

015: University Talent, Internship and Co-Op Experience at ECS with Tricia Shelton, PE

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Intro

Steve Gosselin:

Welcome to Coffee Talk: From the Ground Up. An ECS podcast. Where we strive to provide a more personable way to communicate with employees. I'm Steve Gosselin, but you can call me Goose. I'm part of our senior leadership team. I'm joined here by Julie Smith, who is part of the marketing communications team and our resident chocoholic. Say hi, Julie.

Julie Smith:

Thanks Steve. Hey everyone. I'm glad you're joining us today. So, Steve, what are we doing here?

Steve Gosselin:

Great question, Julie. One of the struggles with the company, our size is getting a message to the masses, without it being diluted along the way. From projects and people, to services, and career insight. We hope this podcast helps provide an avenue to communicate the stories that are worth sharing. It's to learn about our culture and feel more connected. And to have some fun along the way.

Julie Smith:

So what you're saying is, we hope this podcast is educational, entertaining, and encouraging. With practical advice, you can apply directly to your work and life

Steve Gosselin:

Well said, Julie, and that's why you're in marketing.

Julie Smith:

So grab a cup and settle in.

Julie Smith:

Our attorney makes us say this. This podcast is for entertainment and informational purposes only. Nothing here in shall be construed as providing professional engineering services or used to establish the standard of care. This podcast and the comments contained therein represent only the personal views of the participants and do not reflect those of ECS. While we make every effort to ensure that the

information we are sharing is accurate. We welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors.

Julie Smith:

Welcome to Coffee Talk: From the Ground Up, we are really excited to talk with Trisha Shelton. Trisha started with ECS in 2002, and she is currently the university talent senior manager. She's based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. When she's not working, you can find her at the ice hockey rink or gardening. So welcome Trisha.

Tricia Shelton:

Thanks, Julie.

Julie Smith:

Today's safety minute is all about our new hires. When you're onboarding a new hire, make sure you're sharing with them where a first aid kit is available in your office.

Julie Smith:

Then also make sure that we're keeping their work space nice and neat because messy workplaces are full of hazards. So as they're unboxing any of their materials or things for their workspaces. Make sure that you're cleaning up afterwards so that you don't have any tripping hazards. Your space is clear and safe. We like to start off with some rapid fire questions to get to know you a little bit better. I think this is kind of a cheat, because I may have given it away in the intro, but what is your favorite sport?

Tricia Shelton:

Oh my by far it is hockey. I always have to say ice hockey because there's field hockey and in line hockey. Whatever, there're different types. So I love ice hockey. I have three kids that actually all play ice hockey. And so I am at the rink several nights a week and it's just really become a passion of mine. I volunteer with the different youth organizations with my kids, hockey teams and I just love it.

Julie Smith:

Awesome. Yes. Well, I think it's a given when you're in Pittsburgh, right? You have to fall in love with ice hockey.

Tricia Shelton:

I mean it possibly, and actually I live quite close to where the Pittsburgh Penguins practice arena. It's very sweet. I live like 10 minutes away from there, so it's really cool. They actually have practices that are open, that you can go to. I haven't been there a while, but it's really cool to be that close to a professional team as well.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

Okay. How do you start your day

Tricia Shelton:

Coffee. I'm actually a newer, I know a lot of people probably say that. I'm a newer coffee drinker, I just started over the past couple years. So just start with coffee. I do like to get up early and have kind of that quiet time where I can just kind of prepare myself for the day. Reflect on what my plans are for the day. Just kind of have a little bit of peace and quiet and sip on some coffee.

Julie Smith:

Yeah. Okay, because the show is called coffee talk. How do you take your coffee?

Tricia Shelton:

First of all, I've never, ever tried iced coffee. So a lot of people think that's very strange. Maybe that's because I'm a newer coffee drinker, but I like it hot. I do, do some cream and sugar. I'm not ready for the cold brew stuff yet.

Julie Smith:

Let's do a touch.

Julie Smith:

That's too much.

Julie Smith:

I'm one of those that when it's hot outside, then I want an iced coffee. When it's cold outside, I want my coffee hot. So maybe this summer you'll try iced coffee.

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah.

Tricia Shelton:

It definitely doesn't that hot here in Pittsburgh.

Tricia Shelton:

Maybe.

Tricia Shelton:

That's why I haven't tried the iced.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

Okay, what scares you?

Tricia Shelton:

I am extremely scared of Heights. So I could never be in our facilities group. I see some of the crazy stuff they do. Get me on a second story balcony and I'm ready to pass out. I'm very scared of heights.

Julie Smith:

Oh, gosh.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

I don't think...

Tricia Shelton:

Now if I'm strapped in a rollercoaster and you take me up high. I'm good. If I'm strapped in secure, but I can't have that open type feeling. It's very scary.

Julie Smith:

Yeah. So my dad is six foot six, and I kind of make fun of him. Because as he's gotten older, he has now become scared of heights. I'm like, dad, you're like so much taller than the rest of us. That's not fair.

Tricia Shelton:

Wow.

Julie Smith:

But.

Tricia Shelton:

That is tall.

Julie Smith:

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Tricia Shelton:

Well, unfortunately I have not had the opportunity to really travel abroad. So I'm sure there's some places that I've yet to go. That would be on this list. But, here in the US would be for sure, hands down Hawaii. I've been there. I got married there. Up until I had kids I went there like every year for vacation. I just love the serenity. I love the vibe, it's laid back. It's the culture, everything. So maybe someday I'll end up there.

Julie Smith:

Yes. Oh, I like that. I'm like now picturing a Hawaiian sunset. You've got me totally in like tropical state of mind. I like that.

Tricia Shelton:

Yes it's nice.

Julie Smith:

Now we're going to kind of dive in and get to know you a little bit better. I'm really excited to hear more details about this, but can you share your ECS story? How did you get started here and what's been your journey since you've been here?

Tricia Shelton:

Oh, wow.

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah so like you said, I started in 2002. At that time I had just graduated from Purdue University. So I was a fresh, new graduate, civil engineering degree. Looking for a company to work for and ended up going to work out in our Chantilly, Virginia office. That was my first career, my first job right out of school. So that's where it started.

Tricia Shelton:

So I started as a Geotechnical project manager and did that for quite some time. Right away, we were kind of in a staffing mode. Where they were just starting to look for more hires and they were looking for volunteers to go back to campuses. Back to different universities and recruit. And so right away being a fresh graduate, I was raising my hand ready to go. I just really over time developed a passion for talking to students about what it's like to start your career in civil engineering. Even specifically for me, when I started back in 2002, looking around one of our largest offices at the time. I was the only female engineer at the time. I definitely had this kind of passion in the back of my mind, this desire to go back and find more female engineers. So that's where the recruiting spark started and it's really spiraled from there.

Julie Smith:

So you were talking about how obviously you started as an engineer and then you kind of transitioned into recruitment. I think a big thing at ECS is career paths. Kind of, quote engineering your career, as we may have seen in some recruitment emails. Can you share a little bit more about what that looked like for you. The transition from the technical engineering side to recruitment and what that journey looked like?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, certainly. I mean, one thing that I love about ECS is they have allowed me the opportunity to really follow that passion, to make that switch. I talk about that all

day long with anybody that I meet. About how grateful I am, that ECS is open and willing to allow people to really follow that passion. So that's what it was for me. As a technical person I will say it wasn't like a light switch. There was definitely a transition period, because I was carrying projects, I had clients. So I had to really softly finish out what I had started. Before I really was able to fully transition over to recruiting. Around the same time I was actually sitting for my PE exam. So it was really good timing to finish out what I was working on, take the PE. Then still be around if need be. But, it was a pretty seamless process for me.

Julie Smith:

That's one thing that I absolutely love about ECS. Is if you find something that you're passionate about and it maybe a new passion. Something that you didn't necessarily know you loved, but find your way in that. We want to encourage you to pursue that. Obviously work with your supervisor and a different team needed. I love that you're able to craft the career that you want and to be able to expand your skills. Do the things that you love to do, here at ECS.

Julie Smith:

So obviously you kind of transitioned into recruiting. Can you talk about the history of the university talent program? Did you start it? Was there anything kind of in place when you started? Can you talk to us a little bit about that?

Tricia Shelton:

Sure.

Tricia Shelton:

So thinking back there definitely was a time where, when I actually first started in recruiting, it was myself and one other recruiter. Eventually there was a period where I was the only recruiter at ECS and that did evolve. As we grew the team, I was able to really break off and focus on that early talent. The folks coming right out of school or the folks looking for an internship, looking for that first opportunity. So I was able to really break off. At that point it was a blank slate. We had nothing in place. There was no real structured program. So I was able to really develop the intern program. All the way from the basics. The titles, we have different levels with the intern program and all of our departments. Also, really try to like spell out what we thought could be accomplished at the different levels. Really build out what that program was and really what it is today.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

So we were talking earlier and I'm just trying to get a time since. So we've had kind of a University Talent Program for, was it been the last 10 years?

Tricia Shelton:

I would say so.

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah.

Tricia Shelton:

I've definitely been tracking it for the last 10 plus years. It has grown significantly. It's evolved and grown. I was looking recently at the numbers and some of my early numbers show we had as a company, I think it was a right around 40 interns. Then, this summer, now we're winding down on the hiring, but we have over 200 interns and around 20 co-ops plans. We're still hiring, so it has grown tremendously. Especially over the last couple years.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

So you're saying 200 interns across all of our offices for this summer. We're just talking about summer interns, right?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, just summer.

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, definitely.

Julie Smith:

Wow.

Julie Smith:

What has it been like growing this internship program from 40 interns to over 200? How have you done that?

Tricia Shelton:

Well, there's been some laughs some tears, some smiles, and it's been fun though. I really enjoy that part of my job. I enjoy building programs and processes and figuring out what works, what doesn't work. Maybe that goes back to the engineer in me where it's kind of that problem solver. So we've tried different things over the years and it's been fun. It's a lot of education, a lot of information. I think it also just goes back to the company as a whole, has really grown and evolved. They have really seen the value in the intern program and how that translates to full-time, long-term staffing. It's really exciting to see all that coming together.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

You mentioned we've kind of progressed. We now have levels and different titles. How did you go about figuring that out? How do you go about distinguishing the different levels of our internship program?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, that's a good question.

Tricia Shelton:

So historically we have a really good program for that first time intern. Someone that's in school, even at a freshman level, they may not have a lot of courses behind them. They may not really have any experience, but we realize that we offer that really good, just come to us and we'll teach you and mentor you on what it's like to be a civil engineer. We realized we did that really well, but the next step, we realized very soon that we needed that progression. We want our interns to stay and grow with us. So we had to really rethink what that looks like.

Tricia Shelton:

So our level one is really a hundred percent in the field training and just learning what's happening in the field. Then beyond that, a level two intern would be kind of that mix of field, with an exposure to some office work. Then our level three intern would be someone that's really primarily in the office learning those day to day functions related to project management. Then occasionally they might be pulled into the field for some more specialty type projects. That gives a really good progression kind of from level one all the way up to three of a real well rounded exposure.

Julie Smith:

This may be a silly question, but do we have interns across all four of our service lines? Do we have interns as an admin function or in HR or what does it look like?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, definitely.

Tricia Shelton:

So we actually have interns in all four of our service lines and at all different levels within those service lines. So that's complete and it's really nice. We also hire interns in our support function. So we have interns within marketing, within accounting, within recruiting, within HR. We really have interns in all different functions.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

We talked a little bit about the progression of the internship program. Obviously you've seen a lot of growth over 200 interns all across the board. Can you share with us, what's the program looking like now?, what are some things that are maybe new to university talent program? What's in store this summer? Can we get kind of a sneak peek?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, definitely.

Tricia Shelton:

Towards the end of last summer, we actually filmed some new professional intern orientation videos. So we're able now for the first time to roll those out. So all of our incoming interns this year have this new video and new exposure. It's a really nice, welcome video. Talks a little bit about who we are, the service lines, what they will be doing. So I'm really excited about the new orientation video that all of our interns will be seeing this year. We're also piloting a company wide mentor program that I am very excited about. We tested it out last summer with about 25% of our interns and the response was overwhelmingly positive. So now we're at the point where we're ready to roll that out, company wide this summer. So I'm really excited to see that really come together.

Julie Smith:

Awesome.

Julie Smith:

Can you share a little bit more about what that mentorship program looks like? Maybe we have some employees listening who didn't know that were doing that, but may be interested in being a mentor. What, what does that entail?

Tricia Shelton:

I'm still working out some of the kinks, but in general it is a 10 week program. I know sometimes our interns are with us a little bit longer than that, but we are anticipating rolling that out beginning of June. It'll be a 10 week series. There will be a component of that where we're really hoping that our interns this summer take the initiative to start to have those conversations with their mentors. So I don't want it to be that one sided where our interns are just thinking we are going to keep reaching out to them. We want to put a little bit of that back on them. Start to own that responsibility a little bit and learn a little bit about the business world. So we're excited about that. The one caveat, I will say at this point, because if we are piloting this program. Right now, this program is really only developed for those that are in our four core service lines.

Tricia Shelton:

So those other support interns, they're not included in this first phase., That's something that would be something later down the road.

Julie Smith:

Gotcha.

Tricia Shelton:

That's kind of where we're at. The other thing that we're really focusing on for this pilot period is, we're really focused on keeping the mentors and the interns in the same office. However, down the road, I could see that expanding to where a mentor might not be in that same office as that intern. But, we'll see how it goes. And I'm really excited to see these match ups and see these connections happen.

Julie Smith:

Okay. So some logistical questions say, we have someone listening who wants to become a mentor. What should they do? Should they be reaching out to you? Is it too late this year, maybe next year?

Tricia Shelton:

Well, depending on when this actually goes live, we're actually right in the thick of that right now. So I have reached out to all of our offices that have interns. I've reached out to the branch manager and whoever the hiring manager was on that intern position. I've asked everyone, it's an opt-in program, so there not required to do it, but we sure hope that they do. So we just went through the opt-in process. Part of that as the opt-in, I also requested the offices to provide who would be the mentor for their interns. So that specific matchup, certainly if there's anybody listening, that is like, Hey, maybe they hadn't heard about it. Maybe it hasn't trickled down. Because like I said, this is pretty fresh. If anyone is willing and wants to be an intern mentor in their office this summer. Certainly reach out to me tShelton@ecslimited.com. Let me know. We are more than happy to include you in that mix.

Julie Smith:

Awesome.

Julie Smith:

You mentioned a new orientation video. Did y'all do another video too? A day in the life video?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, we did. Along with a new orientation video. We also did a brand new day in the life video to showcase what it's like to be an intern at ECS. Two different aspects. The orientation is that internal video they've already started with us. But, the day in life is its external facing. It's attached to all of our job posts. So that anyone applying can easily click on that and see what is it like to be an intern, a day in the life of an intern here at ECS and hopefully see if that would be a good fit for them.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

So speaking of that, what should our interns and our co-ops expect this summer?

Tricia Shelton:

Expect the unexpected actually, because the work can change day to day. They can be working with different contracts or different projects. The weather changes. I mean, there's really nothing that they can expect. Except they should expect to learn, try anything, ask questions. Those would be more like advice and things that we would hope and we would expect of them as they learn through their internship.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

That's great advice. I'd definitely echo, expect the unexpected, always be willing to try, fail, adjust, and keep learning from every single experience.

Julie Smith:

For sure.

Julie Smith:

I know you said that we're winding down hiring. Let's say someone may know of a potential intern in the future or maybe they're too young now, but, looking to 2023 and beyond. You mentioned that we're winding down but, we do a lot of the internship hiring in the fall. Is that right? And kind of looking at, what does even next 2023 summer look like and what kind of that timeframe?

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah, we are winding down now.

Tricia Shelton:

We do still have some positions posted, but I expect a lot of that's going to be closing very soon. I think we're pretty happy with the hires we have so far. The number of hires and all that. But looking forward, we actually start hiring and recruiting for interns in the fall. September is typically when we start. That's when a lot of our events and engagements also occur at the different Universities that we attend. So we typically start in September and continue to hire all the way up until end of April, beginning of May and that's typically when we end. However, the sooner the better, cause I have seen that more and more offices are hiring sooner. Once they fill those positions, the opportunity doesn't exist. I would say that if you know, anyone looking for an internship next summer. Apply sooner rather than later to have the best opportunity presented to them.

Julie Smith:

Yeah.

Julie Smith:

Awesome.

Julie Smith:

All right. So one final question for you again, because the show's called coffee talk. What fills your cup? What brings you joy?

Tricia Shelton:

My kids. I mean, I feel like everything I do, I feel like I have so much joy and seeing what they do and seeing them learn. Even more recently actually tying this back in, this past week was bringing your kid to work day. It was really cool that my oldest daughter came and hung out with . She. Got to see a little bit about what I do and talk about the engineering that I used to do to try to encourage her to kind of just think of all options, but it's family

Julie Smith:

Love that.

Julie Smith:

Well.

Julie Smith:

Awesome.

Julie Smith:

Thank you Tricia, for taking the time to share with us. I'm really excited to see the internship program this summer unfold with a lot of its new programming and that mentorship program. We have a lot of great resources available this summer, so I'm excited to see that. Thanks for your time. And I'm sure we will talk again soon.

Tricia Shelton:

Yeah. Thank you too.

Outro

Steve Gosselin:

Thank you for listening to Coffee Talk: From the Ground Up. We hope you enjoy today's episode. If you have an idea on future topics, guests, or up for round of call.

You can call me, text me, email me, just get in touch with me and I'll get it to Julie and we'll get it set up.

Julie Smith:

And for those of you that don't want to play golf and you may hate talking on the phone. That's okay. You can send us an email at ecsmarketing@ecslimited.com. Be sure to follow us on social media and subscribe to this podcast. So you never miss an episode.

Steve Gosselin:

Thanks Julie. Here's to having a great day.