Internships – A Gateway to Your Career

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Many students seek internships during school and after graduation as it is a way to get a “foot in” the workforce. The main objective in acquiring an internship is to gain more knowledge in a specific career, to increase networking and have more opportunities available for our future success. Today, several schools in the Unites States are encouraging students to acquire internships by requiring an internship as a class in order to graduate. In other words, without having an internship the student is not allowed to get a degree. These schools have come to the same conclusion, that internships are an efficient way for students to get a foot into the workforce, and therefore want to give the students the opportunity to network and develop new skills for future success. Students utilize internships as an experience in preparation for a future career. It affords them the opportunity to be immersed in the workforce and also explore the career of their choice in which they will gain valuable skills or in some cases acquire a position. However, before deciding on a suitable internship, one must make a critical assessment of themselves to ensure the potential internship will be advantageous for future aspirations. Knowledge about oneself is the key to success and it applies to students in every profession. You have to explore your personality, interest and values. Going through a self-exploration when deciding on any internship allows for an individual to be clear on self-expectation and what is needed out of the internship experience. Establishing a strong sense of self, especially when in the workforce, builds confidence and leads to strong motivation and a more focused mindset (Burnsed, 2010).

**Self-exploration** is a very important aspect in career development. It’s about
identifying your personality, skills, interest and values. We all have to choose a career but many people still fail to be satisfied and successful in the careers they choose. This is due to the lack of self and career exploration; one has to be aware of their own personal qualities and needs in order to be happy and make the right decisions in choosing their careers. Without self-exploration there is a high-risk that you will become dissatisfied or unhappy with your career, which will also affect your private life. This happens because you lack knowledge about what you really want to do and what you are really good at. Many students come to a point of uncertainty in their quest for the right career path for them. A great tool that is readily available to all students is career counselors. It is important to meet with a career counselor as they can guide you into the right direction since they are professionals at this subject. There are also multiple self-assessment tools available on the Internet that every person has access to. These self-assessment tests will help us get a clear picture of our own qualities in both education and our career planning (Greenhaus, 2010).

In order to find the best internship you have to be aware of your personal and academic interests, your career and academic goals, your work values, and your skills and characteristics. We can find this out by asking ourselves the following questions:

What interests you? What do you like to do on your free time? What issues are you passionate about? Which subjects do you enjoy most?
What motivates you to do your best? What motivates you to take action?
What makes you advocate for a cause or point of view? What are your strongest skills? Which skills would you like to learn? Which ones do you want to enhance?
These are all key questions that will help you understand your true self and what profession or field will create self-fulfillment. The moment you reach this point in life, you will be ready to go get what is yours. You will probably have a vision where you see yourself in a certain position, or it could also be a profession. This vision will help you find an internship that will give you the experience and opportunities you are looking for.

As an intern one must have a strong understanding that, 1) you are working with professionals in your field, 2) you are working with real experienced people, projects and organizations, 3) this could be the gateway to your career success. Therefore, you must have good communication and cooperation skills, have the ability to think ethically and critically in almost all situations, be creative, as well as being independent, and not be a burden to the official employees. In early December 2012, the Internships.com did a survey where over 7,300 students and graduates participated together with 300 human resources recruitment professionals; this survey shows that in the process of looking for an employment, “the new interview” for employers is now internships. The survey also tells us that 53% of the employers participating is expecting to give employment to future interns. In other words, from 2011-2014 there is an increase on 36% of more companies who hired interns (Smith, 2013). The National Association of Colleagues and Employers has for three years done a survey where they asked graduation seniors if they as intern have been offered a job, and if it so paid or unpaid. Throughout these years they have seen the same pattern of the result, which is that the unpaid internship seem to not be so effective in regards to get a full employment. However, in the following year the statistic has changed, in the following year of 2013 the percentage increased for unpaid internship to 47.8% (Weissmann, 2012).
As we can see in figure 1, we can clearly see that interns have a higher chance to get a full employment than non-interns; their relationship has improved in comparison with the previous years. So having an internship will give you a higher chance to be hired as a full employee, but it is still not guaranteed that it will lead one especially if it’s not paid. In figure 2, the statistic shows that a paid intern have much better chances to turn their experience into a full-time job, and if it is for a profit-company ones chances are even higher (Koc, 2013).

According to Job Outlook 2014 report, the statistics tells us that more companies are willing to hire more graduate students this year. Employer has created a big interest in turn internships into employment, which is why the intern hire rate will increase by 7.8% (Elliot, 2014).

One theory is that as employers have interns work for their company for potential hiring opportunities. The intern will have an opportunity to learn the environments, and what is going on inside of the company. The employees are also the ones teaching the intern how to perform work correctly, and to be professional. If then the intern is ambitious enough and is using this opportunity to get full employment, it works out in favor for the employer also. Employers take into consideration that the intern has created a bond with the co-workers, managers etc. The intern knows how to do the required tasks, so here there is a relationship of confidence with the employer and the intern. If the employer feels that the intern meets the requirements, it would
make sense that the intern is the best person to hire. If another potential employee, who did not start as an intern for that company applies for the same job and is hired will still have to go through the same process as the intern before the company can see whether he or she is qualified. Why move on to the next, if you already have the “best”? It is ideal for companies to hire students for free and get an idea of who the person is rather than hire a full time employee who they really have not witnessed in the workplace and can only go off of others’ recommendations.

Still, one must understand that internships provide students with much more than “a chance for full employment”, this is your chance to meet new people. Networking is one of the most effective ways to get closer to that dream job and to also build relationships within a particular field that could lead to limitless employment opportunities. There are never any guarantees, especially in the workforce. However, taking full advantage of an internship by networking allows a student the opportunity of knowing important people in a specified field who can make recommendations or even provide employment opportunities.

Dr. Timothy Butler, a professor at Harvard Business School stated that, "The biggest mistake that people make networking is that people don't do it" (Dizik, 2007). His statement supports my understanding of the importance of networking. Chances are high that you will meet a person who is impressed by the person he’s talking to, and that person could be you. When you leave a good impression on someone, you are already building a relationship with the person you interact with. And that is when the green light is flashing; exchanging contact information is never a bad idea. So, if you are a graduate student use your internship to it’s fullest potential, you might turn your internship into full-time
employment. But remember you are in an extremely competitive market, so you have to stand out and impress your co-workers and employers, if you fail to do so they will move on to the next prospect with no hesitation. Only you can make the right decisions for your future success. Either you make it at the company or you walk away with your head held high, and a backpack full of knowledge and experience ready to climb the ladder; never settle for less.

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