

# Getting Your Foot in the Door

## Editorial

In this edition of GYFD, EMWA Internship Forum (IF) lead **Derek Ho** gives us a rundown on the second *Live IF* in Birmingham. Don't forget – Barcelona is the next IF venue!

The second contribution is from **Laura Rodriguez**. Laura is not a medical writer and she did not get her current internship position in big pharma through IF. But the powerful piece she shares with us speaks to everyone trying to get their foot in the door in whatever field they are in. Thank you and congratulations, Laura!

Raquel

## SECTION EDITOR



**Raquel Billiones**

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Again, I feel pleased and proud of not only what we accomplished but also about how we just might have helped a prospective medical writer take that next career step or helped a company find new talent.

By the time you are reading this, the IF team will be preparing for the Spring 2018 event in Barcelona. Beatrix Doerr stepped down from the chair position of the IF team at the Birmingham event, and I am honoured to succeed her. Please feel free to contact me about the IF, and I look forward to our next event in Barcelona!

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## The second EMWA Live Internship Forum

The birth of the EMWA Internship Forum (IF) took place at the Autumn 2015 conference. It was here that Danae Rokanas and I independently approached the Executive Committee with the idea of an internship scheme that would match prospective medical writers with companies willing to provide them with training and mentorship. Beatrix Doerr agreed to lead us in our endeavour, and the core team was in place by early 2016. A few short months later, we had our first *Live IF* at the Spring 2016 conference in Munich.

We were very pleased with the response to the first IF and felt proud of what we accomplished in such a short time. Regardless of this success, we soon got to work thinking about how the IF could be improved and what we could have done differently.

Two issues were almost immediately evident at the Munich event – space and time. As this was the first *Live IF* and nobody knew what kind of response we would have, we erred on the side of caution and arranged for a total time of 1.5 hours in a small, open-space area reserved for the event.

The interest in the Munich event exceeded our capacity, so we planned accordingly for the Spring 2017 IF in Birmingham. This time, we arranged for our own room, increased the total time of the event (5 hours) and increased the amount of time allocated for the informal and pre-arranged meetings. In addition, Raquel Billiones and Phil Leventhal each gave opening talks, Jackie Johnson and Evguenia Alechine provided career-coaching services, and Peter Llewellyn answered any questions on the world of medical communications. James Pritchett was present to discuss the MSc Science Communication programme at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Like in Munich, it was difficult to predict what kind of response we would have in Birmingham. For me at least, my fears were immediately assuaged when I realised that it was standing room only for the opening lectures. Our career coaches were in meetings non-stop throughout the entire event, and there were lively discussions between applicants and companies throughout the day.



*Derek Ho*

# Shifting your thinking – the first step to getting hired

If you are reading this, you are already headed for success. Your commitment to your education and career goals make you a prime candidate to land an internship in the industry of your choice. That is, if you are willing to do the work. Getting your foot in the door rarely happens by chance. In my experience it required countless hours of preparation and pushing myself to new limits. Ultimately, not only did I land an internship in the pharmaceutical industry, but I also learned a lot along the way.

## Lesson 1: Find value in yourself

The truth is that people will not believe in you unless you believe in yourself. To do that, you need to know exactly what it is that you bring to the table. More importantly, you have to believe it.

It's easy to think of yourself as "just a student." I know I did. I often asked myself, *what could I possibly have to offer one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies?* I wasn't a specialist in any particular field. (In fact, I had changed career paths from psychology to health economics and policy.) I had recently moved to Switzerland to pursue my MA and didn't have any connections in the industry. Moreover, despite being educated, I knew I wasn't a genius. In a sense, I was creating roadblocks for myself by focusing on the things I didn't have. It wasn't until I thought about and believed in my strengths that I saw a clearer path to being hired.

While I may not be a specialist, I have a broad understanding of relevant fields that enables me to look at projects and challenges from various perspectives. Though I didn't have an established network, I certainly wasn't afraid to go out and build one. And even if I will never be a genius, I am committed to learning whatever I do not understand.

We all have something to offer. Some are smarter, some are more qualified, but it isn't until we realise who we are that we can convince others to invest in us.

## Lesson 2: Networking is not the enemy

At first, I thought of networking as trying to get hired on the spot. I convinced myself that if I was charming enough, other people would immediately want me on their team. I now know this is simply unrealistic.

After failing to make connections at my first networking event, I knew I had to change my strategy. I stopped looking at networking as a means to find a job and began thinking of it as a



Laura Rodriguez

way to learn from other people. At my next event, I focused more on asking questions and listening to others' experiences. Surprisingly, the conversations were not always work related.

What I learned was that connecting with professionals just means being human. We do not go to networking events to be solicited by others in the same way that we do not answer the 5pm telemarketing phone calls asking if we want to switch our internet provider. Rather, people go to networking events to meet other interesting people and have a good time.

With the help of my new attitude, I walked out of my next event triumphantly. I had met many incredible individuals who not only gave me real insight into the pharmaceutical industry but also wanted to see me succeed. In fact, a few went as far as to recommend me for positions or gave me invaluable tips on how to get hired.

## Lesson 3: There is power in rejection

I absolutely blew my first interview. Even worse, I beat myself up about it afterwards by obsessing over what I had done wrong. However, mistakes are more than just mistakes – they are opportunities to learn. I now knew what not to do and concentrated on preparing myself for the next interview. This process of trial and error lasted a few months, and with every rejection, I actively improved. That meant thinking

critically about my responses, writing different versions of my CV, and even signing up for Coursera and the Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society courses to fill my knowledge gaps. This experience both empowered me as an applicant and eventually got me where I am today.

## Lesson 4: Sometimes it's just bureaucracy

Along with facing the typical challenges of finding an internship, I had the added pressure of living in a country with strict non-EU work permit regulations. Between cleverly worded laws and permit quotas, finding a job as a non-EU national is very difficult. So much so that many of my talented colleagues are either leaving to pursue opportunities elsewhere in the world or remain unemployed.

Yet many countries have established traineeship agreements that allow graduates to obtain positions internationally. Unfortunately, not all employers know about these agreements and do not consider non-EU applicants because of the challenges associated with employing them. Specifically, businesses may not be able to wait the 3 or more months' processing time for a non-EU work permit or take the risk of having the permit denied.

If you are facing a similar situation, prepare yourself. Take the time to read all relevant legislation, speak with the authorities directly regarding your possibilities, apply early, and discuss realistic timelines with employers. It will not be easy, but it is not impossible.

In the end, things will just work out. Not because you are lucky but because you were determined to make them happen. Good luck!

**Laura Rodriguez**

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