

THE ROLE OF INTERNSHIPS IN FINDING A JOB AFTER COLLEGE AND PAID VS. UNPAID INTERNSHIPS: EXPERTS SHARE THEIR VIEWS



By: Andrew Ostler

If you're currently attending college or have recently graduated, you may be wondering if looking for an internship is really something you should be doing. We asked several experts for their thoughts on the role of internships in finding a job after college, and wanted to share their responses with you.

Anne Howard, a recruiter at Lynn Hazan & Associates, Inc., shared her thoughts about the role of internships in finding a job after college:

"We often have post-grad interns in our offices, including one of our current interns. In the past year, we have placed two post-grad interns directly from our internship into their first jobs. That is unusual, but it illustrates that some of the benefits of post-grad internships are the opportunity for networking and connection to job openings. Candidates who are not having luck finding job opportunities in their chosen field after graduation should certainly consider an internship as a way to break into the industry."

She also commented on paid vs. unpaid internships:

"Don't write off an internship because it is unpaid. Some smaller companies only offer unpaid internships, and you are often exposed to a lot more than in a large firm. If you have to take an evening/weekend job as well to earn some money, well, you wouldn't be the first."

Howard also shared her thoughts on internships in general:

"When I recruit for entry-level jobs or those requiring less than two years of experience, I give much more weight to candidates who have internship experience in the field. I am more interested in a candidate with appropriate internships and an unrelated major than one with a major in the field and no internship experience. A big part of an internship, particularly the first one, is learning how to conduct yourself in the work environment. You learn how to arrive on time, stay focused, keep track of assigned projects, ask for help and clarification, dress appropriately, etc. When I hire someone for his/her first full-time job, I'd much rather know s/he has already gone through that learning process. We value our interns and put a lot of thought and effort into their growth. We keep in touch with our "alums" for years afterward and are hosting a reunion party in August."

Another expert on internships, Nathan Parcels, co-founder and CMO of InternMatch, shared his thoughts with us on paid vs. unpaid internships:

"At InternMatch, we strongly believe no student should have to settle for an unpaid internship. You're a professional doing work for a company that will likely turn a profit from your efforts, so be sure to know your rights as an intern and avoid companies that won't offer you at least minimum wage. If you've been offered an internship that's unpaid, try negotiating for minimum wage or a monthly stipend. If an employer isn't willing to budge, it may be time to move on."

We asked Parcels if getting an internship is important.

"Getting an internship is important for students in any field or industry...A worthwhile internship should offer immersive, hands-on experiences that will help students to build their resume, complete projects for their portfolio and network with industry professionals. At their internships, students should be sure to keep track of their accomplishments, conduct regular performance reviews with a manager or boss and get friendly with colleagues and other professionals at the company who could help them to land a job after their internship is over."

While internships are important, many students are held back from taking them because of financial reasons or geographical constraints. In this case, volunteering, freelancing, doing research or getting heavily involved in campus clubs and organizations can be a great alternative for getting a jumpstart on a career."

When is the ideal time to get an internship?

"The ideal time to get an internship will vary according to students' individual needs. Some students find it's easiest to get a for-credit internship in their college town or on campus and will complete it during their regular semester. Some will take a semester off to travel for an internship, and others prefer to keep their internship experiences limited to the summer months."

No matter what time a student decides to take on an internship, they should remember that it could take up to six months to land one. Students should give themselves ample time to search out opportunities, send in applications and follow up with employers to express their interest."

Alfred Poor, a professional speaker and writer, who focuses on career skills issues for young employees, shared his thoughts about internships with us:

"The Chronicle of Higher Education recently published the results of a survey of employers. One of the key questions was to have them rank eight factors that they consider when hiring a new college graduate. Internship and co-op experiences were at the top of the list, with work experience while in college was a close second. In contrast, choice of major was a distant third. (And GPA and prestige level of your college were dead last.)"

Employers these days want candidates with proven career skills. They need employees who can contribute value to the company quickly, even at entry level positions. Experiential learning such as internships - either paid or unpaid - give the students the opportunity to be involved in projects that they can point to as demonstrations of their ability to make a positive contribution right from the start.

Beyond simply making a student a more attractive candidate to employers, internships offer some other important benefits. First, they give students the chance to observe company operations up close and personal. Recruiters complain that candidates don't know anything about the company to which they are applying; an internship can expose the student to the strengths and challenges of a specific company, as well as for the industry as a whole.

Internships also give students a chance to expand their professional network. CareerXRoads has published research showing that the average job applicant has a 1 in 72 chance of getting hired. If that same applicant has a personal referral from a company employee, that chance jumps to 1 in 10. It is essential to build an effective professional network if you are going to conduct an effective job search.

Finally, internships give students a firsthand view of the working world, which can help them develop more realistic expectations about entry level job experiences. Managers complain that most recent college grads demonstrate impatience and a lack of engagement in the workplace. At an average cost of \$25,000 to replace an existing employee, the fact that young employees now change jobs every three years on average (instead of a more typical five years) is costing our nation's businesses a lot of money.

Students with a better understanding of entry level job responsibilities are likely to have better job retention."

We also received advice from across the Big Pond. Jon Davies, the marketing manager at [Lenstore](#), a leading UK online contact lens retailer, shared his thoughts on internships and their importance:

"I joined Lenstore as an intern in 2010, and have been involved in recruiting interns. In the marketing department at Lenstore, we place huge value on recruiting and developing interns for mutual benefit."

An internship is important, as long as the intern develops their skills with practical experience (and isn't given tasks such as making coffee!). It will help them decide if it's something they want to do long-term, whilst also developing skills and improving their resume. The summer holidays at University are an ideal time for work experience, but graduate internships are just as helpful. Indeed, internships benefit both the company and the intern. The employer can trial a prospective member of staff, and the intern can develop useful skills which will stand them in good stead for the future."

Karen Mishra, a business school professor in the US, shared her thoughts about internships:

"To get the most from an internship, stop and assess what you have learned so far and how it can help you land the perfect job once you return to school. First, expand your network at your company by meeting new folks and asking them to lunch. The more connections you have before you leave, the more likely that they will remember you when it comes time to make full-time offers. Second, ask everyone you have worked with for feedback or to be a reference for you. When you humbly ask for feedback, because you want to learn more, this will also help folks remember you when it is time to make full-time offers. Third, learn about the company, not just your job, if you want to be best prepared for that exit interview (and hopefully a full-time offer). Finally, don't be afraid to take on extra projects outside the scope of your job. It will help you learn more about the company, make great connections, and will show your boss and others the value you can provide as a full-time employee."

Our final piece of advice comes from Navdeep Mundi, an Adjunct Professor of Clinical Management Communication at Marshall School of Business, USC:

"Regardless of whether an internship opportunity is paid or simply for school credit, scoring one in the student's desired field will undoubtedly be a rewarding experience and help them differentiate yourself from the rat pack while gaining serious on-the-job experience. Most students are unaware about the fact that seeded interns are 70% more likely to be hired as full-time employees with a company when compared to applicants with no experience or network at the company. And, in our age of social recruiting, nothing can help a student establish a strong, worthy network than the right highly, positive professional experience. Employers get that fact that a well-suited, young, eager, and enthusiastic intern brings some set skills and fresh ideas to potentially jobs straight away and can hit the ground running. Also, a mentorship is always a positive gain for both the intern and the boss.

The best time to scout for interns is anytime! Employers are always looking to fill needs whether it is during the fall semester or right before summer graduation. The opportunities are always out there. The key is to connect with the right firms and get the recruiters excited about why the student would be the ideal fit for the position, culture, and even the future growth of the firm.

In general, seeing students who are go-getters demonstrate the initiative and are become seriously active in pursuing their passions during their junior and senior years are the ones who can turn any internship into a fully paid opportunity."

Although opinions vary about internships, it seems that most of these experts agree that internship work is important and can be beneficial to you and your future career. Your future job may depend on what internships you were involved in, so keep that in mind when planning for your future.

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