

Megan Nibbio

MFS Investment Management

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My Human Resources Co-op at MFS

Going into the co-op interview process for my HR Co-op role, I felt so lucky to have the preparation from co-op class in my back pocket. I knew how to answer every question in the interview and I had the confidence to be myself and really connect with my interviewer, who happened to be my future manager, Sonya! I only had one interview during the entire process because MFS was my first and offered me the job the next day. I knew I wanted to be part of the team when I heard Sonya talk about how down-to-earth and passionate the employees are. For students preparing for their first co-op, I would recommend paying close attention to co-op class and interview training. Sonya told me that when she interviews students, the Northeastern students are so polished and look great, even if they're not the best candidates. Other schools don't have this resource, so they don't usually come off as professional, no matter how qualified they are. This discrepancy proved to me that co-op class was worth all the fake interviews! I would also recommend first timers to show genuine curiosity and passion in the interview-- you're not expected to know everything about the industry or the work you'll be assigned, you're just expected to show you care. The more you can show your personality and values while still being professional, the better! This way, the recruiter will have an idea if you could thrive in their culture.

I wish I had known before co-op (and interview) that your major doesn't matter when applying for HR positions. Lisa said this in class, but I did have an underlying anxiety that an investment management company like MFS would think otherwise! However, the uniqueness of my Human Services background and ample community service experience were huge assets in landing the role, matching the company culture, and taking on projects that involved D&I down the road. Sonya helped me to learn this lesson when she told me that she would seek out Human Services students in the future because we match the company culture and are passionate about our diversity initiatives.

In the beginning of my time at MFS, I made some goals such as learning more advanced Excel skills, such as V-lookups and conditional formatting, and about what I wanted to look for in company culture. I was able to improve my Excel skills by taking an online course and getting advice from my coworkers who used it all the time. MFS was also the perfect place to learn about company culture because it's always a topic of conversation. There are core competencies that outline qualities that make you successful at MFS, such as agility and collaboration. I got to see how these tie into year-end reviews and even recruitment, which demonstrated the importance of finding a company that champions values that match your own. It will impact your job satisfaction and performance!

I spent the majority of my time on co-op either working independently on projects that I created myself or that someone from HR needed help with. I pulled diversity recruiting data from Workday and manipulated it into important chunks so send out to recruiters, I curated and

uploaded educational materials to our learning platform, and I scheduled interviews and interacted with hundreds of candidates to update them on their progress. I felt so lucky to have autonomy in my work, especially because I knew Sonya would be there to guide me and give me feedback if I wanted! It also felt gratifying to know that others trusted me to help them with their work. I truly felt like an integral part of the team because I got to build strong relationships with my teammates and my wonderful manager! Sonya would always ask for my perspective on what she was working on as the Campus Recruiter because I'm a student, so I felt heard and valued. My duties evolved very quickly. Sonya told me on the first day that my projects for the rest of my time would be based on how I performed on my first ones. During the first week, I had the idea to implement a student ambassador program at the universities we hire from to increase brand awareness and reach different diversity groups. When I shared my research with Sonya on the second week, she embraced my proposal and said she would support me to create the program and present it to senior management! This is how I earned her trust right off the bat and was able to take on more in depth projects that would have a lasting impact on the company.

The most surprising thing about my co-op was how much others cared about my interests and were willing to listen to me. I imagined that no one would ask for feedback on a project from a 20-year-old with virtually no HR experience, but I was proved wrong when my teammates asked me about myself when I arranged informational interviews with them.

One of the most exciting, meaningful, and interesting tasks that I did was attend a recruiting event at UMass Lowell with Sonya. To be on the other side of a networking event changed my perspective on talking to potential employers. I realized that recruiters aren't there to judge students and weed people out, they're happy to share their experience at the company and are so excited when you are curious about it. Sonya prepared me to participate by reminding me to be myself and to be open about my experience because students will appreciate my honesty and enthusiasm. Going forward, I'll be more likely to go up and talk to Campus Recruiters because I know that they have a genuine passion for working with students.

One thing I'm so grateful for about this experience is how much I learned about myself that I may have never learned in the classroom setting. It became clear to me that I prefer a more laid back managerial style that allows me to have more autonomy to follow my passions. MFS definitely has a hierarchical structure, being of a fair size and having heavily tenured employees. Of course, I respected this structure during my time there while noting that a more fluid structure might feel a little more in my comfort zone.

Another thing I learned about myself is that my energy for projects comes in sprints, so it's best to plan about three hour blocks to push through part of one project, then switch to another. This allows my subconscious to work on the first project so I feel fresh and have new angles when I come back to it later. I also learned that I love feedback. I usually know who would have a good perspective on whatever I'm working on because I know the backgrounds and interests of my team members, and this intuition makes the feedback more meaningful. I only reported to Sonya, which was perfect because she also ran the co-op program and I'm her only direct report! It was a luxury to have so much individual attention on my projects, ideas, and professional growth.

A main theme of my co-op and working with Sonya was working to undo the social inequality that has long been at the center of the financial services industry. The main reason that I wanted to work in HR in this industry was because my dad told me about the ongoing shift toward diversity and all the barriers in its path. At MFS, turnover is extremely low. This is a benefit for stability because execs aren't cycling through and creating chaos with new processes every year. However, this is a barrier to diversity because it takes longer to bring in new employees with different perspectives. This is something I've talked about with Sonya because it is discouraging to both of us to look around and see a lack of women, people of color, people in the LGBTQ+ community, etc. One standout statistic is that in the US offices, only 17% of MFS' employees are people of color. This is a call to action! Studies show that more diverse workplaces have higher employee satisfaction and bring in higher revenue. And considering that the city of Boston is composed of a majority of people of color when you count the neighborhoods on the outskirts, we can see the opportunity that MFS has to increase its diversity. Insights like these gave me the drive I needed to support the co-op program in every way possible and connect with students. I went to recruiting events, talked to students, traded emails with candidates, greeted every co-op candidate to make them feel welcome, listened to the voices of other co-ops about their engagement, brought up any issues with my manager, and spoke from the heart about my own experience. Building our pipeline from the co-op and internship programs and keeping those students engaged is one way to introduce a new generation of diverse potential candidates to the industry and the MFS brand. It is my hope that any diverse candidate who has been touched by these programs will feel welcome and heard because their perspectives are desperately needed! I feel so committed to the goal of wiping out this harmful inequality within the financial services industry and I can't wait to get back to work.

Looking back on the job description as a new candidate might see it, I would suggest a couple changes. On NUCareers, the job description for my role was engaging enough to push me to apply to the position, but doesn't do justice to the meaningful experience that brought me so many learning opportunities, growth, and joy. I actually recommended to my manager that we update the job descriptions that are posted on NUCareers and Handshake to better reflect the culture of MFS. We were excited to do so before COVID hit, but unfortunately my co-op ended before we could implement the change. In the focus groups that I held at MFS to gain insight on co-op job satisfaction, I asked other co-ops how well they thought the job description matched their experience. The job description describes MFS as "elite" and "competitive", which makes it seem cut-throat. The reality, however, is more inviting and familial. Especially considering that MFS harps on culture in the Employee Value Proposition and at recruiting events, my manager and I saw the opportunity to integrate this asset into the job description to attract the right kind of candidate. If I were to change the HR job description specifically, I would also include the opportunities to learn about D&I, community outreach, charitable giving, and diversity recruiting. These were such meaningful elements of my role and my passion in these areas helped me to make a strong bond with my manager, Sonya. I bet that if these elements were included, more students who would mesh with the down-to-earth culture would apply! My co-op was paid, so it felt nice to have a steady income that pays much more than the summer jobs I've had in Illinois. It was also already in NUCareers, which was convenient for me because I didn't have to do all the outreach required to make your own co-op.

This co-op, even though it was cut short, was meaningful to me and clarified my career vision. I now know that I am specifically interested in the D&I/Diversity Recruiting/Community

Outreach parts of Human Resources. I am really looking forward to taking more classes in the field and seeing my coworkers again once the virus calms down. I would highly recommend this co-op to another student who cares about workplace equality and I can't wait to see how MFS changes in the future because of the power of the talent pipeline from co-op.