and mapped out how many batteries we needed and how many main units we needed. The main unit for the batteries just displayed the batteries percentage and how long they could run if the power went out. It also ran a diagnostics test to make sure that the batteries were in good condition. These batteries felt like they were 50 pounds each and each container held 2 batteries. between the 3 schools we tested, mounted and installed 20 batteries and main units. This was one of the most difficult tasks to do but not because it was a technical challenge but because it was hard to try and mount these crazy heavy objects on these frames with small screws compared to the size of the batteries. Overall it was a great experience. One of my first times mounting anything other than something like a TV.

One project that I wish I was able to start with the IT team at Surry County Public Schools is the two factor authentication through the whole school system. They plan to implement this but it will be after I leave the internship. This is great for the school system. Two factor authentication is one of the best ways to help secure user accounts and the infrastructure of any corporation. It allows the users to use 2 forms of security one being a password and the second being either something you know, you have or you have. That alone should boost the security of the system by a whole lot.

Cybersecurity Skills

Prior to the internship I knew about active directory, password management and VLANs in theory but never put it into practice. With the permissions that I had I now understand how bad it would be if someone with malicious intent also had the permissions that I had. What they could do with the whole system would be detrimental to the schools infrastructure. I made sure that I understood the severity of confidentiality between user's passwords and information. I was informed of an incident that happened at the school while I was still just a student at the school. There was a cyber attack on the schools systems specifically and ransomware attack and of course the school did not pay for it. At Old Dominion University I learned that it is not smart for most corporations to pay any ransom because if you do it is not guaranteed that your systems will go back up anyway and they probably already have the information. Unfortunately at the time the school did not have many means of backup so they had to wipe every device between the three schools so that they knew for sure that there were no more malicious codes within their network and they had to essentially re-build their whole network. Come to find out the source of the attack was in the insertion of a USB. They do not know who plugged it in but did find out that it was the source and that is why it is important to never plug in anything if you do not know what it is. Also it is important to not click any and everything on your machines because it can cause attacks like that one. I knew about these precautions before the internship and I understand users do not always know how critical these things are and I think that staff should be taught this either monthly, annually or on a scheduled basis because it is that important. I learned how often

users forget passwords and how often they keep passwords for too long and how that can be risky. I learned that a lot of users either use the same password or use passwords that can be figured out by just a simple conversation and encouraged them to use more complex passwords when creating accounts because attacks like brute force attacks are as simple as installing John the Ripper. Trust me because I have done multiple John the Ripper labs at Old Dominion University via Virtual Machines within a Kali Linux environment.

ODU Curriculum

The ODU course helped me a lot in preparation for my internship and being able to understand a lot. Especially the basics like terminology, security protocols. A few networking basics and things of that nature but I was not prepared practically a lot. Anytime I did feel comfortable practically it was because of my own knowledge but not from what Old Dominion taught me. I do not fully blame ODU though because there's only so much you can learn from an institution. It does not translate that well because there is not any stakes. When you are working for someone else things get serious and it is important to hone down on the things you are being shown. While as in an institution you are doing assignments and just trying to get through them for the semester. Which causes at least to not retain the information as much as actual experience does. But because of ODU I was able to be in a room full of other professionals and have a conversation and keep up to some extent from topics that I learned from school. ODU allowed me to ask my supervisors the right questions to learn more and connect it to what was going on. For an example I did an assignment in one of my networking classes on how to map out and create a budget for a building. On paper it looked like it made sense but I never stepped foot in this place it is just a hypothetical but when I was in the school and I saw how the switches, routers, RJ45 panels and more was set up in order to make things run efficiently it started to click on why it is important to budget before hand. Once you get that hands on experience the words that you have been reading in these books become actions that I can do in person. Working with the school also brought a new meaning to teamwork and communication. It is not just about talking to each other but being on the same page with each other especially if you are handling people's sensitive information like children's accounts or parent's accounts. It is also important to learn from one another. There have been plenty of instances when Stephanie learned things from me indirectly from us just being around each other and she had taught me what I accidentally taught her. She taught me a whole lot. I do believe that I have learned more in these 3 months with her than what I have learned from ODU. I believe that is so because there is nothing like in person learning. Being in the moment and actually making a difference. Schools help build a great foundation so you are not just a hindrance but hands on experience cements these hard and soft skills into your brain.

My Objectives

In the introduction I listed some objectives of mine that I wanted achieved by the end of the internship. These objectives included the following: Learning more about hardware and networking, Being comfortable enough to do my own experimenting, Refining my soft skills and lastly Engaging in as much as possible so that I can get as much practical experience as possible.

Starting with learning more about hardware and software so that I can communicate within my peers. I knew a little bit about hardware but I have not done much with it to know where things were or call them out. I had only heard of words like Ram and Cpus but never really seen it inside a PC, not enough to point it out when I saw it. The most that I had done was change batteries from friends' macbooks and that was only a few months before I started my internship. So one of my main focuses was to understand and work with hardware way more often and needless to say I got what I wished for. We worked with ram, Vga cables, cat 5e cables, Pcs, docking stations, switches, routers, and more. Also wanted to learn more about software and different systems and protocols which was very informative. I was able to engage in active directory, google admin, remote management, DHCP domains and more. Knowing the 2 allowed me to piece both of them together when they had to react to one another. Before the internship I was able to get some experience in software due to Old Dominion University. At ODU I did labs in linux, Windows and other hypothetical software situations. It was mostly password attacking, threat detecting and anything that was cybersecurity related. I think to understand the cybersecurity portion of IT you should dip your feet into helping fix issues like technician work so that you are able to understand various aspects which gives you options within cybersecurity. While at the internship I was able to get my hands on any and everything and before any other internee was able to volunteer I tried to get my hands on it first. Doing these things had me researching things even outside of the job site expanding my knowledge with these machines and I am proud to achieve this goal throughout my internship.

Another one of my objectives that I hoped to achieve and I did was being able to find inspiration from this work to do new projects while I was interning. This would further support the fact that I wanted to make sure that Information Technology/Cybersecurity was the field that I wanted to be in. Like I have said before I had questioned myself on if this was the correct field for me and after working hard and learning for the past three months I can confirm that I do want to be in this field. I have also started a project and I plan on continuing it. I have found that I am very interested in Linux Operating systems. I recently purchased a book that goes through basics in linux like commands, permissions, file management and more. I bought a very cheap laptop on ebay and used a skill that I learned from my internship called imaging. I used a bootable usb drive to install linux onto the laptop, specifically kali linux because eventually I want to experiment on pentesting. I had a learning experience while installing linux. When I originally attempted to install it I was having issues so all I could install was the terminal. With that happening the operating system was very basic there were a lot of things not downloaded on there. I learned about drivers which is software that allows the hardware to communicate with certain software. I did not have drivers for ethernet or wifi so after installing the basic form linux I could not update it because I had no form of connection to the internet. The only other solution I could do was use another computer and download the drivers from kalis website to a usb and navigate through the terminal to download it off the usb. After downloading the drivers I had to unblock the Wifi. The problem that came up with that was I did not have a subsystem called rf-kill. This command allows the blocking and unblocking of mainly wireless devices. So, again I had to go back and download rf-kill on a usb and onto my linux system. Once I accomplished that I was in business and was able to install all the current updates and a desktop environment. I did all this just to practice Linux and in trying to practice it I was hit with a lot of tasks that helped me learn. That is the beauty with IT trial and error is so beneficial and problem solving helps a lot in the process.

Next objective that was on my list was to refine my soft skills. I could do this in any work environment which I have but there is a difference in IT teamwork and warehouse teamwork. It's less about giving a helping hand but about giving a helping solution. Adding your input to open up the realm of things that can be done and be solved with more than one mind. Communication in this environment is very mature and allows room for improvement, not being scared to say something because you might think it is done. Being able to use new software and applications is also big. I did not want to touch something and look clueless. It is one thing to be confused but curiosity will trump it. When something new was laid out to me, I wanted it to be a habit to click around and explore this new tool, application or whatever was in front of me and that is what I did every chance that I got. The next were professionalism and attention to detail. I have a service to do for other people and I wanted to learn how to be professional to the people that were receiving my service and I wanted it done properly and in a timely manner. These are teachers, front desk, superintendents and more. They are in charge of a lot of things so they need things done in a convenient time. There needs to be some sort of order in a school system and being the support is one of the most critical aspects in the foundation even if some people do not realize that it is.

Reflections

In this section I will go over some of the motivating, discouraging and challenging aspects of my internship. Starting with the most motivating aspects of the internship. The most motivating aspect was how much I was growing as the weeks went by. Previously I did not know as much as I felt I should have. I had known things from the classroom but this was different. It felt like in this setting it mattered and I needed to absorb everything that was being fed to me. Everytime I completed a new task, whether it was imaging, Pc migrations or even adding switch batteries, It felt like I could do this for the rest of my life. It being so hands on also motivated me to want to do it more. I wasn't just shadowing but I was just as involved as Stephanie and the rest of the team was which made the experience worth it. I would not have learned as much if I did not physically do it myself. I was trusted with responsibilities and treated like an employee by everyone and that was greatly appreciated. Being a small team allowed me to feel more personal with the team. Made my impact feel stronger. It did not feel like I was doing it for some big time boss that never saw me or appreciated me. My supervisor didn't just give me a task and told me to do it but she taught me. When she taught me she explained to me why it was so important for the rest of the schools. I remember one day we were talking about IP addresses and the topologies. We went down a little rabbit hole on topologies and how the schools network topology was set up. We discussed different topologies and how some old versions like the bus or the ring were not effective anymore. That type of environment made me want to be there everyday because we always had something to talk about whether it was personal or formal.

The most discouraging aspect of the internship was honestly not getting paid for it. It is not anybody's fault because I can understand if they can not add anymore employees then why would they be able to pay interns but it was still discouraging not to be able to earn an income. Having to go without being paid caused me to have to work on the weekends and have to go to the internship during the week. This caused some burnout for the 3 summer because all 7 of my days during the week I had something to do. If I was getting paid I would have had more time to relax my mind and my body. It did not make me want to quit by no means but it definitely made

my time there a little bit more discouraging since I really did not have a day off of moving around for months.

Lastly was the most challenging aspect of the internship. There were plenty of challenges that I had during the internship and I do not think that it was a bad thing that I did. Having all of these challenges allowed me to learn so I am very appreciative of the challenges that the internship brought. The biggest challenge that I had was working in an environment that I never worked in before and you have to start somewhere and here it was. It was challenging because I did not know what to expect so at the beginning I was in my head a lot about if I was in the way or if I was a burden or not. Never touching these systems and making a mistake was a fear of mine so I was very wary and nervous. I had to get over it, bite down on my mouthpiece and come at it head on because it was my opportunity to learn as much as possible. It allowed me to ask accurate questions and add to conversations that meant something. The next challenge was the tasks that I had to do. They were very diverse and there was not really any easing into them. It was just diving which forced me to adapt. Everything could not be explained in the most elaborate way. It was just moving with the team and that is what I did. The questions that I was not able to ask my supervisor at the time, I looked for it online on my own time and tried to apply it to what we were doing.

Recommendations

I think that it is very important to stay prepared for the unknown. If you are reading this and you are about to start an internship or want to start an internship. Here is a few recommendations that I have for you:

- **Ask questions:** It is very important to ask questions during an internship. You will not learn if you do not ask because a supervisor does not know what you know so asking questions will increase your chances of learning more.
- **Get involved:** Make it your priority to be involved with as much as possible. You never know who is watching and also practical experience will keep you sharp. Someone can see you working hard and offer you a job or send you in the right direction just based on your work ethic.
- **Write things down:** If everything is faced-paced you could possibly forget what you have learned. Write what you have learned down so when you go back and look at what you wrote the dots start connecting. That is why I am grateful that my school had this program with the journals I was able to reflect on what I have done.
- **Take initiative:** Not just in the work but take initiative in learning things new outside of the job site. Your career does not end when you leave the building. Continue learning especially if you want to do this for the rest of your life. Think about what you can do to advance on and off of the jobsite.

Preparations

Before you start your internship it is important to do a few things. I would say do some research on the place you will be working. Learn and understand what the company is all about and match what they want. Not only for them but for yourself, you do not want to go somewhere and be out of place because you do not have any sense of what it is like. To add onto that find out what they usually do in the position that you are interning for and do further research on that.

You do not have to go into a deep dive but be familiar with common terms and tools so that you can make an impact during professional conversations. Be prepared to engage with people, just because it is a tech job does not mean you are isolated all the time. It is important to communicate and engage with people especially if there is some sort of customer interaction. Make a good impression on the people that meet you because you never know what they might see in you. Lastly learn about multiple aspects of tech, not just hard or just software or just networking. Have a general understanding of it all because you never know what you will be working on until the assignment is given to you

Conclusion

Overall for my first internship I love the way it turned out and I am happy that this is the other place that did deny me. Being able to go to a school that I graduated from and make some sort of difference was a great feeling. I also am grateful for the connections I made with the IT team. It is crazy that I went to that school system from elementary all the way to highschool and I really did not know who was in charge of the Information technology team. I did not know where the office was or anything. I think that shows how underappreciated IT roles are sometimes, they can go underappreciated for long periods of time and that is not right they should get more attention. From this experience I took away a lot of various skills, nothing laser focused but a broad overview of technology. I got a taste of everything and I think that it is perfect that I learned that way. I will be able to piece things together better moving forward. As for the remainder of my days in college this was my final chapter. I am grateful to ODU for pushing students to look for an internship and documenting our experience. This allows us something to go back to and proof of what we have accomplished in our final semesters, A perfect send off. Lastly this internship has set me up to possibly have enough experience to land another internship(hopefully paid) or an actual job in this field. I think before attempting to dive directly into cybersecurity I will try to sharpen my skills in Information technology and build an even stronger foundation on my knowledge. The best part is I am open to many career paths as long as I am in IT.