

Three lessons I learned in CTI
End-of-internship reflection at City Telecom
[By Ray Chau, 2010 Summer Intern, The Chinese University of HK]

My expectation before joining CTI

Before coming to CTI, I have completely no idea what I would be doing except the fact that I would be assigned in the finance department. As a university student who knows very little about the telecommunication industry, I anticipated myself to learn the following:

- To have hands-on experience on how a finance department in a company works
- To develop numerical skill sets, more specifically, more advanced excel skills
- To explore the investor engagement functions of a finance department in a listed company

After joining CTI, I would say almost all of my expectations came true, I had a very comprehensive overview on the telecom industry, and carried out a couple of excel-based analyses. But the most rewarding experiences in CTI were far beyond job-related skill sets. In this reflection, I would like to share three lessons that I learned in CTI, which I believed would add much value to my future career.

Lesson #1: Small details make up the big picture

Throughout my internship, I had been assigned some daily operational tasks such as updating daily payment batches and updating database. At first, I felt quite bored about doing the repetitive and tedious tasks, and I thought I was supposed to do something which could add more value, utilizing me as a summer intern more fully. I did not realize that pride started to take over me, until I randomly came across an article in newspaper which was about common traits of the after-80s at work.

One employer commented that after-80s always want to think “strategically”, but are seldom willing to roll up their sleeves and do operational things, which they regard as tedious. However, for one to get promoted onto management levels, he should learn everything at the front-line, and starts from the fundamentals. This article had very an alarming effect on me. There was an epiphany dawned on me – For whatever I do, even it looks tedious, I have to work it with all my heart, and think about how I can get the most out of it.

Thereafter, I tried to look at my daily task at a different perspective. The work itself is

still quite boring to me, but at the same time I tried to relate every little detail, such as a payment batch report generated by the system, to the whole receivables process. I asked myself questions like “Why we need this?”, “How will this add value to the reporting process?”, “Is there any ways to streamline the process?” I also tried to how every raw report is consolidated through different colleagues until a final summary report is generated. This thinking process is very rewarding, I generally grasp a big picture of how the AR team works, and, the big picture is made up of all little details.

My lesson #1 taught me that no matter you like the tasks you are doing or not, there are always a lot more to learn. Try to think big, and you will find things you are doing not as boring as you think. A strategist is not someone who only formulate strategies, but the one who is able to look at operational issues in a strategic perspective.

Lesson #2: Confidence to talk flat comes from exposure

One thing that I am very impressed with my internship is the exposure that I gained. Thanks to the company CFO, NiQ, I was able to attend a couple of his meetings with investors and equity analysts. Chances are really rare for a junior position like me to meet senior executives, learning to mingle with them.

The meetings are very intellectually impactful, as the equity analysts are always very high caliber people. As an intern knowing not much about the company, I was a bit hesitated to get involved and add value in the meeting. I felt a bit uneasy when the people in the meeting are very senior, and I was afraid to say something stupid. But at the same time I did not want to just sit there and say nothing, so the crux is to strike the balance between saying something meaningful and not disrupting the meeting.

It was not easy at first, but from time to time it gets better when I get used to the atmosphere. “Talk flat,” NiQ told me, “and think about ways that you can add value to them.” Therefore, I tried to provide the comments from a student perspective during the meetings, and stayed in touch with people I met in the investor meetings. I even shared an inspiring Youtube video with one of them. I know these experiences would become a lifelong lesson to me, and now I am more poised when meeting someone senior.

Yesterday, I met an equity analyst I knew while I was interning at CTI again at a recruitment event at my university. He still remembered me, and it was very nice to catch up with him. I gradually understand that confidence does not come from nowhere. It is actually an accumulation of exposure and proactive effort. I would like

to thank CTI, being so people-oriented to expose me to these opportunities.

Lesson #3 Learning is a proactive process

In CTI, there are many opportunities to learn. My supervisor Andrew, who is the Senior Finance Manager, always drives me to think independently. Whenever I submit my “homework” to him, he usually questions me why did I do something, inducing me to think the significance of every move I took. This was indeed very inspiring – do not just do a thing. Think about why you have to do it. When you know about your objective of doing something, you would definitely learn more.

Another occasion is about preparation. The company CFO NiQ said, “How much you learn is a function of how much you prepared”. I still remembered before one investor meeting, NiQ sent me more than ten pdf files, asking me to “read as much as I can before the meeting”. The files include a telecommunication industry guide written by a renowned investment bank, and several analyst reports written by the equity analyst we were going to meet. The documents count for a total of 400+ pages. Reading them all is of course a painful process, but I really learned a lot about the industry after reading them all.

Before my internship, I only know very basic excel skills. During my work, I felt the urge to learn more excel skills or otherwise I may not be able to complete my job well. Knowing that excel is a very important skill set, I self-learned from reading excel tool books after work and enrolled myself into advanced excel skill classes during weekends. It was a bit tiring to go to class on weekends despite working on weekdays, but the sense of success to acquire more knowledge completely override the tiredness. Now, I am very proud to say that I can manipulate Excel quite well after the internship, and learned to write a little Macro in Excel.

I can see CTI being a company that stretches people to their limits in terms of the learning curve, and I believe being proactive to learn would pay, and it pays well.

Conclusion

My three lessons are all about some inspirations I got in CTI. Of course, I did learn a lot of practical skills in CTI too, but those are transferable skills that I can learn elsewhere. However, the three lessons are the very unique experiences that I can only learn in CTI which I treasure most.

Appendix

Tasks	Description	Learning Outcomes
Daily batch payment updates	Updating daily payment batches from HSBC Internet Banking, ATM, 7-11, OK, Vango and shops	Got a holistic overview of how the Account Receivable Team collects money from customers through different channels
Handling charge analysis	Streamlined the update process of bank handling charge analysis file. Created a automated summary report sheet for reporting purpose	Learned hard core advanced Excel functions. Gained insights in designing worksheet to satisfy internal customers' needs
Study on annual reports	Studied CTI and its competitors' annual reports of the past 5 years. Proposed future growth recommendations	Learned a lot more about financial side of CTI. Explored key competitive grounds of the industry.
Attending investor meetings	Attended meetings with Quamnet, Primero Limited and Deutsche Bank investors	Gained hands-on experience on how investor engagement of a company works. Learned to mingle with senior executives.
Dividend analysis	Analyzed dividend policies of local competitors and foreign telecoms. Produced a summary report on worksheet.	Learned about different dividend policies and their significance through due diligence. Gained knowledge of different global telecom players.
Preparation for FY2010 Financial presentation slides	Prepared PowerPoint slides for FY2010 Financial presentation slides	Gain insights of how a company presents its financial data.
Offsite meeting	Attended finance department offsite meeting 2010	Learned about MBTI attributes. Gained ideas of how CTI invests on its talents.