

My Summer With Winter Water Factory

This summer I was fortunate enough to work with the Brooklyn-based company Winter Water Factory. Winter Water creates beautiful, vibrant prints and turns them into easy, everyday outfits primarily for infants and children. Winter Water was established in 2006 and has been thriving since. What makes this company special is the fact that they make their clothes purely from 100 percent organic cotton, all manufactured in the United States; in fact, the factory was just down the street from their main office! While the company has a large client base, it is actually a very small company with only two employees in the office every day. Due to their small size, I was able to be a part of every aspect of the company. In my time there I did everything from getting lunch to attending textile conferences with one of the company's owners, giving me an all-inclusive view of what the running of Winter Water Factory entailed.

Most days I was either packing and shipping orders or working on updating the website with new sale items, using the online marketplace Shopify. While packing orders seems like a menial task, I quickly learned that it was actually the most stressful one. Winter Water has a brand to uphold which means that everything must be packed in a clean, professional manner. This is because their entire reputation is based on stores and individual consumers being completely satisfied with their products. With each order I had to always be aware of what I was doing in order to catch any malfunctions (holes, off-prints, stains) all while making sure to triple check for correct quantity, sizing, etc. My bosses, Caitlin and Todd, were always very encouraging but not afraid to tell me when I was doing something incorrectly, which made learning and growing as an employee much easier than I had anticipated. It also created a certain level of trust so that I was not afraid

to ask questions while undertaking a new project. This taught me that you must always have a realistic grasp on your weaknesses, and that there is no shame in admitting them when diving in to something new, which in turn creates more quality work in the long run.

While also ensuring quality customer service on our end, we also had to ensure that the clothes were being made in a clean environment with minimal damage to the fabric. Unfortunately, this was much more difficult than it typically would be. Another perk of being the only intern in an office of two was the high level of transparency, so my bosses were not shy to discuss with me the difficulties of maintaining an American-made product. With more and more companies sourcing their products overseas it is hard for small manufacturing companies to maintain a consistent employment base, so they are required to go through cycles of hiring and firing in order to stay afloat. I arrived in the middle of production of the fall line, which got underway a few months after the factory had to lay off a large percentage of their employees. Then, when they needed to increase production rates for our large order they needed to hire more people, but were unsuccessful in doing so. This led to our Fall 2016 order falling well behind, which meant we were weeks behind schedule for shipping wholesale orders to stores, which makes our company look bad despite the fact that it was out of our control. As this became more and more of a problem for Winter Water, my boss actually had me start researching for suppliers that sourced their fabric from countries such as India and Korea. While it was sad to watch this happen to a company, I think that that ended up being the most valuable business lesson for me. I was not expecting to use my political science minor this summer, but it ended up being an unexpected asset to my bosses as I was able to discuss with them, in an informed and intelligent matter, these issues and begin brainstorming solutions to make the best out of a

bad situation. If they do in fact decide to begin using Asian-based manufacturers they will use a company that ensures fair pay to farmers as well as high quality organic cotton. I had the exciting job of finding these kinds of companies and compiling notes on these companies as well as the general client base of each one. An unexpected bonus that arose from this was discovering new types of hybrid fabrics that companies abroad are beginning to produce. I learned a great deal about fabrics such as modal and lyocell that are up and coming and could possibly be much more sustainable than cotton if researchers continue to have the same findings. This is all to say that when I set out on the glorious adventure that is interning, I did not expect to be entrusted with duties that could help change the face of an entire company.

I am so thankful for the opportunities I was given with this exceptional company and learned much more than I thought possible as an intern. From a business perspective I learned that sometimes a company must change with the times, but that that does not mean that they have to compromise their values to do so. I also have now learned through my extremely varied tasks that I have the skills to confidently tackle anything an employer throws at me. I now know what to look for in a company because of the outstanding amount of heart and soul they put into this business and have come out of this experience excited for the future.