

Kevin Minor: 0:03

Greetings and welcome to the NASPO Pulse podcast. This is the podcast where we are monitoring issues in state procurement. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and today we are continuing our internship mini series with Ian Fox, a junior at North Carolina State University who is majoring in supply chain management. Over the summer, Ian had the opportunity to work for the North Carolina Department of Administration and Shaquage and I am going to be talking to Ian about what part of the internship program applied to him, what were his expectations going into the internship and what does he see next for his career. So if you are interested in the next generation of state procurement staff or supply chain management experts, you're going to want to listen to this episode. Before we get started.

Kevin Minor: 1:03

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Ian Fox: 2:16

I'm doing good. You know I'm excited. Got some classes later today, so you know getting pumped up for the school.

Kevin Minor: 2:24

What classes do you have today?

Ian Fox: 2:26

Today we have let's see if I can remember, we have macro economy, we have operations management and then HR management.

Kevin Minor: 2:36

Sounds like a well-rounded. Sounds like a busy day.

Ian Fox: 2:39

Pretty busy day, and then one of our friends has her birthday party today, so you know lots to do when you're a college student.

Kevin Minor: 2:46

Absolutely got to balance it out. Well, enjoy, Ian. Before we get started, can you just give us a little bit of your background?

Ian Fox: 2:53

Yeah, absolutely. Well, my name is Ian Fox and I am a student at NC State University. I'm a junior, I'm majoring in supply chain management, and this summer I got the opportunity to work with the North Carolina Department of Administration and public procurement. That whole experience was a blast. I'm still with them. It's going to be for 11 months, until next May, and I've gotten to learn so so, so much about public procurement and what it's about.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 3:19

So, Ian, so I know you said you're with the state of North Carolina and they decided to extend as far as your internship. So what appealed to you? Let's start from a little bit of the beginning. What appealed to you about going to the state of North Carolina? For your internship.

Ian Fox: 3:40

So I've always been very service focused on, both in my personal life and professional life. I've worked in customer service with Chick-fil-A before, so I've always had that mindset. And so when I met the representatives at the supply chain career fair at state, I was like, hey, like this might be something that I might be really interested in. So I reached out, they reached out back, and after the first interview I had I was like, hey, I really like the atmosphere, I really like what they bring to the table, um, and it's something that I think I can grow from and learn from. Um. And then, yeah, that's, for the beginning, what I thought about as I was started to start that process.

Kevin Minor: 4:19

What, uh, what is it about customer service, that that you find so appealing?

Ian Fox: 4:26

Um, I just like deal well, deal well, not dealing. I like talking with people and, you know, getting to understand their story and trying to accommodate them for their needs and public procurement. That's that's a huge, huge need. You know any agency might come and reach out to you saying they need this specific part or this specific service, and you got to be able to put yourself in their shoes and understand what they need in order to give them the best option and the best resource for them.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 4:54

So you mentioned as far as service. So we know, in public procurement we deal with, of course, our goods and services. So what would you say? Some of the goods and services that you were made aware of still being a part in interning for North Carolina, whether it be contracts, negotiations or what have you, or anything that they have you assigned to?

Ian Fox: 5:19

So in the service related, they had us create two documents we call them SOPs or standard operating procedures and me and the other two interns with the OA what we did. We looked through the organization for our statewide term contract folders and also just our procurement files folders and we looked through and saw what the contract management team and the strategic sourcing team needed in order to do their job more efficiently. And when onboarding any new team members, you know what they needed in order to be able to just jump right into their work and not have to worry about all these semantics. So we talked with a lot of them and again, that whole service focus. We needed to understand what they needed in order for them to, in order for us to be able to produce a document that was gonna best fulfill their needs. Two separate documents with two separate teams, but at the end of the day, both teams and both of our of the DSPO. So the deputy of state purchasing officers were very, very happy with the work we've done.

Kevin Minor: 6:19

Ian, what were some of the expectations that you had going into your internship?

Ian Fox: 6:24

Well, coming from Chick-fil-A I was. I was thinking, you know, it's a big boy job, you know, gotta gotta dress up a little nicer. But, um, no, I, I was expecting, um. I was expecting to find a team, um that was ready to work. I was expecting to find, you know, a community, um. Not a lot of people have that service mindset when they go into the workforce, and so finding people that were like me in that sense was was, was a blessing, um. So, besides other expectations, you know, I was expecting to learn a lot about public procurement. You know it's an internship, so I was expecting to, you know, not only give but also receive some of that instruction, some of that learning while

growing my career. So, yeah, those were some of the expectations going in.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 7:09

Okay, and so you did talk or mention about the onboarding. So how was that for you? As far as the onboarding process with North Carolina, you know?

Ian Fox: 7:19

just saying, hey, like we want to come, we want to get you on board. You know, anything with the government, there is a lot, you know, there's a lot of bureaucracy and there's a lot of processes that you have to go through, but you know, none of it ever felt like it was, you know, too much, or it was too complicated. I was able to pick up on it pretty quickly and you know, my first day in work, you know I got to meet all the supervisors, all the bosses, everyone who'd made that process a little bit easier and, you know, set some of the expectations that were necessary for us to be there. But you know, we hit the ground running. I never felt like it was anything too complicated. That it was, you know, over my head that they weren't paying attention. I always felt that they really cared for us in that manner, that they wanted us and they needed us to know what was going on. You know every step of the process.

Kevin Minor: 8:15

Speak a little bit more to that, to that leadership. How did you find uh, do you have like mentorship, or how did that help you?

Ian Fox: 8:24

So the way our internship worked, they assigned us to mentors the DSPOs for strategic sourcing and contract management, and so all our projects were handled by them and they were the kind of the people that we ran to whenever we need, you know, had an issue or anything but our SPO, david O'Neill, was always available. You know, sometimes when you meet your you know the head guy, you're always like, sometimes he's like kind of reclusive, you never talk to him, he's just kind of there. But you know, I never felt that with david. He was there in our first meeting cracking jokes. You know again, someone you could you felt like you could code to in case you needed anything. Um, you know we had several questions throughout the project we're currently in and you know he'd always make the time for us to come down there and explain and you know we'd end up talking, you know 15, 20 minutes about an unrelated topic. So you know that I always felt like they were there and that they were available for us in that manner.

Kevin Minor: 9:15

Yeah, absolutely, come on that. That um camaraderie is important. Shout out to David O'Neill. We always enjoy seeing him.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 9:23

Absolutely so, ian, I would say as far as, because, of course, your, your internship, um, is a little bit special because you are extending all the way to, I believe, may, so that's a good thing for you to get all this experience. And what I would say to that is would you say that you have any different type of mini projects that they have you working on from when you first started to now, and is any of them, do you think will change or will be something consistent that they'll have you working on as far as any type of mini projects or large projects with working on teams?

Ian Fox: 10:08

So I'll walk you through what we've done so far. So at first they needed us to get an understanding of what it is they do. So the statewide term contract folders in our filing system online. They were very disorganized, you know contracts and documents are all over the place. So what they wanted us to do is go through their SOP, try to organize those folders. And then, after we'd organized all the folders I think it was like 90 or so they were like okay, now redo the SOP so that anyone coming in after you has an easier time, you know, understanding what's going

on. So that was our first project. It took us, I want to say, a month or two, but it was great, it was fun. It really opened up our understanding of what was going on, all the documents that were involved and kind of like dipping our toes in the solicitation process. Then, after that, we worked on the procurement file SOP, which again was the same thing, except now with the procurement files. So more contract management and again we had to understand. We went through the SOP and tried to redo it so that anyone coming in after us would understand what was going on a little bit better and their onboarding process would have been, you know, a little easier.

Ian Fox: 11:17

And then at the moment we're working with the file room in our building. So you know, for several years prior to COVID I want to say dating back to 2003, 2004, any new bid that was requested had, like, a specific file folder, like a physical file folder, and so since they're tearing down our building and removing it, we need to not get rid, but we need to look through all those folders, all those contracts, and see what needs to be there and what doesn't need to be there. And so we're working through that. That's kind of like our big big project right now. I think so far we've gone through 1,000, 1,300 folders.

Ian Fox: 11:58

So it's been a lot of work and trying to manage that with school and the rest of our mini projects. It's been a lot. But just now we're starting our next mini project where we're going to go through a contract manager program per se, going to go through a contract manager program per se. So again, when a new person has to be onboarded, they go through this kind of like process and they start on their first solicitation. But they want us to go through that, not only so that we learn how solicitation goes about but also so that we can then go back and say, hey, like, what needs to be fixed, what needs to, you know, be streamlined, and what else needs to be fixed, what needs to be streamlined and what else needs to be expanded upon so that they have an easier time. So that's what we've been doing up to this point.

Kevin Minor: 12:41

You know you sound really enthused about all those, and that's great. Is there one project that you liked more than others, or that stood out to you, or?

Ian Fox: 12:50

Yeah, you know, I've loved all of them. I think the first one, I would say, was probably the most difficult, just because we had no idea what documents were supposed to look like or anything. But after that, you know, once you get it, you get it. And so I'd probably say the one we're in right now, the VAR room project, which is our most biggest one, which is probably going to take us until the end of our internship to get through. But, um, you know, I think that one's our favorite because you get to see, you get all these little nuggets of information. You're like, hey, we had a contract for this, you know, several years ago. Um, we were talking with David in the forum the other day. We found like a type type written, so like on a typewriter document for a bid from like 19 what was it? 1960, something he was like let me keep that.

Ian Fox: 13:35

That's like that's an archive, but you know, you know all this, all these little nuggets of of you know, memories you make while just going through that. I think that would probably be my, my, my favorite project so far okay.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 13:48

So with all you have said what? Where do you see or believe the next steps are in your career path so far?

Ian Fox: 13:58

Absolutely Well. As you know, supply chain and operations management is very broad and procurement so far has been an absolute joy for me. I still haven't had the opportunity to take my procurement and logistics and all those classes at the state yet. That's probably going to be either next semester or next year. But I think the next steps,

especially after this internship, would probably be to secure something else in a different area in order to get a better understanding of something different, like logistics or something like that. But I will say that if I was looking for a full-time job, I wouldn't think twice about applying for something with DOA, at least here in NC, because it's been amazing. I love procurement so far. I can't wait to see what else they have in store for us.

Kevin Minor: 14:43

You hear that, david. David, I know you're listening. Ian's coming for you, sir. Absolutely so, ian. Before we go and we really appreciate your time what's some advice that you can offer prospective students seeking an internship?

Ian Fox: 14:58

Absolutely. You know, looking for my first internship was everyone's telling me. You know, your first summer you're not going to get anything. You know, dip your toes out there, just try to meet people. And I was like why would I go in there with that mentality? You know, I want to go in there and find something that's going to help for my career path.

Ian Fox: 15:20

So I would say tips just starting off. You know, just be confident in yourself. You know um recruiters, they don't. You know they can look at a resume and see your qualifications and you know that may qualify you, but what they're going to, what it's going to impact them the most, is your confidence. You know, your belief in yourself and you carry yourself in those conversations. So that would be a tip. And then probably my second and only tip would be once you land that first internship, have an open mind and try to be like a sponge, like soak up as much information as you can. Because when you have opportunities like this, like recording a podcast, or when your next employer asks you hey, what did you do, you have all these little nuggets of information. You have all these, you know, specific memories and skills that you acquired that are going to help you. So so much you know beyond just what's written on your resume or beyond what you're just going to say in that interview.

Kevin Minor: 16:06

So yeah, Awesome, um, just crazy. Did you have anything else? No, thank you.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 16:16

Job and um thank you so much for joining us today and just giving all us the great nitty details that we might not normally get um as far as feedback, but we definitely appreciate it and I know our audience will definitely appreciate it too as well absolutely, yeah, it's, it's been a pleasure.

Ian Fox: 16:33

Thank you so much, guys, for having me yeah.

Kevin Minor: 16:35

And good luck, ian. It sounds like you've got it. You've got it down just fine, thank you.