

internship to offer letter: the placement conversion stories at aelo swiss academy

I have written thousands of emails in my years running placements at AELO Swiss Academy. Timetables, exam reminders, visa checklists, the usual flood. None of them stick in my memory the way a certain kind of email does. It arrives on a weekday afternoon, usually from a hotel HR address, and somewhere in the third paragraph sits a single sentence that changes a student's life: *we would like to offer your graduate a full-time position*.

Last spring I got to send three of those emails in one week. Every one of them started the same way, twelve or more months earlier, with a nervous student standing in our lobby holding an internship folder and asking me the question every cohort asks: how do I make sure this turns into a job?

Here is the honest, story-filled answer, the one I usually give over coffee instead of in a brochure.

How the internship engine actually runs

The placement model at AELO Swiss Academy is built around one idea: you cannot talk your way into a Swiss hospitality career, you have to be useful in it. So every diploma student spends a substantial paid internship inside a partner property, a lakeside hotel, a mountain resort kitchen, a front office in a busy city house, before anyone hands them a diploma, let alone a contract.

The stipends are real Swiss stipends. Depending on the property and the canton, interns typically see somewhere between CHF 1,100 and 1,400 a month, with staff meals and often shared accommodation on top. Nobody gets rich. Everybody learns what a 6:15 breakfast shift feels like in February.

The conversion pathway has a rhythm to it, and I drum it into every cohort because the students who understand the rhythm are the ones who get the letters:

- Week four: an informal check-in with the line supervisor. Not an exam, a temperature reading. Are you showing up, are you asking questions, do people enjoy working next to you.
- Week eight: a structured mentor review. Strengths get named out loud, gaps get named out loud, and the intern writes down both.
- Week ten: the smart interns ask for a preliminary conversation about conversion. This is early on purpose, it gives the property time to check budgets and headcount.
- Week twelve: the decision conversation. Either a pathway to an offer exists or an honest reason why not, ideally with a timeline.

That fourth point matters more than students believe. A "no for this season, but here is what would change my mind" is a completely different outcome from silence, and the properties in our network know we expect the honest version.

Now, the stories. Because the rhythm only makes sense once you have watched people move through it.

Maya and the breakfast buffet that grew a job

Maya came to us from Manila to study hospitality and events. Bright, polite, terrified of Swiss winters, which she handled with the determination of someone who had never seen snow and refused to be defeated by it.

Her placement was at a mid-size lakeside hotel near Lucerne, the kind of property that runs a serious breakfast operation: 42 covers on a quiet morning, pushing past 70 in summer. She started on breakfast service, the least glamorous station in the building.

By week three she had done something small and enormous. She kept a running note of what guests asked for that was not on the buffet. Not complaints, requests. Oat milk kept coming up. So did something portable for guests with early flights. She wrote a one-page proposal, showed it to her chef de service, and the kitchen quietly piloted a grab-and-go corner with five items drawn straight from her notes.

Here is where it gets good. The hotel's breakfast complaint mentions dropped that season, and the food and beverage manager noticed. At week ten, Maya was invited to sit in on the F&B planning meeting, as an intern, in a room with people whose job titles had acronyms in them. At week twelve, the offer conversation lasted about eleven minutes.

She signed. Today she coordinates the afternoon tea rota at the same property, and every new intern orientation includes her telling the breakfast story. Her advice to them is always the same: the path to the offer letter ran straight through the buffet, not around it.

Jonas, the kitchen with no budget line, and the November phone call

Not every conversion happens on schedule, and Jonas is the story I tell whenever a student panics about timing.

He is a culinary student who landed a placement in a busy Zermatt kitchen. Talented, quick, the kind of line cook who cleans as he goes without being told. At his week-eight review, the head chef gave him the honest version: the kitchen simply had no budget line for a junior chef de partie that season. No matter how good he was, nobody was signing anything in September.

What Jonas did next is the entire lesson. He asked one question: what would make you call me first if something opens? The answer was basically, become someone I do not have to think about. So he spent the rest of his placement documenting the pastry section's recipes, standardising the mise en place so any seasonal helper could step in, and training the winter temp so well that the section ran without friction when he was off.

In November, a chef resigned with two weeks' notice. The head chef did not advertise the role. He called Jonas before the job existed on paper, and the contract was signed in December, two months after the internship had formally ended.

Conversion is not always a week-twelve event. Sometimes the letter arrives later, sent to the person who made themselves unforgettable in the meantime.

The quiet intern who almost slipped through

Priya worked front office in Geneva, and I will be candid: she nearly did not convert, and it had nothing to do with her competence. Her entries in the property management system were flawless. Her guest follow-ups were meticulous. But in the morning briefing, she never said a word.

Her mentor flagged it at week eight with refreshing directness. Front office is a speaking job, she said. The guests meet your voice, not your typing. So they gave Priya one task: lead the pre-shift briefing twice a week. The first time, her hands shook around the coffee cup. The third time, she was explaining the arrival list with actual authority in her tone. By week ten, colleagues were asking her questions, which in a hotel is the surest sign of trust there is.

The offer came, and Priya told me later that the briefing task scared her more than the interview for the full-time role ever did. Edge cases like hers are why I resist the idea that conversion is a pure meritocracy of technical skill. The properties hire people, and people have to be visible.

What the numbers look like when I am being honest

Students always want the percentage, so here it is with the hedges attached, because the exact figure moves every cycle. In a typical recent year, roughly six in ten interns at our partner properties received some form of offer or extension. But I always break that number apart, because the whole number flatters and misleads at once.

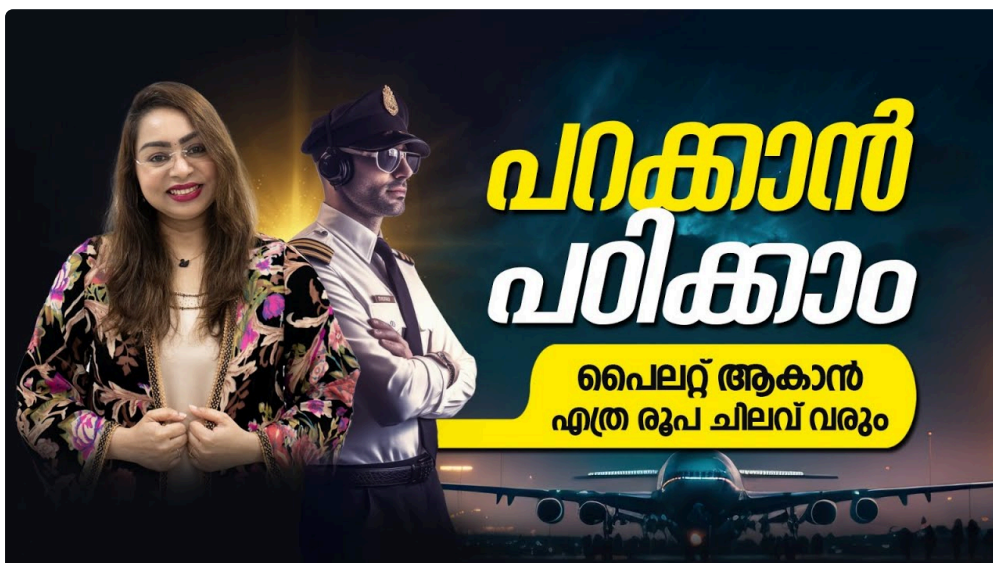
Around half of those offers were permanent or permanent-track contracts. The rest were seasonal positions with a stated path to permanence, or extended internships where the property wanted a longer look. In Swiss hospitality, seasonality is not a rejection, it is the shape of the industry, especially in mountain resorts where the winter season is its own economy.

Two honest trade-offs deserve naming. First, non-EU graduates face the Swiss work permit process, which is real paperwork and can take several weeks, and our placement team walks students through it, but nobody should expect a signature on a Monday and a start date on a Tuesday. Second, smaller boutique properties convert fewer people simply because they have fewer positions, yet when they do convert, the roles tend to be broader and the mentorship tighter. Big chains offer structure. Small houses offer range. Students should choose with open eyes.

And some interns choose not to convert, which surprises people. Every year a few discover mid-placement that they love events more than rooms division, or that they want to head home and build something there. A placement that clarifies your preferences is a success even when it ends with a polite goodbye.

What hiring managers quietly watch for

After enough week-eight reviews and week-twelve conversations, patterns stop being patterns and start being laws. When I debrief with the property mentors at the end of each cycle, the same few things surface again and again, so I will surface them here:



- Reliability beats brilliance, every single time. The intern who is exactly where they said they would be, at the minute they said, outperforms the sporadic genius without a single impressive flourish.

- Curiosity only counts when it has follow-through. Maya did not just notice the buffet gaps, she wrote the page. Observing is free, proposing costs one sheet of paper.
- How you treat the people nobody introduces you to. Housekeeping, porters, the night kitchen crew. The mentors compare notes across departments, and the interns who are kind downward get described upward in glowing terms.
- Owning a small improvement end to end. One visible, finished, measurable thing beats ten half-started ideas, and it gives the manager a concrete story to tell when the conversion decision gets discussed.

Notice that none of these require talent in the cinematic sense. They require habits, which is good news, because habits can be built in twelve weeks.

What the letter itself actually says

People imagine the offer letter as something grand. It is not. It is one page. Position title, start date, salary, the permit clause where relevant, a signature line. I have read hundreds of them and I could recite the structure in my sleep.

What the letter actually certifies is nothing on that page. It certifies that a breakfast shift was covered on a Sunday when someone called in sick. That a pastry section survived a resignation because one intern had written everything down. That a shaking voice at a briefing became the voice that runs a rota. That somewhere between week four and week twelve, a stranger became a colleague the property did not want to lose.

I still print those emails. I know, nobody prints anything anymore, but I keep a folder, and on the days when the placement logistics get heavy, the timetables and the permit paperwork and the room reshuffles, I open it. Three letters went out last spring. Maya's, Jonas's, Priya's. Three students who walked into our lobby holding folders and asking how.

The answer, it turns out, is that you show up, you notice something, you finish something, you make yourself visible, and then one Tuesday afternoon an email arrives with a single sentence buried in the third paragraph. I have the best job in the building, because I am usually the one who gets to forward it.