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Introduction

At the beginning of this semester, I chose to work within ODU, specifically at our IT Help Desk to gather experience within the field of Information Technology. Specifically, I wanted to work here so I could find ways to help our community with my specialty skills involving computer and software knowledge. I specifically wanted to gain more knowledge in the following areas: learning how to utilize backend systems, learning to work with a team of equally skilled individuals, and troubleshooting technical issues that I cannot see personally.

The IT Help Desk is an office within ODU's Information Technology Systems, its current form evolving in 2018. The IT Help Desk seeks to assist any user who calls or creates a ticket with their issue, aiming to do so with only one contact. Among the ODU offices with Google reviews, the IT Help Desk has the highest ratings sitting at 4.5 stars, and serving every monarch, staff or student with a smile and a reassuring voice. Our motto is "We're here to help", and that is fundamental to the ways in which we perform our duties, as when someone is calling us, they're likely not having a good day, seeing as their technology isn't working. This is something that I was taught during my initial orientation, I was brought in for about two weeks of training before going onto the technician floor. My orientation was very thorough, covering everything, from how to greet customers who walk in, to phone call etiquette, to how to handle incredibly niche situations, such as receiving a hotline phone call while with a walk-in customer. No situation was left unspoken about, and nothing was obfuscated. This gave me an incredible view of the IT Help Desk as one of the most dutiful and helpful departments within ODU, and that this internship was the correct choice for me.

Once I began properly engaging with the IT Help Desk beyond training, I was shadowed by more experienced technicians to make sure any mistakes I made were quickly corrected. This took the form of me sitting at one of the Desks acting as a normal technician, but on a zoom call and sharing my screen so that my shadow could see everything that I was doing and stop me before I gave out wrong information or followed the wrong procedure. This shadowing period gave me a lot of confidence that I was missing prior to beginning to properly work here and helped me realize that despite all the second guessing that I always have fallbacks. Be that our knowledge base or our other technicians. Since then, I have found myself quickly answering questions that I thought I'd always need help to answer.

The Hierarchy of Service

The IT Help Desk's management structure is incredibly simple to understand, as unlike other organizations, the structure is a straight line. It starts with me and my peers, the student technicians. We're all students with knowledge about computers, and training in the specifics of working within ODU's IT systems. We're every caller's first point of contact, we manage tickets, field calls, and assist walk-ins. Above us are the Lead Student Technicians, students who have been working at the help desk for a longer period and have accrued a larger knowledge base. They assist us with the same duties we take but also act as an escalation point, if we don't know how to answer a question, we turn to them. Above them are the hourly technicians, usually

graduated students of ODU and former student technicians, they have some of the most knowledge at the help desk. Finally, above them is our manager, Stefan Hancock. He runs our schedules, manages who does what during work hours, and how our duties are doled out.

Above the manager is someone I rarely interact with, but someone who should be mentioned regardless. The director of the IT Help Desk is Clifton Blaisdell. He is the ultimate approver of schedules and work reporting, he reviews our tickets and makes decisions that we must follow regarding policy and rules of interaction with customers. Despite this, though, he is not a monolith. He still requests and accepts input from my manager and the hourly technicians

Professional Interview

Interviewer: Ana Brown

Interviewee: Stefan Hancock

Q: What made you choose to enter the field of IT and the IT Help Desk?

A: I have been building computers for my entire life and have always kept up with the evolving nature of technology and have an interest in the latest that emerging technology has to offer. The IT Help Desk allows me to not only practice those skills but utilize them to help others who may not understand how to work on their own devices.

Personally, the reason I chose to enter this field is due to my own knowledge of computers and how to resolve the issues, the responsibility to help students, staff, and other people of ODU is a bonus. As for Stefan's words, we have very similar origins in this matter, wishing to practice and hone our technical skills.

Q: What do you think some of the most important skills someone working within IT could have?

A: Some of the most important skills to have would include strong problem-solving abilities, the ability to research and comprehend new information, and strong listening skills.

Regarding technical skills, I included this question to see if my own assumptions were correct. Prior to this, I had assumed that problem solving and research skills were paramount, which they are, but the listening skills were novel to me, as I had not considered this as a possibility

Q: Is there any special knowledge you think would be valuable to pass on?

A: I think one of the most valuable things you can do as a technician is keeping your own documentation on solving issues that you can refer to in the future.

This advice, above everything else I have learned in this interview, is probably the most important piece I will ever receive now or later. Documentation is everything in every IT field, and quite possibly will be the most important thing an IT professional could ever do, well beyond fixing technologies.

Q: In your opinion what are the most valuable tech-related skills for a professional in the IT field should have?

A: The most valuable tech related skills would be familiarization with multiple operating systems, a strong understanding of what hardware performs what function, and a grasp on how a user's needs relate to hardware requirements.

Q: What entry level experience do you think would be valuable for someone searching to obtain your position as a Help Desk Lead Technician?

A: The best entry level experience would be starting out as a technician and gaining the experience of assisting users through remote means and exercising the skill of being able to troubleshoot issues with a device that is not in front of you. The ability to walk a user through a process without being in control of the device is a valuable skill.

Q: If you were to hire full-time employees from the interns currently working for you, what qualities are you looking for?

A: The qualities that I would look for would include outstanding customer service, taking the initiative to inform themselves about new technologies and how they may apply to our IT environment, and a strong use of documentation.

It does make sense that an IT lead would require these skills in order to excel, and developing them at a low level where mistakes are more permissible is going to provide a good experience so that

Q: Regarding the IT Help Desk itself, what are some of the most valuable qualities for a worker to excel in this position?

A: The most valuable skills at the ODU IT Help Desk in particular are mostly customer service soft skills, including active listening and critical thinking. Keeping up with all facets of the issue that a user is having is the most important step in solving the problem.

Q: How could someone seeking to improve their skills as an IT professional utilize a position here to improve said skills?

A: Working in a Help Desk environment will provide you with all of the scenarios and experiences that you would encounter as an IT professional in the field. Interfacing with customers, exploring new technologies, encountering new issues, and corresponding with other departments within IT are all things that you will be able to improve on.

My Duties

At the IT Help Desk, my duties are rather simple. I assist anyone who creates tickets through our system, walks in for assistance, or calls in. Every day that I work, I have no specialty assigned projects, instead being placed at one of the desks with a phone and computer so that I can assist users with any issues they face. This work I perform is incredibly necessary for the functioning of the college, as not only do student issues get sent to us, but also VIP issues from people such as department heads, lawyers, and occasionally, the president of the entire university, Brian O Hemphill. Without my work at the IT Help Desk, and indeed without the tireless work of everyone else who works there, none of our technical issues would be resolved. From non-functioning projectors to phishing attempts, the IT Help Desk is always the first point of contact for all issues, large or small. We take pride in this fact, and I do as well now, having been granted a greater understanding of what it takes to perform in this field.

What Skills I Use

Within the IT Help Desk, I find that I utilize many skills that I have learned from my time at ODU, including those not directly related to my degree in cybersecurity. The main skill I utilize in my time here is knowing how to directly speak to customers when they are having issues. Of course, my technical knowledge plays a role in what I do, but the ability to communicate complex technical issues and how to resolve them is the most important ability to have. Without the knowledge of how to “dumb down” technical speak to people who may not know everything you do, people’s issues could not be properly resolved, and they will become frustrated. My preexisting skills of troubleshooting have helped me immensely in this regard, as I have almost always been able to determine the heart of issues people are having and how to fix it, though I was not always able to communicate that in a clear and concise manner. Working at the Help Desk has taught me how to properly communicate ways to fix issues people are having in a way that will not frustrate them.

A skill I did not have before I began working with the IT Help Desk would be how to diagnose and solve issues that I cannot physically see. Previously, I would need to be physically present to help someone with a technical issue, as I believed that if I could not see and replicate an issue, I would be unable to help someone. Now, working at the Help Desk and with all the training I have been given to properly assist with technical issues, alongside my ready access to a detailed knowledge base that holds almost all the answers, I have grown in my confidence and ability to help. Without this access to information and people I can bounce off of, I do not believe I would be able to be nearly as confident in my troubleshooting as I have become.

How My Classes Prepared Me

The classes I have taken at ODU have not properly prepared me for the reality of working within a live service environment. Most of the classes I took grant us a large amount of time to diagnose and respond to problems, rather than the quick resolutions required when talking with users whilst live on phone calls. I think ODU could better prepare us for working in a system as this one by making sure we have been given experience on how to quickly diagnose issues without overthinking them or making the jump to the most complicated issue before trying simpler solutions. In my experience, it is never a complicated issue that users request, and when it is, they are usually easily fixed by simple solutions.

My Goals

Through working at the IT Help Desk, I personally believe that all the goals I laid out when I first started here have been met. Through a combination of training, live experience, and being immersed in technical knowledge has helped me to grow and learn my areas of expertise, reinforcing my knowledge base and supplementing areas I did not already know about. More

specifically, I have learned how to expertly navigate the backend system the IT Help Desk uses to handle tickets and phone calls, able to search for old tickets to help resolve issues with ease, and how to simultaneously talk on the phone with a customer while searching for a resolution for their issue. I have also been able to easily talk with my coworkers, who are on an equal and elevated plane of knowledge from me. Everyone who works here has a passion for technology and the know-how to help ODU students and staff with their issues, so I have learned and taught in equal measure, as each of us brings a unique set of skills that makes the IT Help Desk what it is.

The most important goal that the IT Help Desk has helped me achieve is learning how to troubleshoot and resolve issues someone is experiencing without physically being present. Previously, I would need to be physically present to help someone with a technical issue, as I believed that if I could not see and replicate an issue, I would be unable to help someone. Now, working at the Help Desk and with all the training I have been given to properly assist with technical issues, I am far more confident in my ability to help. I can now diagnose problems within a minute of talking with someone experiencing an issue, and am able to quickly figure out a resolution or some steps that might get us to one, as not everything can be done in one step

Motivations and Excitement

This internship has been one of the most exciting and interesting work opportunities I have had, though it is the only experience I have had in my field, so I don't have anything to compare it to. What motivates me most about this internship is that I am always working on different things. While most of what we do is password resets, the things that happen between password resets are where the real interest lies. Some days it's an outage, other days, its helping someone map a shared drive to their computer. Every day is different, and I am always ready to handle whatever issues are given to me that day. The most exciting things I have done involve helping people get back into their accounts after hours of being unable to, the relief I hear in their voices after I resolve their issues is worth any stress I've undergone to get to this point, and I feel especially vindicated if they want to give compliments to my superior about the way I handled them.

Motivation-wise, I find that I am incredibly motivated to work within the Help Desk, as anyone having an issue that they bring to us is seeking assistance, and they are not having a good day. I always strive to make people's days better if I can, so being the person so many come to with issues I know I am able to fix brings me great satisfaction.

Discouragements

Despite all the interesting challenges posed through working here, I cannot deny that sometimes I get discouraged. Mostly, it is through boredom as there are often dead zones where no calls come in and no tickets are in the bucket. In situations like these, all we can do is wait and chat, but depending on who is working with me, waiting is more boring than not having

anything to do. When there is nothing to be done in terms of work, we are not allowed to do anything but classwork, which is helpful but not quite as exciting as the highs of the active periods of working here.

Beyond the boredom, however, is the times when I cannot help a user and they get angry. I aim to help everyone I possibly can whilst working within this office, but sometimes a user calls in with an issue that I just cannot help to fix. Some examples of this are when a user resets their password and calls in stating they cannot access outlook. Usually, this is something we can help with, but if their password was set within two hours, Microsoft services are still syncing. Having to break the news to them that they are unable to access their emails or word docs is not a fun job, but it must be done.

Challenges

This internship is an interesting and amazing opportunity to have while going to the school of cybersecurity of ODU, but it is not bereft of its challenges. Just as something new is brought every day, a new challenge is brought as well. From phishing attempts to full on outages of major systems. ODU students and staff rely on us for everything tech related, and that can be stressful. The main challenge, though, is the customers. While most are very benign and easy to work with, there are some who are rude, mean, or downright weird. While I only have secondhand accounts of the first two, I experienced the third firsthand. It was a slower Monday, and a someone, presumably a student walked in carrying his laptop with a flash drive slotted into the USB port, we figured this would be a simple fix. It was anything but. It turns out that he needed help reinstalling windows from the flash drive, which is not an unusual ask of us. However, what makes him memorable is what he said immediately afterwards. Without even giving us a chance to respond, he said “Don’t worry, this isn’t a hacking attempt. If I wanted to hack you, I’d just go on the dark web to see what breaches ODU has had recently, then violate the computer privacy and decency act, and then go to jail for 20 years.” Everyone had to restrain a laugh or double take when he finished speaking, but it is our job to help. Our lead student technician went to help him, and it was uneventful. As I was nearby I overheard the issue he was having, it turns out that he was trying to run a dual-boot of Linux and Windows on his laptop, but somehow messed up the partitioning so badly that he removed the wi-fi driver of his motherboard and was unable to install it again, as without that driver, he could not connect to the internet. When I suggested to him to take his computer to the bookstore to see if they might be able to fix it, for cheap at that, he replied “I dunno, that sounds like a social engineering attempt.” We all were baffled at the confusing nature of this walk-in and have been talking about him since.

This challenge, while funny to think about afterwards, is stressful in the moment. We were trying to help this walk-in user without making him think we were “suspicious” of him or trying to hack him, even though we’re only here to help. It is possible that we did scare him off with our knowledge, but I hope he was able to get the help with his technical issue that he needed.

Recommendations for Future Interns

For all interns coming to work for the IT Help Desk in the future, my only advice is simple. Come with an open mind and you will leave with more knowledge than you ever could have wanted. To expand, every day you work at the help desk, you will be learning something. If you think you know everything there is to know about working here, you will not do good work. A fundamental part of the work we do is looking through previous tickets and sifting through our constantly updated knowledge base of issues. Everything we do should have reasoning behind it, and I advise that you put the ticket or knowledge base article you looked at to get the information give in your work notes, that way if you're wrong, you won't be penalized as you were only going off previous information.

Additionally, interns coming to work here should know, you're amongst peers, not monoliths. Everyone at the Help Desk brings their own area of expertise and their own unique knowledge. As do you, you're here for a reason. Every member of the Help Desk contributes to our collective knowledge, and we are all useful for ticket resolutions and calls. I also believe that something Stefan said to me during our interview is relevant here." Working in a Help Desk environment will provide you with all of the scenarios and experiences that you would encounter as an IT professional in the field. Interfacing with customers, exploring new technologies, encountering new issues, and corresponding with other departments within IT are all things that you will be able to improve on." Stefan

Conclusion

To conclude this, I believe that the help desk is perhaps the best internship opportunity I could have gotten for my future, and for my degree. Overall, my thoughts of this place are extremely positive, and the people are fantastic. I am glad that I was accepted so readily into this position and have become a regular face at the help desk. For the remainder of my tenure here, this position will remind me that behind every issue is a person, and that all technical issues can be resolved with a little bit of communication. Professionally, I believe working here will be incredible on a resume, and the references I have from my boss might help land me some entry-level positions. I will also continue working here for my remaining time at ODU and learn ever more than I have put here. I have learned how to work with unfamiliar situations and how to reassure someone experiencing a bad day that things will be better with just a few words. This experience has been fantastic for my personal and professional development, giving me confidence I previously lacked. Thank you for reading