

Gaining Sapience at Publicis Sapiant

by Celine Tsang



My fellow People Ops Intern Alexis Magder and I strike a pose in the hallway of Publicis Sapiant, a digital-consulting company, in Toronto in the summer of 2022.

I had no idea when I applied to Publicis Sapiant (PS) how much I would grow and learn about myself, and what I wanted for my future, in just twelve weeks. Overall, my time at PS helped me examine and deconstruct various expectations I held about the workplace and my place in it.

When applying for summer internships, I hoped to do something entirely different from marketing and experience in-person work at a big company. My internship in People Operations (a subset of HR supporting employee engagement and productivity) at PS fulfilled both these aspirations and more, such as by compensating me over double

what I anticipated. However, there were factors on the job that did not align with my initial expectations. For one, the posting outlined a division of work that proved unreflective of the actual experience. Rather than spending half my time on operations and people management, it typically took up almost all of my day. In addition, the posting mentioned working with a small group of interns, but I ended up collaborating with a larger group of thirty-one! Thus, my first takeaway was that, even when the job description seems very clear, the actual work and environment can still differ significantly. I know now that I should be prepared to ask clarifying questions during the interview stage and talk to previous employees about their experience if I want a more realistic picture. Overall, I learned to not put my faith entirely into what the posting describes and to temper my expectations.

Other times, I had to confront the difference between reality and my prior expectations and was forced to reflect on whether my expectations were apt. For instance, I sometimes felt like I was not being given due credit for my ideas or efforts. I found these experiences disheartening because I expected to be given recognition to the extent that I believed I deserved. However, this incident was ultimately formative as I realized that the workplace is not always “fair,” in the sense that I conceived of it. Oftentimes, it’s better to be a collaborative and encouraging team member than appear petty in insisting everything you do is

recognized, and it is similarly important to learn which battles to pick and which to let go. Most importantly, I learned to not take things too personally either way and to try and forget about it when the workday was over—for my own mental wellbeing if nothing else.

Furthermore, it was an interesting exercise for me to examine the relevance of race in the workplace. From my course learnings and past internship experiences, I know that white people tend to be taken more seriously and seen as more capable. I felt I had to appear almost overly confident in my ideas to seem as competent and convincing as someone who was white and thus represented the status quo in a corporate environment. However, that is not to say I did not appreciate other instances of PS's strides towards greater equity and social-justice initiatives. For instance, when the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was announced, I was glad to see our CEO address it in a company-wide email and discuss possible healthcare options. Generally, it seemed PS was committed to achieving equity in various ways, yet white privilege still persisted in the workplace, and I would have appreciated greater discussion on its impacts in the workplace and not just in hiring efforts. Therefore, another main takeaway is that it is very difficult to assess a company's EDI efforts from the outside, as every person's individual experience will differ—but championing EDI stands out as something I hope to see in my future workplace.

I found many places for improvement in how I tackled the internship. Notably, I could have focused more on valuing my strengths rather than overthinking my weaknesses. Early on, I felt too soft-spoken and worried this would

prevent me from making friends and demonstrating that I was a competent employee. But I eventually realized how my quieter demeanor could be more appealing to some of my peers and that leadership can be displayed in other ways. For example, I found I was effective at rousing a small team to accomplish a goal and taking initiative to help them think ahead and properly schedule their tasks. Leadership could also be displayed through my learned skill of adaptability as a SASAH student, as at any moment I could be expected to take initiative in stepping into a new role (e.g., covering for my supervisor by hosting onboarding for new full-time hires) and doing something I was unprepared for. Thus, my final takeaway was to embrace who I am, as cheesy as that sounds, and trust that the right place and people will value what I offer.

Overall, this internship was instrumental in shaping my vision of my future career. I realized it is crucial to examine what I value most in a company, because almost no company will possess everything I am looking for. Most of all, I learned to take everything in stride and be prepared for changes at any time—because that is what the real working world will be like.