



**ASK QUESTIONS? DEFINITELY.
AFTERALL, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.**

Aileen Farrell

In the fall of 2018, as a third-year college student, I was looking to secure a co-op—a unique form of education whereby students alternate periods of academic study with six-month periods of work experience. In the course of my search, the most important advice from my peers and mentors was: Always ask questions during an interview. At this point, after completing my first co-op experience, I now know that this good advice translates beyond the interview process into the workplace and even to my personal life.

I recently completed my co-op at Eaton Vance, a Boston-based investment management company. During the spring and early summer of 2019, I put my knowledge and skills to the test as the graphic design co-op, working with a team of designers and writers on various projects for the firm, which has a global presence. Almost immediately, I was assigned projects to work on independently and, at the same time, I started to see things I hadn't learned at school.

It took me a while to gain the confidence to ask my manager and colleagues questions about the things I didn't know. But once I did, I realized why being comfortable with this process is so valuable—by asking questions I was exhibiting and growing my self-confidence. I started to become comfortable with admitting what I didn't know—and asking questions to fill those gaps.

During these same instances, I experienced the willingness and readiness of my team, and other people within the company, to help me when I asked them to explain anything I wasn't familiar with (a quality indicative of a welcoming organization). Eventually, by the end of my co-op, I realized that if I didn't ask questions I wouldn't have gained nearly as much in the way of technical skill, industry knowledge and confidence, and I definitely wouldn't have built the collaborative relationships that I so fortunately did.

Initially, I began to establish these mentor-like relationships within a close circle of co-workers—members of my team only. Then, in my discovery of confidence, I began to seek clarity and understanding from people outside of my department as well.

I want to thank my colleagues for contributing to my growth in confidence and my skillset as a designer—I am a better employee for it. I am returning to school with even more confidence than I ever had. I think it's important, as students, to remember our goal of learning and not being afraid to admit the things we have yet to learn. Remember to seek out and rely on others, including our colleagues, to maneuver the complex maze I call the 'real world.'