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Intern Nation: How To Earn Nothing And Learn Little In The Brave New Economy



Synopsis

Millions of young people—and increasingly some not-so-young people—now work as interns. They famously shuttle coffee in a thousand magazine offices, legislative backrooms, and Hollywood studios, but they also deliver aid in Afghanistan, map the human genome, and pick up garbage. Intern Nation is the first exposé of the exploitative world of internships. In this witty, astonishing, and serious investigative work, Ross Perlin profiles fellow interns, talks to academics and professionals about what unleashed this phenomenon, and explains why the intern boom is perverting workplace practices around the world. The hardcover publication of this book precipitated a torrent of media coverage in the US and UK, and Perlin has added an entirely new afterword describing the growing focus on this woefully underreported story. Insightful and humorous, Intern Nation will transform the way we think about the culture of work.

Book Information

Paperback: 286 pages

Publisher: Verso; 1 edition (April 4, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1844678830

ISBN-13: 978-1844678839

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #657,693 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #43 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Unemployment #591 in Books > Business & Money > Management & Leadership > Training #601 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Labor & Industrial Relations

Customer Reviews

I first heard the author on National Public Radio and was intrigued by the insight and expose like qualities of their work. As an internship director at a 4 year college that has set up internship programs outside of academia I bought the book in anticipation of new perspectives on internships I had not considered or been exposed to. I found the investigation quite revealing especially when issues touched on social justice like access and equal opportunity. For example there are student populations that cannot access internship because they work to get through school and little or no financial support from their families. Even our service veterans cannot always afford to do internships. Perlin does a good job identifying some of these important issues that I confess had

escaped me before reading these insights. I have experienced the financial incentives companies see for themselves using interns and there have been unscrupulous companies that have sought to benefit themselves at the expense of our students. We don't do business with these entities anymore. Perlin did a good job lifting up the carpet on this and I did feel it was quite true for many small businesses that the reason for the internship was to lower labor costs and advantage themselves with no guarantee of on the job learning taking place. Essentially they talk up the experience but don't do much to create real value for students. Cons The tone is a little bitter and twisted and I found it consistently so throughout the text. More solutions were needed. I found it was like Perlin shouted alarm and then ran from the scene. I would have preferred more provocative ideas about how to make internships better; more case studies of when companies and non-profit organizations do a good job.

The book used the term "race to the bottom" to describe how workers these days have to underbid each other, all the way to zero wages, and sometimes even paying money to get the unpaid internship. During my time in college I've worked only a single internship, which was paid due to being in engineering field (one of few typically paid fields to intern), but what I observed matched quite a bit what the writer reports on. The intern is not by any means afforded the respect of a regular employee, and the educational part of the internship is not going to be there anymore than having a part-time job in flipping burgers. In either case there is nothing to stop a motivated engineer to think of ways to engineer a better way of doing things, but the company is not interested in advancing the skills in your field. To them, you are just an inconvenience, unless you have willingness to work as a servant taking care of boring and simple routines. The book half-way through began to motivate me to start fake 'internship' opportunities to students who are desperate for one. Mine would be unpaid as well. However, instead of having them make me coffee and go do my laundry, I would assign them reading in the school library. This way the students would actually learn something during their internship, and at the conclusion I would still provide them with references and a company name for their resume. Donations for this service would of course be accepted. While this might be slightly 'unethical' in how it might mislead future employers of the students, it would be a step up from what they are forced into otherwise. I hope that Mr Perlin continues to track internships and provide an update in the future for this book.

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