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# From Summer Jobs to Self-Discovery

## The Internship Advantage: Why Every Young Person Needs One

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This is a personal story about my summer jobs, traineeships, and internships. In this text, hopefully somewhat entertaining, I argue that these are crucial factors for young people's learning and personal development. These experiences were vital to me, and I use my internships as an example in this article.

Different forms of internships are needed in society. In today's world, it is a major shortcoming that companies and organizations do not offer these kinds of jobs as



they used to. Everyone should get their act together, and help young people get the early work experiences they need for life!

*If you are short of time, try reading number 1 & 11!*

## 1 — The Paint Shop



My first job was 13 years of age

### My first job

In 7th grade, as soon as I was 13 years old (in Sweden we start regular school at 7), I started working extra on Saturdays in the town's biggest paint shop.



I was a junior salesperson. That is, I was a person who priced merchandise and stocked shelves, but someone else was in charge of advising customers or operating the cash register.

## Anecdotes

One day I was given the task — without any protection — of pumping concentrated ammonia out of barrels, filling hundreds of five-liter cans (1.32 US gallons) to about a third, and then the rest with plain water, labeling, pricing, and shelving in the store or warehouse.

I also did things like sawing planks and painting fences, in the summertime.

One time when we were sawing fence boards, another trainee and I discovered that we were more productive (got more done) if one of us worked hard and then breathed — while the other worked, etc; alternating — than if we both worked at the same time at normal speed. When I was breathing, the boss came. I had difficulty explaining why I was reading comic books at work, while the other was working hard.

Another time I and the other boy were painting boards. For this task, we got paid by the painted board rather than the hour. I was slower than the other, but much more careful. The boss had something to think about. Did he want cheap or quality? I got paint all over me and washed myself with mineral spirits (naphtha) as there was no shower or bath. I was 13 and didn't know much about chemicals.

## Facts

- Year: 1974–1976
- Age: 13–14
- Weeks: 7 full-time summer weeks, and 4-4.5 hours every Saturday for two years
- Initial hourly wage when 13 years old: 5 SEK or USD 1.13 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 35 SEK which is USD 3.25
- Final hourly wage when 14 years old: 7.50 SEK or USD 1.74 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 45 SEK which is USD 4.20
- How I got this job: I asked my father to ask his business contacts.





As a paint shop boy

### Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary

In my first paid job outside my family, I learned how retailing works, practically and economically. I also learned about pricing, which I've been doing on and off for another fifty years. I learned about paint and chemicals, sometimes the hard way, but also from the staff. I learned how to work with colleagues in a team with a purpose.

Most importantly, I learned what working and earning my own money feels like. This was very valuable because it led me to establish important financial and economic principles at the age of 13 that have guided me throughout my life and have been very positive. I realized the value of saving my salary. I stopped buying



things whose value had soon dropped to near zero. Instead, I started buying things that increase in value the more I use them, such as a camera. I went from being a 'waster' to a 'saver'. I went from feeling poor to feeling rich.

Although my story is anecdotal and the value is individual to me, I would argue that having a real job and earning one's own money outside the family can be very valuable for a young person at a time when one establishes basic values and principles. It can set the stage for a rich life in many ways. I wish that businesses and organizations would be more active in offering paid jobs to teenagers.

## 2 — The Local Newspaper



As newspaperman



## **Compulsory work experience, Externship, Shadowing**

In 8th grade, I was an apprentice at the local newspaper, shadowed journalists, and watched them set up a newspaper for printing during the night shift. It was interesting. I even got to write a little piece for print.

### **Facts**

- Year: 1976
- Age: 14
- Weeks: 1/5, one full work day only 8h
- Hourly pay: Nothing, replacing school
- How I got this job: I went to their office and asked them myself

In Sweden, we have compulsory work experience placement in school, 1–2 days in year 8 and 1–2 weeks in year 9. But you have to find the job yourself.

### **Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary**

Understanding how a newspaper is produced was interesting. Understanding how new information (news) is captured, collected, produced, and distributed was valuable. This is some knowledge that I have improved and used in my career. This single day of “work” gave me more insight and wisdom than a month of school. It was the right time for me, at the age of 14. I’m glad that the Swedish school system requires work experience. It’s a great thing.

## **3 — The Foundry**



As a foundryman (or foundry boy)

### **Compulsory work experience, Externship**

It was a bitterly cold winter, and I was doing my two weeks of mandatory 9th-grade work experience in a big factory, a black and dirty foundry for large iron castings for machinery. I wasn't allowed to work in the foundry itself due to risks and safety regulations, so I had to run errands on a flat-bed moped they had, you know, the one with three wheels, two small in front and one big in the back and a place for goods at the front.





Driving this moped on the snowy roads was great fun. I remember repeatedly making the mistake of straddling large blocks of snow and ice, which I then caught on the rear wheel and almost flew off the moped.

### Facts

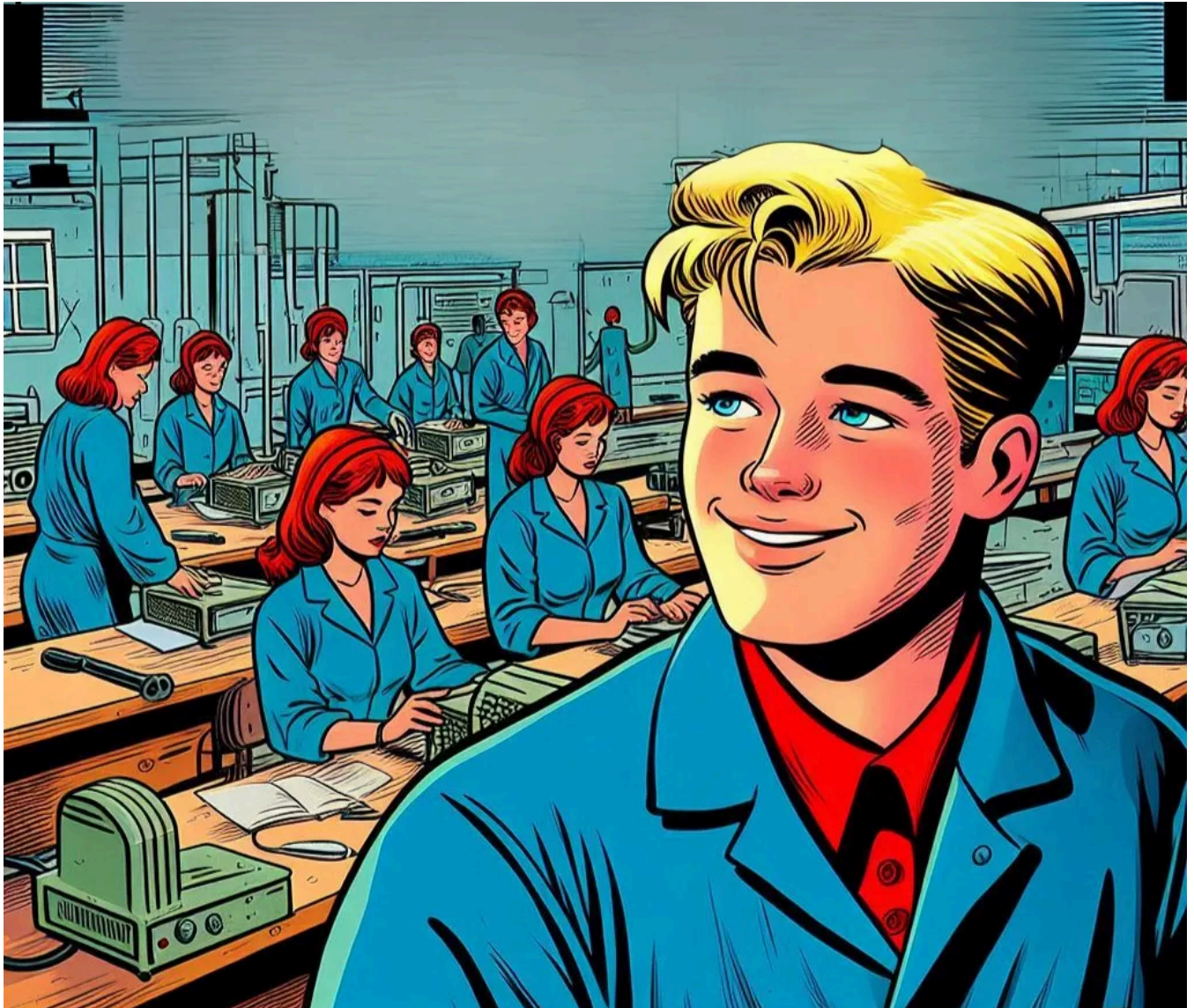
- Year: 1977
- Age: 15
- Weeks: 2, full time 8h/day
- Hourly pay: Not any, replacing school
- How I got this job: I asked my father, he worked there as the employed CEO of the business, which was a subsidiary company of Alfa-Laval AB, ALFA (STO)

### Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary

Two weeks of talking to foundrymen made me realize how skilled these men were and how hard their work was. It was also dangerous and dirty. They inspired me with respect. Their jargon was different but their professionalism and good work ethic impressed me.

This work experience gave me great insight into the workings of heavy industry and the importance of competence and skills in business, not just processes and machinery but professional skills. For me, this was a good choice for the 9th grade work experience requirement.

#### 4 — The Electrical Appliance Factory



I decided to work for a year between elementary school and high school. I had good grades in school, but I needed a break. I got a job in a factory that made electrical appliances for buildings, such as electric heaters, water heaters, and ceiling fans for heat recovery. Before that, they had manufactured all kinds of household electrical appliances, such as hobs and cookers, stoves, vacuum cleaners, and raw juice extractors. My job was in the repair department with two regular employees and the boss. This job was perfect for me since I had studied electronics in elementary school.



The first couple of months I was packing mail, unpacking items to be repaired, packing repaired items to be sent back, and learning what the factory did. Before I was 16, I started fixing stoves and things. I learned to fix everything. It was a life-threatening job because you were testing with high voltage and you had to be careful. So at 15, without any training, I was doing high-voltage warranty repairs for the manufacturer. That would not be allowed today.

### **Anecdote**

A factory was required by law to keep repair parts for ten years. The warranty was one year. We repair anything under a year or over ten years old, free of charge. There was an inventory cost to store the old parts, and the parts had already been written off anyway.

### **Facts**

- Year: 1977–1978, 1979
- Age: 15–16, 17
- Weeks: 52+3, full-time 8h/day
- Initial hourly wage when 15 years old: 10.25 SEK or USD 2.30 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 56 SEK which is USD 5.20
- Final hourly wage when 17 years old: 19.72 SEK or USD 4.70 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 93 SEK which is USD 8.65
- How I got this job: I asked my father to ask his business contacts. I passed an interview.

### **Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary**

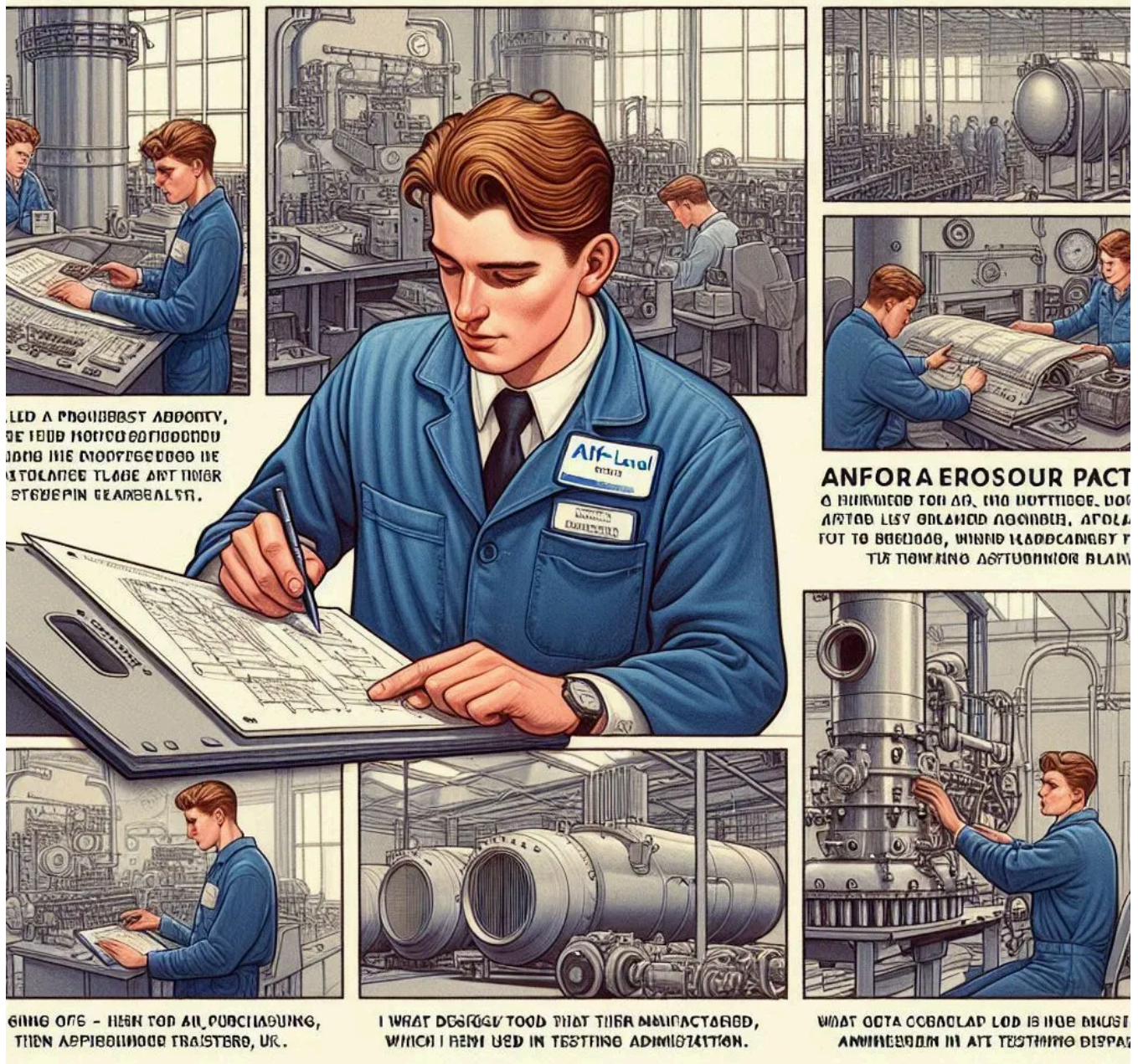
I learned to get zapped and to zap the babes on the assembly line. More seriously, I learned lots of stuff, not just how to fix anything electrical. I learned how a business works, and how a complete production facility is operated and managed, including administration and sales, product development, production equipment, manufacturing, and after-sales. I learned about the main business processes, company functions, and organizational units; the full manufacturing value chain, such as material stocks, sheet metal workshops, varnishing workshops, assembly lines, and finished goods inventories. I also learned about the Swedish style of win-

win cooperation between the employer and the local union. And to be a good colleague — social, curious, and helpful.

Having 55 weeks of work experience at a young age was excellent. It laid the foundation for my future business management and leadership roles. It also made me fearless about fixing anything electrical or electronic, which saved me a lot of money over the years.

## 5 — The London Factory

### AS A ROTATIONAL TRAINEE IN ANNDY - GAINT PLATE HEAT EXCHANGE



As a rotational trainee at Alfa-Laval, London, UK

## Internship Program

I was a rotational trainee in an industry — an Alfa-Laval factory in Brentford,



London, U.K., that manufactured huge plate heat exchangers.

So I had the privilege of working in different departments such as quality control, purchasing, welding, assembly, administration, etc. In the drawing office, for example, I was allowed to design and draw a tool that someone manufactured and I used myself in the testing department.

## Facts

- Year: 1980
- Age: 18
- Weeks: 11, full time 8h/day
- Hourly pay: I was not paid a salary but my accommodation was paid for with half board.
- How I got this job: My father's business contacts (otherwise impossible)

## Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary

It was an excellent 11-week, high-intensity experience. I learned all the major technical and business processes and functions, both theoretical and practical, of a large industrial company. I learned to speak English fluently (British upper-class posh style). Right after I returned to Sweden I took the following year's English exam and got the highest grade. I also learned to enjoy all kinds of beer.

This summer job was something special. In the early 1980s, it wasn't common for Swedish 18-year-olds to have a summer job abroad, especially one as good as mine. I was lucky to have a father with a powerful job and excellent business contacts — you'd better choose your parents well. This rotational traineeship was like the start of an education to become a great industry leader, but my father didn't show he had such expectations of me. And I would never want to fulfill them — I am too detail-oriented and have always been. Nevertheless, I have made fantastic use of the knowledge I acquired during this internship — especially in quality control and procurement.

## 6 — The Telecom Operator



As a telco service technician

## Traineeship, On-the-Job Training

I was a trainee at Televerket, the incumbent Swedish telecom operator for six weeks in the summer of 1981. This counted as the traineeship required for Engineering studies at the University. Directly afterward, I began my five-year studies for a Master's Degree in Applied Physics & Electrical Engineering.

Together with my technician supervisor, I drove around the town and the countryside in an orange Ford Transit van marked "TELE" to help repair reported faults on the telephone lines. In the countryside, these lines often consisted of old uninsulated bare wire we had to solder to the top of the poles. I was also in the



telephone exchange working with cable connections, and in subscriber line terminal units.

### Funny anecdote

When we arrived at a muddy, deserted pasture in the middle of nowhere, my supervisor climbed to the top of the telephone pole to fix a suspected fault. I stood outside the fence and watched. After a while, a bunch of young bulls came out of nowhere and started pounding the pole with all their might. My supervisor sat up there for two hours, swaying, terrified. When the bulls finally gave up and left, and he was able to climb down, I was given a stern order “Don’t you fucking say a word about this to anyone!” The fault wasn’t there.



## Facts

- Year: 1981
- Age: 19
- Weeks: 6, full time 8h/day
- Hourly wage: 29.75 SEK or USD 6.60 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 110 SEK which is USD 10.4
- How I got this job: No ad, on my initiative, written application (a form).

## Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary

I learned to measure where a fault is on a line or which cable is faulty among hundreds, and what damage thunder can do. I learned a lot about work ethic and teamwork. I also learned that women can be horny and pushy when service technicians arrive — to be appropriately handled.

I'm glad the Swedish university system requires internships. It's valuable.

## 7 — High School Substitute Teacher





As a substitute in Maths & Physics

## High School Substitute

I was a substitute teaching in Maths and Physics for the High School Science program years 2 & 3 (17–18 year olds).

## Facts

- Year: 1982
- Age: 20
- Weeks: 2, as I replaced a full-time teacher on his two-week vacation, 14 double lessons with preparation time => 56 paid hours



- Hourly pay: 90 SEK or USD 9.5 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 300 SEK which is USD 28
- How I got this job: I was asked, in a dialogue with the headmaster.

### Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary

I learned how to teach a class, it was a lot of fun and an important experience. It was harder than I thought because I had to rehearse everything and develop the course delivery. Without this experience, I probably wouldn't have taken on teaching and course development responsibilities later in life — and they were rewarding, so I'm glad I took the chance.

## 8 — Electronics High-Tech



### Internship, Summer Job

Although I had only completed two of my five-year study years for my Master's degree in electrical engineering, I worked as a professional engineer during the summer. I designed, built, and personally delivered a one-of-a-kind digitally



controlled analog video switch to the research department of Televerket in Stockholm, Sweden. By 21 I had mastered analog and digital electronics design and was trusted to develop advanced high-tech products. However, I got great support from the other engineers — I wouldn't have made it without them. There was a special and essential design element to this job that I didn't know about. After all, there was a reason this company got the job in the first place. Aside from this important detail, I developed and produced this unique high-tech product almost entirely on my own in just six weeks.

### **Here is how it works**

Week 1: Get acquainted with the company and its equipment and understand the task. Make the electronic design. This was an intense week.

Week 2: Build the prototype and test performance. Redo until specs are met.

Week 3: CAD the printed circuit board (PCB) layout.

Week 4: Build the PCB product. Component assembly and manual soldering of the PCB. Circuit test and performance measurements. Functionality test.

Week 5: Build box and final assembly. The product must look and feel as expensive and exclusive as it was and be durable.

Week 6: Careful testing of the final product. Delivery.

### **Facts**

- Year: 1983
- Age: 21
- Weeks: 6, full time 8h/day
- Hourly wage: 40 SEK or USD 5 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 126 SEK which is USD 11.75
- How I got this job: I had shown interest earlier and begun building a professional relationship with some researchers. I asked them for an advanced design job when they started a spin-off company.

### **Anecdote**

After the first three weeks, when I had just finished my CAD design on a late Friday afternoon, I went to where they make PCBs from CAD files to ask them to make the physical four-layer PCB for me. They said they were closing for a week's vacation in

the middle of summer. I didn't even think you could have a vacation. I had to wait two weeks for the PCB needed to keep going.

So now I suddenly had two unplanned weeks off, without pay, of course. What was I supposed to do?

The day after I had my bike — a Kawasaki 750cc 1981 year model — serviced, I bought a tent and a sleeping bag and finally found my passport. Early Tuesday morning I drove south through Sweden, took the ferry to Germany, and headed south.

When I arrived in Zürich on Friday night, the engine was on three cylinders. I was lucky that some German bikers who lived in the same 32-person dorm as I did helped me find an open MC garage (a repair shop) on Saturday morning to fix the bike while we waited. The mechanic was an old man, probably 70 years old. He took off the carburetor and blew it clean with compressed air. Then he rode the bike with an interwar leather hood to ensure the problem was fixed. A good thing people are helpful.

I made it through 11 European countries in 13 days and got home on a Sunday, just in time for week 4 of the program.

### **Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary**

I learned how to build professional electronic products quickly. It was a fantastic internship. I am so glad that I got this chance. It allowed me to showcase my skills and build good relationships with several researchers who are starting various high-tech companies. Business relationships are very important for personal success. Before I was 18, I relied on my father's business connections, but now I have created my own network.

## **9 — Test System High-Tech**





## Internship, Summer Job

I worked the whole summer of 1985 at ContextVision, a newly started high-tech company specializing in medical image analysis. This company is still thriving in 2024. In true teamwork, we developed a test system for processor boards for the company's custom hardware image computers. For me, the work was mostly programming in Pascal on a VAX computer.

## Facts

- Year: 1985
- Age: 23

- Weeks: 9, full time 8–10 h/day
- Hourly wage: 40 SEK or USD 4.65 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 108 SEK which is USD 10
- How I got this job: I had shown interest earlier and had maintained professional relationships with some researchers for two years. I just asked them for a summer job at their spin-off high-tech company.

### **Anecdote**

Our team leader for this task was a guy 3–4 years younger than me. All the other team members were technologists about 23 years old like me. This guy worked half-time at this high-tech company and half-time at the university as a researcher in parallel computing. He also studied Applied Physics & Electrical Engineering like me. He was the nicest and most social guy and knew everything about everything. He already had a university degree in mathematics, which he had taken while still in high school, and had come third in a national math competition. It is very interesting to have met such extraordinary people. There were several extraordinary individuals in this high-tech company.

### **Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary**

Another fantastic internship of great value to me. It gave me more contacts for future opportunities. For me, this job was a bridge from hardware to software, which I have now crossed. I had been designing electronic hardware since the 9th grade, but now I was doing computer programming for a living.

Students need to have opportunities like this. Businesses, including start-ups, should dare to employ students on a large scale. On the one hand, they can provide great help at a low cost, and on the other, they can be part of the skills supply.

## **10 — Programming High-Tech**





### Internship program, Thesis-related, On-the-Job Training

At the same company, ContextVision, I was given a product development assignment, which was also the basis for my master's thesis. It was mostly programming in Pascal, C, and a low-level assembler-like language. Back then, processors were so slow that we had to use high-level languages for business logic and user interface, C for integration, and low-level languages for implementing data processing algorithms.

My task was to adapt and implement a pixel interpolation algorithm. The software product I developed was used for the geometric rectification of images. For example, if two photographs are taken from an airplane at different angles to the earth, partly overlapping the same landscape, my product would make one correct

rectified image from the two, at 90 degrees to Earth, and very fast. This functionality is essential in medical imaging, such as X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, and ultrasounds.

I also had some in-house courses in advanced image processing, which were sold externally.

## Facts

- Year: 1986 Jan-Sept, and almost two months early 1987
- Age: 24–25
- Weeks: 40, full time 8–12 h/day
- Hourly wage: 40 SEK or USD 5.60 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 104 SEK which is USD 9.60
- How I got this job: I knew them all and just asked.

## Anecdote

I had written a long program with many procedures. For the life of me, I could not understand why my program was not working. I was sure it was written correctly, and the tools I had (debuggers) showed no errors. I was tearing my hair out (I wore a thick skullcap at the time — it is long gone now, I'm afraid). Finally, the software development manager came and helped me. He found the bug in just over 10 minutes. There was nothing wrong with my code, but I had named one of the procedures with the same name as the program file, and the compiler couldn't handle that. I thought it was a weird bug — it should work. But I was impressed with the software manager who figured it out so quickly. I sat there for days.

## Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary

I learned real programming, i.e. writing production programs. This job was also the basis for my thesis, the final assignment for my engineering degree.

Companies need to provide opportunities for students to do real-world thesis work. Later in my career, when I had management positions, I had students do work for me that they used for their thesis or final paper.

## 11 — The DSP development





## Summary

In the fall of 1986, I spent 13 weeks in Switzerland as a systems engineer at Zellweger Uster AG, where I built an advanced digital signal processor system for four-camera automatic inspection.

## Internship, On-the-Job Training

By mid-September 1986, I was a full-fledged engineer. Or at least I felt like one. My self-confidence was excellent. I had done everything for my master's degree in electrical engineering except write the thesis paper.

After finishing my studies and thesis work in the summer of 1986, before I had time to write the thesis paper, I got an IAESTE internship in Switzerland for three months in the fall of 1986. I traveled to Switzerland by train to work as a systems engineer at Zellweger Uster AG in Uster. This was a high-tech company that developed machines for the textile industry (such as weaving). I first joined their IT department and was

tasked with looking at how they could implement a local area network within the company. Although this was new technology, I thought it sounded boring, so I asked if the company had a development project involving computer vision/robot vision/image processing instead. To my surprise they did, and within a week I was transferred to a department that was developing a prototype for an optical inspection machine for woven fabrics. My job was to independently build a digital signal processor (DSP-CPU), write the program for it, and integrate everything to make it work. It was the right kind of job for me.

It took me maybe a month to build the CPU and test rack, 1.5 months to program and test the DSP, and 2–3 weeks to document everything. I had a great supervisor — who had done the basic design — and we were both part of a development team that did all the hardware and application software. We all worked together to prototype a computer machine the size of a house with many different processors and buses between them and the cameras. It was high-tech — the image processing algorithms and the computer technology were state-of-the-art. My CPU or DSP ended up in a commercial product sold in constantly updated hardware versions for decades, until at least 2007. The product replaced 15 manual inspection stations and 10-15 FTEs (full-time employees, or people).

## Details

To do the DSP, I built a discrete CPU and programmed it in 48-bit microcode. There were no DSP chips then. I couldn't use a CPU chip or machine code because it would have been way too slow for the application we had it for. I built the CPU using bit-slice technology (for ALU and CU), some memory and gates, and wired and tested the whole thing. The processor took 13 weeks to build, and the component cost was not very high, maybe a few thousand dollars. Also, no special equipment was needed for testing. So from the basic design to a finished working CPU programmed and tested for its special application — a kind of controller with two-dimensional digital signal processing in real-time, an application similar to robot vision — in 13 man-weeks.

I can't take credit for the CPU design, as most of it had already been done when I arrived. However, I critically reviewed and improved the entire design — among other things, I eliminated unnecessary and expensive buffer memory. The whole design was done with paper and pencil. The underlying algorithm — implemented by my program — was partially developed when I arrived, and I had to develop it



further during the programming. I then documented everything on a brand-new Macintosh SE.

## Facts

- Year: 1986
- Age: 24–25
- Weeks: 13, full time 9–14 h/day
- Initial hourly wage: 10 CHF (43.50 SEK) or USD 6.50 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 114 SEK which is USD 10.90
- Final hourly wage: 27.50 CHF (120 SEK) or USD 18 — corresponding to a 2024 Swedish buying power of 410 SEK which is USD 50
- How I got this job: I had previously applied for an IAESTE internship abroad. And I got this take-it-or-leave-it offer. Of course, I took it.

## Anecdote 1 — Daring to negotiate

I negotiated a 175% increase in my salary for the same job.

Initially, I was paid 10 Swiss francs per hour, which was pretty good then. Since I came from one of the three countries (USA, Sweden, and Egypt) and was registered as a trainee, I did not have to pay any taxes according to Swiss tax rules. I could save most of my salary because my costs for accommodation — living with a family in a house — and food were low.

After working there successfully for about five weeks, I requested an audience with the senior HR director of the company. Zellweger Uster was a large enterprise with over 3,000 employees in the same plant. At the meeting, I told him that I had almost finished my engineering degree in Sweden — I just had to finish and submit the thesis paper — which is equivalent to a diploma in engineering from the ETH in Zürich, and that I was now working on the same tasks as an experienced engineer, and that I was important for the success of this project. I showed my grades and gave the names of my supervisors who could attest to my performance. I also said I would like a higher salary, although I knew all the interns were paid CHF 10 per hour. I told him that I was not asking for the pay of a Swiss graduate engineer, but at least close to it. The HR director did not give a direct answer but talked it all away.

When I left the meeting I thought, “Guter Versuch, at least I tried”. Then I forgot all about it.

About three weeks later, I received a phone call from my department head (my team leader’s boss’s boss). At our meeting, he thanked me for my good work and dedication so far and said that he had received a letter from his boss, the head of the division, which he showed me. The letter stated that I would receive a new salary of CHF 27.50 per hour retroactive to the date I joined the department (tax-free). This equates to a net pay of USD 50 per hour in 2024. It was an increase from 10 to 27.5 Franken per hour, or +175%, retroactively.

If I had not asked for and had had the meeting with the personnel director, I would not have been able to save money for an almost new luxury Volvo 244 GLT, which I bought when I returned to Sweden.

Now I can’t understand how I had the courage then.

I sold the completely rusty Volvo for 2,500 SEK (USD 300) well into the 2000s. It was dark gray metallic, the perfect color to hide the fact that it needed to be washed.

### **Anecdote 2— Being creative in solving a problem**

For this internship, I had a visa and a work permit for Switzerland that was only valid for 3 months. I had to leave the country before 12. Dec. 1986. But I hadn’t finished my project yet — I needed another two weeks to document and complete my project. How do we solve this problem? We had to be creative. I said farewell to the landlady and moved out. I traveled to the German border and got a stamp on my passport that I had left Switzerland. Then I traveled back without a stamp. I secretly stayed with a colleague in Zürich and continued to work in the office. Since I couldn’t get paid for those extra weeks, as compensation I was given a bonus of 5,000 Swiss francs (\$9,000 today) ‘for excellent work’, paid out to me in advance on the official last day.

### **Anecdote 3— Learning German**

When I first accepted the Swiss IAESTE internship, I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to learn German, since it was in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. I was wrong, or at least not right. First, Swiss people in the “German” parts of the country speak Schwiizerdütsch as their mother tongue, not German or Hochdeutsch. Second, all the Swiss engineers wanted to practice their English, which was on par with my English and much better than my German. The only



place I could practice my German was where I stayed — my landlady didn't speak English. Anyway, at the end of my stay, I spoke German well enough to go to job interviews in German in Germany. I'd also read five novels in German in three months.

### **Key Takeaways & Argumentative Summary**

This was another great and the last internship for me. I learned German. I learned how to design a CPU and to microcode. I also learned how to properly document according to company standards, which is very important in an industrial development project like this.

It was a great feeling to be part of a team of skilled and experienced engineers developing a state-of-the-art vision system. This internship gave me the skills that led to my first permanent job as a research engineer in robot vision and computer graphics.

### **In addition to the internships...**

Besides school & studies, I did other things, which of course also gave me great experiences and a lot of knowledge and skills, such as

- I attended an English language course in Scotland in 1979 and a further course in conversational English in London in 1982.
- In 1983, I started my own business, an entrepreneurial company, with a friend. We designed, engineered, produced, and sold loudspeaker systems (we outsourced some of the manufacturing). We learned a lot, including marketing, and consumer pricing. I learned how to sell, which has been extremely useful in my life, both personally and professionally.



- Military service 1983–1984. Soldier training and specialization in artillery brigade command center signaling/communications, radar operations, and more. I learned that people are very different (me) and tolerate different amounts of suffering.
- In 1984, I started another business selling computers while continuing to sell speaker systems. I realized early on that I could make money selling personal computers and grew quickly because of the much lower overhead. I learned how to create a successful business strategy and business model. I learned solution selling. Sales peaked in the spring of 1987, a fantastic journey and great success for me. Then I dropped it for my first real permanent job as an engineering graduate. I was doing my thing before Michael Dell started — and I wasn't going to show him how to do it. My new permanent job was as a research engineer in robotic vision and image analysis/graphics/CADCAM.



## Analysis

A key to many internships in society is the matching of needs and offers, of students and companies. Beyond the matching itself, it's about the timing, process, and timeframe of decisions. Together, these create opportunities for students and companies. Opportunities depend on many factors, including legislation and marketplaces. There are few good marketplaces apart from organizations like IAESTE with restrictive conditions.

### What are the student's needs?

Teenagers and young adults need work experience. They also need to learn the value of money and how to manage the money they've earned. The work should be meaningful, challenging, stimulating, and lead to self-discovery. They also need colleagues, friends, and business contacts.

### What are the business needs?

The needs of the company are strategic, tactical, and operational. As I mentioned earlier, students doing internships are part of the skills provision, it is a long-term investment in the company's talent pipeline. Tactically, internships are good for demonstrating corporate social responsibility, which is used in marketing and recruiting. And, of course, interns can perform certain tasks that are important but not urgent enough to be prioritized by regular employees or by hiring consultants.

### What can a student offer a company?

University students have fresh academic knowledge and can bring new innovative perspectives. Younger students can be useful resources, arms and legs, and provide certain skills. Many company tasks and problems are suitable for students. As you can see from the tasks I was given in my internships, a student can handle significantly qualified tasks and start immediately, with some preparation or sometimes without any preparation.

### What can a company offer a student?

Relevant paid work experience. Hope and joy, and a basis for vision.

## Matching

Both companies and students need to be proactive and communicative. Managers in companies are often very busy and do not have much time. It can be difficult for managers to find internship opportunities at the right level and stimulation for students without too much supervision, and to find the right student. For students, it

can be difficult to find opportunities to get noticed and showcase their skills and potential.

### **Advice for students**

For students, the challenge often lies in finding the right opportunity. It's crucial to be proactive and strategic. Don't rely on generic applications; instead, research companies thoroughly and target the managers who align with your career goals, as I did in my internships 7–10. Be prepared to demonstrate how you can add value to their team from day one.

With the right approach, you can turn an internship into the first step of a successful career.

### **Advice for managers**

When I have hired students for internships, I have always been impressed and satisfied with their performance. Don't neglect or worry about internships. Always keep in mind that you can use students. You get fresh skills at a low cost and contribute to the future supply of skills. You make an important contribution to society as well — and remember that CSR is useful in corporate marketing.

### **Summary and conclusions**

Drawing from my experience in management across various companies, and my own 11 internships I can confidently say that internships offer far more than just a temporary solution to workforce needs. They present a strategic opportunity for companies to innovate, shape future talent, and fulfill a vital role in societal development. Here's why:

**1. Strategic Value:** Internships are not just about filling gaps in your team or offloading menial tasks. They provide an opportunity to inject fresh perspectives and innovative thinking into your organization. Interns, with their academic knowledge and eagerness to learn, often bring new ideas that can challenge the status quo and inspire creativity among your established teams. When integrated thoughtfully, these young minds can contribute meaningfully to projects, sometimes uncovering solutions that seasoned professionals might overlook due to routine or familiarity.

**2. Long-Term Benefits:** Internships are a long-term investment in your company's talent pipeline. By providing real-world experience to students, you're cultivating a pool of future employees who are already familiar with your company's operations,



culture, and values. These individuals are often more motivated and loyal, having started their careers with you. Moreover, by engaging with students early on, you can identify and groom potential leaders who can drive your company's success in the future.

**3. Corporate Responsibility:** Offering internships is also about corporate social responsibility. In a world where the job market is becoming increasingly competitive, companies have a moral obligation to help the next generation gain the skills and experience they need to succeed. By providing internships, you contribute to the broader community, helping to ensure that young people are equipped to enter the workforce with confidence and competence. This not only benefits the individual but also strengthens the overall economy by fostering a skilled and capable workforce.

My advice to companies is to recognize the immense value that internships can bring. They are not just a cost-effective way to complete tasks but a strategic tool to build a brighter future for both your company and society at large. Embrace the opportunity to mentor, to guide, and to be part of the journey that shapes the leaders of tomorrow.

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