

## Where Are They Now

Rylan Norris was a Capital Management Intern at Kroger in 2009. After graduating with a degree in Finance from Xavier University, he has stayed with Kroger ever since. Read our interview below to see where Rylan is now.

B: Brandon Sandlin (Interviewer) R: Rylan Norris

**B: Hi Rylan! Thanks for joining me today to talk about your experience at Kroger! I'm sure the past few months have been much different from the rest of your experience. What has been the best/worst part of working from home for you?**

R: The best part would be the increased flexibility for sure. I'm generally available from 8 to 5 via my computer, but with me getting email on my phone as well, I don't feel the need to be in front of the computer the entire day if I have errands, I need to run, etc. Also, saving more money by eating in is a plus. The worst part would be missing the people. Not seeing your coworkers can be tough.

**B: Absolutely! I'm definitely saving money by not going out which is great! A lot of our current intern class hasn't spent any time in our office. Can you try and describe what our office culture is like?**

R: Every department is unique, no one size fits all. In general, I would say that Kroger has a very family-oriented office culture. Many of my coworkers have their own families and I would say that it has a "midwestern" feel to it, if that makes sense!

**B: For sure! My department always has several candy and snack tables throughout the office, I definitely miss that! Which team are you on, Rylan? Can you tell us about what your current role is and what it means for the company?**

R: I'm in Labor Relations. I am currently a Labor Healthcare Strategy Analyst. Our team is responsible for managing healthcare benefits for all union associates in the company. We strategize and provide guidance during labor negotiations. We also provide cost analysis to determine how benefit changes affect the bottom line. We ensure that healthcare benefits are administered correctly according to what's agreed to in the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Most of our stores have contracts with the local unions in their area. This is what determines employee benefits. Contracts typically last 2-5 years and must be renegotiated at the date of expiration. Labor costs is the 2nd biggest expense to the company behind cost of goods sold, so it's a pretty important function for Kroger as a whole.

**B: Wow! That's such an important role to have. You interned with Kroger in 2009, was your role then similar to your role now? Did your duties as an intern influence your decision to work in healthcare management?**

R: My internship was in capital management, which is a finance-based department. It's responsible for analyzing capital investment projects, i.e., building and remodeling stores, fuel centers, MFG plants, etc. I was a fuel intern, so I helped analyze the construction of fuel centers. Another part of capital management at the time was labor costing, but they focused



on wages instead of healthcare. I got the opportunity to join that team after graduation, which is how I got my start in the field of labor!

**B: I see! Can you remember anything about your intern experience that impacted where you are now?**

R: My internship was my first taste of corporate America. Understanding office culture and getting into a work routine were still relatively new to me at the time, so I would say the most valuable thing I learned was whether I fit into that type of office role.

**B: Understanding where you best fit is incredibly important! I'm happy to hear you found that at Kroger. It's been just over 10 years since your journey with Kroger began. How have you seen your role, or the company evolve over time? How do you think Kroger will continue to evolve in the future and how can young professionals anticipate and prepare for those changes?**

R: My role has evolved in several ways. For one, just taking on more responsibility. Managing projects with little to no guidance. I also challenge myself to think about the bigger picture instead of just focusing on my core functions. I better understand how important communication is and how to work in a team. I think the biggest **and most urgent** step of evolution right now is the company's transition to e-commerce, as more people shift to ordering groceries online. Young professionals will need to be prepared for a more dynamic job market as we see trends moving so fast due to technology and social media. When it comes to labor costs specifically, we're trying to compete with retailers such as Amazon, Wal-Mart, Target, and Whole Foods, who are getting more into the grocery business and are not unionized. This requires us to change our compensation structure so that we can provide the most value to our associates (higher wages, competitive healthcare and retirement plans).

**B: You mentioned some great points! Can you talk more about Kroger's competitive advantage compared to our competitors? What do you do in your role to ensure Kroger is a top choice employer?**

R: I think our advantage includes our size and scale, our talent, and our willingness to change and grow with the times. Leadership recognizes the need for change and embraces it. Our team is responsible for making sure we have an attractive and competitive compensation package, which is a big factor when prospective employees are in the job market. Being in labor, that question is right up our alley!

**B: That's definitely a major factor! What would you say to our current interns who are considering a future with Kroger after this Summer? Any tips or advice that you wish you had been given?**

R: Try to find mentors. The more connections the better. I wasn't as aggressive as I should have been in that area when I first started. Don't be afraid to explore other departments that you may be interested in. Just because you start at point A doesn't mean you have to follow that trajectory. Kroger is a big company and a diverse work experience can go a long way. Focus on mastering the job and figuring out what you like to do. Only focusing on climbing the latter can lead to early frustration and burn out.

**B: That is great advice! Thank you so much for sharing! Thanks again for being a part of this. Would you like to share your contact information for any of our interns reading this?**

R: You're very welcome! My email is [Rylan.norris@kroger.com](mailto:Rylan.norris@kroger.com).