

A Competitive Edge

How Henry Schein's internship program helped Tanner Ledford start strong in a field sales role.

➤ Last March, more than 160 college students from 80-plus schools convened on Kennesaw State University's campus for the National Collegiate Sales Competition (NCSC). The NCSC provides a venue for dedicated collegiate sales students to improve their skills and pursue career opportunities with top professional sales organizations.

One of those NCSC competitors was Kennesaw State's Tanner Ledford, who was nearing graduation. He went into the competition for the experience, resume building, and the chance to meet with leading sales organizations who were attending the career fair. That's where he met the Henry Schein Medical team, who offered him a unique sales internship.

Hands-on experience

Traditional internships have a reputation among college students as being confined to entry level, inside roles that involve hours of cold calling but no face-to-face meetings with customers. "That wasn't something that really attracted me too much," Ledford said.

But Henry Schein Medical offered an opportunity, for something different – an outside sales position with real world, hands-on experience. 2024 was the first field sales internship program for the Company's medical business. "They gave me the opportunity to actually go out into the field, meet clients face-to-face, and manage my own book of business," Ledford said. "The idea of being trusted



Tanner Ledford



Jim Dodgen

with my own accounts and having the autonomy to organize my own schedule and prioritize my own tasks was incredibly appealing to me."

Ledford graduated from Kennesaw State University this past summer with a degree in marketing and a minor in statistical analysis. He immediately jumped into the internship with Henry Schein Medical under the guidance of Jim Dodgen, regional manager. After two weeks of company training, Dodgen began pairing Ledford with several field sales consultants. "I wanted Tanner to see all aspects of the business," Dodgen said.

By shadowing the reps, Ledford could see first-hand how they managed their time and book of business. The reps showed Ledford their day-to-day routines, how they approached clients and how they conveyed Henry Schein's value. He observed the support system utilized within the sales team and the resources used during customer visits or prep time. Some of the reps that Ledford shadowed had 20-30 years of experience in the field, but another rep – Justin Nixon – had one year of experience. "I learned a lot from Justin," Ledford said. "He was able to relate to me a lot more because he was still new to the role, still learning himself."

Sometimes, the internship felt like drinking from a fire hose, especially in an industry as complex as health care. But Ledford said being able to learn from the field sales consultants before working on his own proved invaluable. Eventually, he was left to manage his time between customer visits and administrative work. “The biggest challenge reps have is learning how to manage the limited amount of time you have in the day,” Ledford said. “If you can learn how to manage your time successfully and effectively, it is the first step to being successful in a sales role. So being able to shadow Team Schein Members and learn how they do it and what’s worked for them for so long helped me learn how to stay organized and prioritize my tasks.”

Henry Schein’s culture exceeded Ledford’s expectations. “Every company, when they’re trying to hire you, they’re going to talk about how great their culture is; sometimes it’s true, and sometimes it’s not. But Henry Schein truly exceeded my expectations for culture at the company. They really want their sales team to have the support and the resources for long-term career growth. Seeing the size of Henry Schein’s tenured staff was a big indicator of how much the company values its people and how much the people value their company. That’s always going to be super attractive to someone looking for a full-time career.”

The perfect fit

Selling with Henry Schein Medical requires a lot of different skill sets; organizational



(Left to right) Justin Nixon, Tanner Ledford and Jim Dodgen.

skills, time management, and data analytics, to name a few. Dodgen said that Ledford displayed those skill sets during the internship. “Tanner did a great job,” said Dodgen. “He’s one of the first interns I believe that actually received a customer buy list, which is our biggest win in the field – who they’re buying from, what they’re paying and what they’re buying – so that we can do a data analysis and hopefully present them with a solution to have them come over to Henry Schein. Tanner picked that up on his fifth or sixth week in the field while cold calling. He did a great job of learning the various systems.”

Although Dodgen did not have an opening in his territory when Ledford completed his internship, he knew Claire Porter, a regional manager in Nashville, did. He called her to recommend Ledford for the position. With his internship experience and understanding of

Henry Schein Medical’s systems and value proposition, Ledford got the job and is now a full-time field sales consultant in the Nashville area.

Coming out of college and moving four hours away to a new city where you don’t know anybody and you’re starting a new role could have been intimidating for Ledford, but he said the internship helped him feel ready. “I was excited and packed my bags early,” he said. “I knew that I had what it takes to be successful in the role because I’d been doing it for 10 weeks previously. I had no doubt in my mind that this is where I wanted to work, so much so that I put off interviews with other companies even before I got the job here in Nashville because this is the one I wanted to have. The company is great, the culture is great, and the job itself is great, and so there was no hesitation on my end moving to a new city and starting this role.” **REP**