

# Anatomy of an intern

Summer may be months away, but it's never too early to start looking for a summer internship that could be a springboard to landing a great job.

With proper planning and study, you can ensure your summer break brings a productive, real-world experience that helps you meet future career goals.

## Research, research, research

Blindly applying for internships won't do much good and could leave you with a summer of disappointment.

Instead, take advantage of available resources to determine which opportunities are the right match before sending out resumes.

Speaking with a professional career counselor, scouring Web sites of companies and trade organizations and talking to professionals in the field are just a few things you can do to narrow the list, says Kelly Kowatch, a career counselor at the University of Michigan.

Internship seekers should also specify the types of skills they want to develop before applying.

"Students that enter an internship search with the purpose of exploring a variety of careers are not always successful in selecting a beneficial internship because they have not taken the time to self reflect and gather information on what they want to do," Kowatch says.

## Treat it like a job search

If you want to be seen as a potential future employee, you'll need to tackle your internship search as if you were applying for a full-time job.

For each internship you apply for, create a professional resume and cover letter that clearly spells out your career goals and how you would benefit the company.

Conducting a few mock interviews with a professional career counselor will also help you work out the kinks.

"A lot of people blow internships because they don't take it seriously, but it's not just summer fun," Kowatch says.

Focus on finding internships that offer hands-on opportunities to work in the field. If an internship recruiter is vague about what your responsibilities will be, it may be a signal you'll be assigned to stapler duty for the summer.

"The ideal internship gives a student the opportunity to actually train and learn a job within the company so they may have the same skills needed to complete a task on their own," says Donnitia Firnstein, a career counselor with State University of New York at Potsdam. "This type of internship benefits the student in all aspects of experiential learning by allowing them to apply knowledge gained through academics to an actual position."

Also, don't overlook internships at smaller companies, which may offer more opportunities to get practical experience in a variety of tasks.

## Soak up the experience

Once you've landed an internship, take every opportunity to learn more about the business and network with employees.

Attending staff meetings or conducting informational interviews

with employees will help you gain more insight into the working world, says Leslie Stevenson, director of career development at the University of Richmond in Virginia.

"Take every chance to learn," Stevenson says. "Not every task is glamorous or exciting, but it will give you a foundation for better understanding the organization."

You want to be seen as a potential future employee, so display a positive image with everyone you meet, Stevenson says.

"Think of the entire internship as an extended interview," he says.

"Many employers make full-time offers to former interns, so always show professional courtesy. Arrive on time, give your best effort and be responsive to requests made by your supervisor."

In fact, networking, experts say, can be one of the most important rewards an intern can take away from the experience.

Uses common sense and knows what he/she wants to do.

Ready to shoulder responsibility for future.

Comes to interview prepared with custom resume and research on company.

Takes a hands-on approach to search to ensure best internship is landed.

Willing to use a little elbow grease (old term for working hard).

Not afraid to pound the pavement in search of opportunity.

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