

CAREER

Are you being exploited in your internship? HERE'S HOW YOU CAN TELL

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Internships are short-term work opportunities where students or young professionals – mostly recent graduates – can gain hands-on experience in a particular field. Be it paid or unpaid, on-site or remote, the primary objectives of internships remain the same – to develop skills, gain industry exposure, and open doors to future opportunities.

Interns expect to have access to opportunities, skill development, mentorship, networking, and even chances to explore different career paths. At the same time, employers seek fresh ideas, task support, and a chance to train potential hires when hiring interns. Basically, an internship serves as a valuable opportunity for both interns and employers.

However, while internships may appear mutually beneficial, they can often be exploitative where interns are overworked, underpaid, or deprived of meaningful learning experiences. Thus, for interns or those seeking internship opportunities, being aware of whether or not they are being exploited has become vital in this day and age. The signs of such

form of exploitation at the workplace are always

there; you just have to look out for them.

You are doing a full-time job on an intern's salary or, worse, for free

Even though your job description clearly mentioned the working hours and the number of days you'd get off, now that you have finally signed up for the job, the reality can be far different from what was mentioned earlier.

You often find yourself working overtime. You might be in a situation where nobody tells you when to stop. Even if the task can be done the next day, you are told that the task must be done immediately.

If this is a daily scene at your internship, chances are you are being taken advantage of.

No one is teaching you anything

Internships are meant to be learning experiences. There should be arrangements for you to learn new things, and they should be provided to you by your employer in the form of mentorship, training sessions, or at least meaningful guidance.

However, if you are constantly told to just get things done and have to figure most work or on-job related things out on your own, this is sort of exploitative. Even if they say that you have to learn while doing your daily tasks or you have to learn everything on your own, it comes off as exploitative.

Self-learning is important but it should be structured with guidance, not substituted entirely with work.

Your pay keeps getting delayed

If your internship is paid, timely compensation should be non-negotiable. You might see that full-time employees are

getting paid on time
but your pay
keeps getting
delayed for

one reason or another with varying excuses. If this keeps repeating, it's a strong indication that your employer does not respect your time or contribution.

Paid working opportunities – be it full-time or an internship – means getting paid on time, and repeated failure in this regard is not a good sign.

You are given responsibilities beyond your expertise with no support

Challenging tasks are great for growth. But if challenges mean you are given responsibilities beyond your expertise without any support, things can actually turn out bitter.

You might do your best to meet expectations, but without guidance, you're likely to struggle. And when the work doesn't turn out as expected, the blame falls on you rather than the lack of direction.

Your employer makes you feel replaceable

You are giving your best shot while overcoming all the odds, yet your employer can still make you feel replaceable. Instead of appreciating your work, they keep complaining about it, give vague or demotivating feedback, and make you feel like you're always on thin ice.

This isn't constructive criticism; it's a tactic to keep you insecure and compliant. And don't fall for the idea that this so-called 'criticism' is to get the best out of you. It's not. This is just your employer or supervisor making you feel bad about yourself so that they can take the opportunity to exploit you even more.

If one or more of these signs are visible right now or in the future, it might be time to rethink your internship. While internships can be valuable, they can also become exploitative if boundaries are not set. If you feel undervalued, overworked, or ignored, it's important to stand up for yourself.



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