

by Haley Rich



VALUED VOICES:

Empowering Employees Through Meaningful Work

Editor's Note: Susan Michel, CEO of a financial advisory firm Glen Eagle, has woven a internship program into the firm's culture by encouraging interns to make valuable contributions to the company. In this article, Glen Eagle intern and Tufts University sophomore Haley Rich provides insight into her unique experience interning at a woman-owned firm and how her employers have instilled confidence in her. Before attending college, Haley was her high school's student council co-president and cross-country team captain, and now writes and edits for two different newspapers at Tufts. As a female-owned business in the male-dominated finance industry, Glen Eagle values the opportunity to guide and motivate eager young women like Haley. Read about empowering your interns through meaningful work and feedback.

Stepping into an anthropology class on the first day of my freshman year at Tufts University, I felt like a puzzle piece forced into the wrong place, pretending it belonged. I was surrounded by creative, intelligent people who had all these strong opinions and used all these words that I couldn't define. Me? I was only in that classroom, in that school, because I was

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an athlete, or so I told myself. Just a dumb jock.

After the lecture, I headed over to the track, backpack slung over my shoulder, foreign words like “marxism” and “neo-liberalism” still ringing in my ears. Our workout began. I looked around, and saw girls who seemed to run effortlessly, high school record holders, national qualifiers. *How did I even end up on this team? Why did my coach ever want me?*

Somehow, I've always seemed to think I beat the system. I snuck into any and every achievement, fooled everyone around me into thinking I was capable, when underneath this shell I'm actually just a really good poser.

Imposter Syndrome: The imagined belief that one's success wasn't truly earned and that they are somehow fooling everyone around them—is especially prevalent amongst women. That shouldn't come as a surprise, considering the fact that women are less likely to get credit in group work, assumed to be inept, judged more harshly on their appearance, interrupted at meetings, and so on (<http://www.businessinsider.com/subtle-ways-women-treated-differently-work-2014-6>).

So, during my first day of my internship at Glen Eagle—a big change from my usual summer camp counselor gig, and an opportunity I didn't deserve, I told myself—I was shocked to see how much trust my bosses instilled in me. No coffee fetching, no copy making; I was given meaningful work, and with a deadline, too. The fact that my mentor Laura was confident that I could effectively market one of Susan's podcasts by 5 o'clock on my first day led me to ask myself why I was the only person in the building who doubted my capabilities.

Whether or not their employer realizes, an intern can clearly recognize when they are being given busywork. The connotation dishing out busywork evokes is that you are not capable of working on

something more meaningful. Fortunately, though, assigning significant work portrays the opposite message to the intern: that they're adept and were hired for a reason.

My first week here in the office, I was told that, among other marketing tasks, my job would be to recruit guests, write interviews, and plan out the marketing for an entire year of the company's radio show. The show features a different guest every two weeks and seeks to encourage women to be confident in their careers and everyday lives. One year meant 26 shows and 26 inspiring women. I was let loose, not without guidance or support from my bosses, but certainly with freedom and room to shape the show in my own creative direction.

With an intimidating task before me, I started conservatively, contacting small business owners and sending dozens of invites at a time, assuming my requests would be ignored by most.

Laura and Susan were so full of praise for my progress and held off on assigning me other projects to encourage me to dive deeper into the task. Just a few weeks later, I had gotten yes from the only former female CEO of a Major League Baseball team, a senator who served California for over 20 years, the oldest woman to swim the English Channel, the Special Assistant to President Clinton, and many others.

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As soon as I hurdled over my initial self-doubt at Glen Eagle, I never felt as though I needed to prove my abilities or worth as too many women do in the office, classroom and media.

Laura, who is based in Texas, calls me each day to go over my progress and is constantly reminding me of why

my contributions are respected by the company, how she's impressed with my work and wants to hear about any feedback I have, positive or negative. Susan publicly cherishes all her interns, boasting that they could run the company on their own. When I recruit a guest for an upcoming podcast, within the same day, Laura has contacted them and asked to schedule an interview, no questions asked (besides a background check, of course).

No one interrogates me as to why I think they'd be a valuable or interesting speaker; my employers take me seriously and trust my work. I believe this inclusive, encouraging atmosphere where a nineteen-year-old young woman with no previous office experience such as myself feels as though her opinions are as important as anyone else's can be attributed to working with a woman-owned business.

Actions speak louder than words. For a company to say that they value the voices of their women and interns sounds charming, but that shouldn't be enough. We shouldn't listen to these voices just because it's the fair thing to do; we should listen to them because we will benefit from the fresh angle. Doing so will not only boost our businesses, but it will also help our team realize their worth. As an employer, you have the power to empower. ☺



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and wealth management. Glen Eagle takes an educational, holistic approach to meeting its clients' long-term goals. Susan is a member of the Enterprising Women Advisory Board and a past recipient of the Enterprising Women of the Year Award.