

Seattle Career Quest

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Recently, I had the opportunity to take trip to Seattle in order to visit some of the world's biggest companies with other GW Students. It was the first time I have gotten to travel in over two years. My main goals were to just learn and gain a different perspective on life in a different city I have never been too.

The first thing I noticed was something I've never seen before on a huge scale, smoke. The recent wildfires in the surrounding areas of Canada and Northern California have caused a huge change in the air quality. Seattle's skies were completely covered in smoke, so nobody could see across the bay. The smoke made all the great views from the Space Needle pretty much underwhelming. It was just a circumstance out of our control which is something many have to accept.

As for the company visits themselves. They were definitely fascinating and interesting to say the least. The companies were given a lot of flexibility in what they wanted to do during our visit. Flexibility is power, and a great deal of character is demonstrated when one has power.

To start, Microsoft made a huge impression. Their campus is much bigger than the school's! The people at Microsoft really focus on the people especially on the employees and teamwork. If an employee's experience at work is good, then that positivity transfers to the success of their mission. I could easily tell that the transfer is being made within their store and visitor center. Heck, I had a lot of fun testing out their products. When meeting some of the employees themselves, there was a curious and fascinating vibe within them. They were all dedicated to what they do. Microsoft is example of the result of constant persistence.

Amazon was next, and Microsoft really set the bar on these visits. I could tell many of the other students felt the same way. The hosts at Amazon really just sat us down in a conference room and spoke to us. Their backgrounds and expertise were exceptional and impressive, but the tone and mood of the visit is what stood out. As the hosts were explaining and answering questions, they sounded pretty serious about their work. What they do does not sound easy. The main takeaway from them is that not all work is fun and games. There will always be a grind.

Starbucks began day two. I'm not an avid coffee drinker, but their success is always appealing. The way their HQ is laid out instantly told everyone that they were also built for these types of visits. Like Microsoft, Starbucks is very mission driven and does everything in their power to ensure that mission's success. The company is specialized in vertical integration, and I was able to tell based on how their employees introduced the concept behind certain products in a sample coffee tasting. Even in events of crisis like the innocent in Philly, Starbucks stuck to their mission still. Listening to Sana, their Finance Senior VP, be straightforward and serious about the problem tells me that Starbucks really cares about their brand a lot.

With the Gates Foundation, the focus took a turn since this isn't a product based company. The Foundation is a bank in a sense. Who gets the grants? What are these methods in determining them? What issues should be focused on? The Foundation focuses on these questions and more. Therefore, there was a more formal and strict setting within the Foundation. I noticed within our hosts that they were really highly intelligent and analytical individuals. That's no surprise especially when you're trying to solve the world's problems. At the same time, our hosts were a lot more personal when it came to their lives outside of work which was a first in the visits. It just goes to show that within every individual is a personality that experiences the same kind of feelings as you and me.

Milliman. They welcomed us as our last site visit for the day. Nobody really knew much about this consulting firm other than the research we did. Even so, Milliman exceeded our expectations. One of the most obvious factors to note on which employees came. All the companies so far brought three or four hosts. Milliman brought ten! The group represented a wide variety of talent and positions including chief officers. The visit was basically storytime and a total page-turner. Their stories on how they ended up at Milliman really stress how careers are never fixed. You'll truly never know where your career will go. Sure you may have an end goal in mind, but the path is written in the present.

Facebook was our only site visit for the third day. Our hosts really prepared for us with a real detailed schedule as well as a buffet. Their treatment of visitors is definitely noted. The panel also really stressed the thought of first-impressions. Most people who think about working at Facebook think about coders and software engineers. That's completely not the case. The same goes for all of the other companies. Just because they specialize in a certain area doesn't mean other areas are ignored. There really is a place for everyone in the company. You just have to really look and contact the right people. Versatility is a sign of growth.

Of course, I could really go into further detail into the specific ideas learned. However, most if not all were simply reinforced through these visits. The lessons gained can simply be boiled down to very broad and common ideals. Finding out more about the true colors of the companies was without a doubt an eye-opener. Experiencing Seattle for the first time was memorable to say the least. Big thanks to GW for inviting me to this great trip!