

## **We asked some current/past Work-Able Interns about their Work-Able Internship Program Experience. Here's what they had to say!**

### **Profile #1**

#### **How did you find out about Work-Able?**

During my last semester at university, I pondered a question similar to that of many of my peers: what can and will I do once I complete my education? Unable to find an adequate answer, I consulted an academic adviser for direction. My academic adviser told me to look at the job board on the university website. Upon browsing, I found a posting for the Work-Able Internship Program, and knew immediately that I should apply.

#### **What is your education and background?**

I have a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Political Science from the University of Victoria.

#### **What was your experience like applying for the Work-Able internship compared to other jobs you have applied for?**

The application process for the Work-Able internship was unlike any job I had applied for previously. To be accepted into the pool of candidates, I wrote a short essay describing the impact that my disability has on my life. This gave me a chance to provide the administrators of this program with a glimpse into my life. The several interviews that followed were challenging; it required diligence and hard work to find out how to refine my answers for the hiring panel. However, thanks to the dedicated leadership of Work-Able program staff, I was given helpful tips and methods to succeed at every level of the recruitment process.

### **What advice would you give to recent graduates who self-identify as having a disability about applying for Work-Able?**

The best advice I can offer anyone applying to this program is to show your unique qualities and characteristics in your initial essay, and echo that throughout the hiring process. Your exceptional qualities are a reason for your academic success. If you harness these attributes throughout the hiring process, it can help you become successful and eventually hired! Just remember that interviewers also want to know who you are, along with what you have done and can do.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I love coming into work each day and learning something new. The amazing thing about this internship is that it serves as a platform for further learning. For instance, I graduated from university with a degree focused in political science and had rudimentary skills in Excel. However, my supervisor tasked me with a project in Excel that was above my skill level and I took this as an opportunity to improve. Thus, I consulted with a co-worker who is proficient, and did some independent research online. By doing this, I have fallen in love with Excel-related work and now wish to pursue a career where I can continue to use it. This internship is truly amazing and unique because it allows time for experimentation. I have been allotted ample *time to try different things, and to find out what I want to do after my internship ends.*

### **What do you find most challenging about your job?**

The most challenging aspect about my job is the amount of public speaking that I am required to do, as I find it difficult to speak in front of people I do not know well. I began seeing a Performance Coach who asks me probing questions during our sessions, imploring me to look inward for possible answers and solutions. The truly spectacular thing about performance coaching is that I have found techniques and methods to improve myself of my own accord. Although I still find it difficult to speak in public, I

believe that I am taking strides towards becoming comfortable and, eventually, confident.

### **What do you now know about working for government that you wished you had known at the beginning of your internship?**

One thing that I wish that I began my internship with was the confidence to be myself around my colleagues. I was worried that I would not seem professional by showing personality, and so I acted somewhat robotically. This did not make my internship experience pleasant. Once I started to let my personality be seen I began to develop relationships with my co-workers and found that I felt comfortable to ask for advice and help. As a result, co-workers, supervisors, and managers have asked me for more help in turn, which has allowed me to develop my professional portfolio. The main point I am trying to make is that you can be yourself at work while still remaining professional, as the two are not mutually exclusive.

### **What is the most valuable thing you've learned through the Work-Able internship?**

The most valuable thing that I have learned throughout my internship is that I am just as capable as anyone else of performing tasks well. During university and throughout this internship, I have needed accommodations that other people do not. Regardless, I can perform at a similar level to other people. I have gained confidence in this Work-Able internship that will undoubtedly benefit my career trajectory.

## **Profile #2**

### **How did you find out about Work-Able?**

I found out about one posting via an email from my mom. She worked in public service at the time and kept an eye out for me. I found the other posting myself, also on the government website.

### **What is your education?**

I have a Bachelor of Arts, Geography from Vancouver Island University. I also have an Advanced Diploma in in GIS Applications.

### **What was your experience like applying for the Work-Able internship compared to other jobs you have applied for?**

For applying, it felt a little more like school than work. My work history has never required cover letters or multiple interviews or anything of that sort. I worked in restaurants. You drop off a resume then either get hired or not. Going through this process made me feel like I was actually working towards something. It was more like having an assignment/homework. It was also way more gratifying to advance through.

### **What advice would you give to recent graduates who self-identify as having a disability about applying for Work-Able?**

Advice is something I both love and hate giving. I love sharing information and insight, but I am usually concerned with the delivery of it. If I can be blunt: take every advantage you possibly can, nobody is going to do it for you. I have an invisible disability. You can't tell unless you get to know me well or I tell you. I spent many years hiding it, pretending it didn't exist. Most of the time nobody was the wiser, but when it caused problems, it caused big ones. Pretending I don't have a disability made me miss out on opportunities such as Work-Able and that is a huge regret of mine. You don't have to flaunt your disability. Just use it and the accommodation granted like any other tool. If someone had told me in my fourth year of university, that there was a program like this (there wasn't), I would have kicked down doors to get in.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

The thing I enjoy about my job the most is using the skills I spent years developing. I paid my way through university by working in restaurants. Continuing to work in that industry was soul-sucking. Actually applying the things I learned and am interested in,

that's the best. Secondly, I have never worked somewhere where everyone is so sincerely interested in the success of others. That's pretty awesome too.

### **What do you find most challenging about your job?**

The most challenging thing is going from a random shiftwork schedule to a static 8:30-4:30/Mon-Fri one. Don't get me wrong, it is what I wanted, but it is hard to get up early every day in the winter.

### **What do you now know about working for government that you wished you had known at the beginning of your internship?**

I wish I had understood the internal movement of employees. The idea of always working towards your next position was totally foreign to me, and no matter how anyone tried to explain it, it just didn't seem possible.

### **What is the most valuable thing you've learned through the Work-Able internship?**

I learned that public service is where I belong.

### **Profile #3**

#### **How did you find out about Work-Able?**

I found out about Work-Able through a friend who works for the government and knew a great intern already in the program. At the time, I was nearing the end of my degree. Although my whole focus was on finishing my thesis, I also knew that I wouldn't want to miss this opportunity.

#### **What is your education?**

I finished my Master's degree in Letters in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow three weeks before starting the internship!

### **What was your experience like applying for the Work-Able internship compared to other jobs you have applied for?**

The hiring process was challenging because, on top of my school load, I was applying for more than one position, which meant many interviews. That said, there was a lot of support and feedback, and each interview was a great learning opportunity. In the end, I couldn't have gotten a better position that suited my skillset than the one I am now in.

### **What is the most valuable thing you've learned through the Work-Able internship?**

A great thing about the Work-Able internship for me has been the help in navigating a return to the workforce as someone who is recently diagnosed as having a disability. I didn't know what kinds of challenges I would face, but Work-Able was able to support me every step of the way.

Now that I am working and have accommodations in place, I am able to focus on the challenges that the work presents me rather than worrying about the challenges that my disability can present.

### **What advice would you give to recent graduates who self-identify as having a disability about applying for Work-Able?**

Work-Able is a great program, and I highly recommend it for any recent grad with a disability who is considering a career in the public service.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

It combines what I love most about both of my degrees.

### **What do you find most challenging about your job?**

Working for any big organization means that there are many levels and layers to navigate, which can take time to get used to.

**What do you now know about working for government that you wished you had known at the beginning of your internship?**

There is a huge amount of support to be had from everyone – don't be afraid to ask!

**Profile #4**

**How did you find out about Work-Able?**

I found out about Work-Able through my Dad - he emailed me the job posting.

**What is your education?**

I have a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Victoria.

**What was your experience like applying for the Work-Able internship compared to other jobs you have applied for?**

Compared to other jobs I have applied for, this internship application was a lot more detailed and intensive. Whereas other employers would simply ask for a resume and then call me back for an interview over the course of two weeks, the Work-Able process had me write essays, conduct preliminary phone interviews, write mock assignments, and then conduct an in-person interview over the course of three months. The amount of work required to apply for one particular posting is a little bit daunting, but it also gives a person plenty of time to submit his or her best work, and perhaps better their chances of being hired.

**What advice would you give to recent graduates who self-identify as having a disability about applying for Work-Able?**

Approach the application with an open mind. It's important to recognize that Work-Able is an entry-level program and because it is an entry-level program, you are not expected

to know everything on your first day. I applied with zero office experience and I was still hired. My supervisors and coworkers are incredibly understanding of my new-ness, and spend a lot of time teaching me about the government and office-work in general. The Work-Able program does not require that you know everything; it's a chance to build on your skills and learn what you are capable of achieving.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I really enjoy all the opportunities I've been given to try new projects and expand my knowledge about the various roles of the provincial government, even just the various roles found within a particular branch or division. My supervisors are phenomenal and have offered me plenty of support, and in some cases have even structured my workload such that I am gaining the experience I need to find a permanent position in the future. It's a wonderful feeling to work with people who are so ready to help you succeed.

### **What do you find most challenging about your job?**

The most challenging thing I find about this job is being "new". I want to know what I'm doing and I want to be able to contribute high-quality work to my branch. Everyone I work with tells me that becoming a high-performing employee takes time, years even, and that in a person's first few months in a job they should focus on learning as much as they can and save their worrying about being a "contributor" for later. Some days it is very difficult to take a step back and realize that this is a learning process and that skill or success will not come immediately.

### **What do you now know about working for government that you wished you had known at the beginning of your internship?**

I wish that before my internship began I had more thoroughly researched my various roles that I have had in government. I really enjoyed one role in particular, and I think I

might have been able to do so much more in the time I spent there if I had studied my branch's work beforehand.

### **What is the most valuable thing you've learned through the Work-Able internship?**

The most valuable thing I've learned through the Work-Able internship is that I need to allow myself time to learn. Even in the best of cases, there will be things I do not know and things I will need to ask for help with. Every time I have ever asked, people have been more than happy to assist me. More generally, I've learned that working – and becoming good at what I do – is a process that takes guidance, effort, and patience.

### **Profile #5**

#### **How did you find out about Work-Able?**

I found the job posting for Work-Able on my university's career website.

#### **What is your education?**

I have a B.A. from UBC in Geography – Environment & Sustainability. My course load consisted of both natural sciences and social sciences.

#### **What was your experience like applying for the Work-Able internship compared to other jobs you have applied for?**

I applied for many jobs before applying to Work-Able. The majority of jobs I applied to, I never heard back from. Even if you aren't successful in moving forward in the application process, you will always hear back from Work-Able. They will give you feedback about your application if you ask for it. The other jobs that I did hear back from were a two-step process. First, I would submit my application. Second, I would have an interview, and then it was decided whether or not I was the right candidate for the job.

My application to Work-Able consisted of more steps. Although it is a longer process, there are steps where you get the opportunity to be yourself more; you can discuss your weaknesses and explain your thought processes. For me, it didn't feel like other job application processes, where I felt pressured to portray myself as a "perfect" person.

### **What advice would you give to recent graduates who self-identify as having a disability about applying for Work-Able?**

My advice is to go for it and submit an application! Why not? At first I felt a bit strange about being eligible for a job because I had a disability. Although my disability affected every waking moment of my life, I never identified with it and often would avoid talking about it unless it was absolutely necessary. The great thing about the application process with Work-Able is that you have a choice whether or not to disclose what your disability is. If you don't want to talk about it, people will respect that. If you do want to talk about it, everyone who is involved in the application process already knows that you self-identify with having one, so disclosing your disability is a lot easier than explaining things from scratch.

### **What was the process like securing employment beyond your 12 month internship?**

I wouldn't have been able to secure employment without the experience and connections I gained from the year of my internship. My supervisor and executive director were extremely supportive and connected me to many people who knew of arising job opportunities. My co-workers were always on the look-out for new postings and never hesitated to connect me to someone they knew who had gone through a similar job search. The experience I gained from working in government, even just understanding the processes within government, gave me a leg up in job competitions.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I like that it's in a field that I'm interested in; I'm really intrigued by the subject matter. Even though it's a "job", it still aligns with the passions and interests that I developed throughout my undergraduate degree.

### **What do you find most challenging about your job?**

The most challenging part about my job is that it tests my comfort zone. I'm a shy introvert – talking in front of large groups of people or making cold calls to strangers, does not come natural to me. However, it's getting easier and I know that in time I'll look back and wonder why I was so afraid to do those things. Although testing my comfort zone isn't always a pleasant experience at the time, it means that I am growing as a person and that's what I want.

### **What do you now know about working for government that you wished you had known at the beginning of your internship?**

I wish I knew how casual and easygoing people are in government (Although it does differ from office to office, ministry to ministry, person to person, etc.). When I first started I would read my e-mails over about twenty times before I sent them. I had assumed that people in government were very formal and that they would make judgements about my e-mails and if I had poor grammar or typos. I also wish I knew how willing people were to answer my questions or to take the time to speak with me about job opportunities, education, professional designations, etc. Many people in government want to help their co-workers out.

### **What was the most valuable thing you learned through the Work-Able internship?**

I think the most valuable thing I learned was to advocate for myself. For years I pretended that I didn't have a disability and I would deny my need for accommodation (I would struggle as a result). This was often because I didn't want to inconvenience

anyone else, or come across as a needy person who asked for so much. I still struggle with this, but now I remind myself to speak up when I need something.