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2023 H-E-B Internship Reflection

My experience with H-E-B has been a great time for me to learn not only about what it takes to be a leader, but where I can see myself in a career. The H-E-B management intern program is a 10 week long program that gives interns the opportunity to show their leadership and problem solving skills. Each intern was assigned a focus, mine was “Fresh Inventory Management through Perpetual Accuracy”, and it was our job to find an opportunity within your assigned store within your focus to make an impact. I honestly had no idea what to expect from this internship which made me a little nervous. It was the first internship I had ever done and I was wanting to just do a good job. My main personal goal for this internship was to just figure out (or get closer to figuring out) what I am passionate about and where I can see myself working in the future. I chose this internship with H-E-B because it was an opportunity that presented itself to me and I figured it would be a good experience, it would look good on my resume, and I would hopefully learn more about leadership and myself.

The internship started off with a two day kick off in San Antonio. At this kick off, we got to hear from current H-E-B partners, some of whom were also in the internship program at one point. This was a great opportunity for me to learn how to network, hear all kinds of different life stories, and learn more about what H-E-B is all about. The second day, we had a volunteer activity at the Animal Defense League of Texas in San Antonio. This was an opportunity for us, the interns, to see just what kind of company H-E-B is. It is always great to see companies going above and beyond for their communities and H-E-B is one, if not the, best at this. We were given assignments such as painting a gazebo, cleaning out pet pens, and even walking dogs. It was a fun activity, but also really showed how much H-E-B cares and it made me feel good to know I am potentially starting my career with a company who cares.

After the kick off was over, the in store work began. For the first few weeks, we were told we should take this opportunity to introduce ourselves to other partners and build relationships. We were eventually going to be going into these departments and trying to “fix” something that could be improved and by building those relationships, the partners were more likely to want to help you. So, for the first few weeks that's exactly what I did! I was assigned to the perishable side, AKA the fresh side, of the store which included Deli, Bakery, Produce, Meat Market, Seafood, and Meal Simple, so every morning I would make my rounds and say Hi to all those partners. After a few days I could tell people were warming up to me and curious about what I was doing at the store. This led to conversation about my project and what they would like to see fixed in their own departments. I was given many good ideas that I was really excited about! However, inventory management is something that takes time to change. Many of the “problems” I was given were either out of my jurisdiction or would take way longer than 10 weeks.

As I was nearing the 5 week halfway point, I still didn't have a project idea and I was starting to become very stressed. Learning inventory management and meeting all these new people took much longer than I expected and the window to find an opportunity within the store was rapidly closing. That was until one day I sat in on an impact meeting with my Fresh Store Leader, the stores Deli Manager and the newest secondary Deli Manager. I was mostly sitting in on this meeting to hear about their inventory, but then they started to discuss flex billing and how that was an area we could improve on that would benefit Produce and Deli. Flex billing is essentially when a department, in this case Deli, purchases product through a different department, Produce, to use for production. For example, if Deli is making party platters that include grapes, they need to get that product from Produce because it isn't something they sell. When done correctly, this creates accurate inventory for Produce and Deli. So, I saw this as a perfect opportunity for a project! I worked alongside my Deli manager to create an inventory guide he can use for specifically his flex items. I wanted to create a system that would make his life easier while also making the lives of Produce managers easy.

Overall, this opportunity with H-E-B has been a good time for me to grow and really understand where my passion is. If I am being honest, it was a pretty stressful experience for me. I was learning something I had no prior knowledge of while also trying to simultaneously improve the store I was in all in 10 weeks! While inventory management isn't necessarily something I am passionate about or see myself pursuing in the future, I am glad I was given the opportunity to branch out into something new just to try. I am an environmental studies major at Southwestern University and I have always been passionate about sustainability, the environment, etc. This internship was definitely a step in a different direction. I figured it would be a good idea to look into different areas of work just to check it out. This experience really solidified where my passion lies. I am not the kind of person who wants to be behind a desk, crunching numbers. I want to be in an environment that is...in the environment! As I go into my last year with Southwestern, I will be thinking a lot about my future career and where I want to end up. This internship has made me realize that the environmental studies path I have been taking with Southwestern was the right one and I am looking forward to finishing out my time at SU doing something I love. While this internship brought many ups and many downs, I am still happy I was able to get this experience. Whether I am at H-E-B or a different company, I am grateful for the time, opportunity, and lessons learned from H-E-B.