

# The wonder years

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It is the onset of youth month and at MediaHeads 360, we are looking forward to welcoming a batch of creative minds who will be joining our business as part of a bursary programme.



Although internship is not a new concept for us, our latest cohort of young professionals is the first group of interns who are still studying. This transformative bursary programme in partnership with Boston Media House is a collaboration that aims to support aspiring media professionals in their educational journey and provide them with invaluable work experience opportunities. The bursary programme will not only alleviate financial burdens but also open doors to a promising career in the media industry.

Internships should not be a box ticking exercise, but all too often, aspiring media professionals are left to their own devices or spend time in the hot desk wondering what the week holds. The reality is no one wins when we do this, and it is up to us as leaders and managers in our industry to drive this process.

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To me internships are about transition, they are the 'wonder years' of a career. As all cool and hip graduates are referencing AI, I turned to Chat GPT to describe the concept of what wonder years are and, in my experience, I think it showed up for me. It says, 'wonder years' is a phrase often used to describe a period of someone's life, typically referring to their childhood or teenage years, when they experience a sense of wonder, curiosity, and exploration. It's a time of growth, learning, and discovery, where individuals often develop their interests, values, and identities.

The professional learning element is the main driver in any internship. This is true of all industries. Think lawyers, doctors, accountants' engineers and artisans, these professions have always had a post-learning element built into their requirements before you can practice as a professional. In our space where creativity meets strategy, budgets, consumers and audiences, through considered planning and execution, professional development is key. Translating the essence of

the industry from the pages of a textbook to the reality of a 9 to 5 where deadlines and delivery drive pay cheques, and performance is key.

But there's more.

I believe it is about a holistic approach to each individual who takes on an internship in our business. By the time a young professional is inducted into MediaHeads 360 team, we've already started a rigorous process of evaluating workplace skills and potential growth. As part of our learning, we've realised that the recruitment process needs to be thorough and in-line with our business. It's not good enough to ask Chat GPT for an internship job description and hire according to that. We've become very specific about the skills and mindset we require and why they are important to us. We share this with potential candidates so they can prepare accordingly.

We acknowledge the value of education and industry specific training and we're building stronger networks with appropriate schools, colleges and training providers so we have a natural synergy and symbiotic opportunity. This is a deliberate action we take as a first step to engaging enthusiastic, young professionals. We feel it sets the tone of what we want and what they can expect.

The wonder years are about testing the waters and immersing yourself into an industry. It is not a perfect process and one can expect growing pains. Perfect. That is the point. It is also fair to assume that in learning and doing, an intern might decide the industry is not their long-term passion. Also perfect. Not every candidate needs to embrace the industry the way we do, that's the point of exposure, you can either embrace the industry or exit with the knowledge that you had a good view of the workings and left because it didn't resonate with you.



Internships are about development. For the intern and the business. Young people bring new skills, perspective, background and aspirations into a team. It is up to us to nurture this process. Existing staff might not want to be challenged while new staff might be hesitant to voice themselves. The wonder years have growing pains and an effective integration of new staff into a team, sees all team members evaluating what they can share and teach as well as learn and extract from each other.

The sweet spot of an internship lies where professional meets personal development. It's about soft skills, wide ranging discussions from finance to relationships, politics to education. It's about more than the job, it's about the entire person employed into the job.

A colleague who studied law and worked as an article clerk shared a moment from his wonder years at the law firm he

worked at. A senior partner invited him to lunch and they enjoyed an hour of conversation, double cheese burgers and several bottles of soft drinks. It was an unusual event for a Wednesday, especially considering an article clerk's salary. At the end of the lunch hour, the senior partner said to my colleague, 'you must remember there's no such thing as a free lunch'. The next two days were spent feverishly delivering documents and preparing for an urgent court application. The moment was however not lost on the 20-something clerk and is still relished as a valuable personal anecdote.

We need to acknowledge the professional purpose of internships and strive for personal input too. From time management to obtaining a driver's license and interpersonal skills. Making coffee and being offered a cup. Teaching resilience and embracing failure as a critical learning opportunity. Celebrating the win and acknowledging excellence. Understanding ego and empathy and knowing which one to use when. Dressing up for the company party and always having a charged mobile phone. The list is endless, but so is the value. Remember that reverse mentorship is also a thing and when you find yourself being schooled by someone half your age, your internship programme is delivering maximum results!

The term 'wonder years' can evoke a nostalgic or sentimental feeling, reflecting on the transformative and formative experiences of youth, in this Youth Month, take an opportunity to reflect on how your career was shaped and embrace the opportunity to return the favour.

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