

# Internship/Job Hunting Tips

Although exams and class projects may be a significant source of pressure, the stuff that comes after college causes the most stress for our students. After college comes the real world -- and the need to find a real job. Even before they leave college, students are eager to gain experience from internships. Students will look to you for comfort and advice. What can you tell them? There is no magic formula to a successful internship or job hunt. Certainly, your own experience will be useful in providing students some direction. However, in case you would like some help in addressing your students' concerns, here are a few tips you can use to send them on their way to an exciting career in public relations:

- **First things first.** Before starting the job search, students must decide what kind of job they are seeking. Not just any job is going to do. They want a job in which they will feel professionally and personally fulfilled. That depends upon individual goals and dreams. To help decide what is important, encourage your students to write down all of the things they want in a job. This could be the kind of work they want to be doing, the kind of organization with which they want to be affiliated, an area of the country in which they want to live, or even a location near a person with whom each student wants to be. Having completed their lists, students should put them aside for a while. When students come back to them with a fresh mind, they should amend and prioritize their lists. This will help clarify what they consider important and give direction to the job search. (If this sounds a lot like deciding upon goals, objectives, and tactics, it is.)
- **Form letters are bad form.** Before sending an application letter to a prospective employer, students should do some research. Have them find out as much as they can about the company, its reputation, and the kind of work it does. They should include some of this recently gained knowledge in the cover letter. It makes the letter stand out from about 95 percent of the others the prospective employer will receive.
- **There's no room for error.** Résumés and cover letters are the most important marketing documents your students will ever produce. Spelling and grammatical errors send the wrong message: If students are not willing to do the very best job they can for themselves, why should an employer believe that they will be any more careful on the job?
- **Don't undersell.** Students should include internship, volunteer, and nonprofession-related experiences on their résumés. They should also include memberships in social, fraternal, or professional organizations. How people spend their time and their willingness to accept responsibility -- even in unpaid positions -- says a lot.
- **Be honest about strengths and weaknesses.** As strange as it may seem, you can tell your students that there is something worse than not getting a job. It is getting a job for which

they are not qualified and in which they will fail. Prospective employers -- especially for internships -- don't expect to see years of professional experience on student résumés. Students shouldn't undersell -- but neither should they oversell.

- **The whole world is watching.** Be careful what you tweet and post on the Internet. More and more employers are checking out applicants online. Always remember the unintended audience: Just because your friends may think a picture or post is funny doesn't mean that a prospective employer will. While you are at it, watch what you say and how you say it in your voicemail in-box.
- **We're Living in a Digital World. And You're Just a Digital Girl (or Guy).** In a digital world, remember to keep your digital options open. If you have Internet or audio/video production skills, you can showcase them by creating your own website and providing its URL on your résumé.
- **Create job networks.** There are a lot of people out there just waiting for someone to ask them for help in finding that first job. Many of these people are total strangers. Graduates from your school all over the world might help fellow alumni when asked. They may not have a job but may know someone who does. If students are members of a fraternity, sorority, or professional association (such as IABC or PRSA), they can tap into their membership lists. Past employers and parents' friends are other sources of contacts.
- **Follow up.** It is not enough to fire off letters and résumés and wait for a response. Except where specifically discouraged, students should follow up each inquiry with a personal telephone call. As part of a student's job search research, he/she should find out who will make the hiring decision and try to speak to that person instead of a clerk in the personnel or human resources department.
- **Informational interviews can be valuable.** Students shouldn't let the phrase "Sorry, we have no openings at this time" close off all communication. Encourage your students to ask if they can come in for an informational interview. It is a chance to find out what employers are looking for in their job applicants. It is an opportunity to tap into another person's network of contacts. These interviews also serve another purpose: helping a prospective employer remember an eager applicant when an opening does become available.
- **Interviews are a two-way street.** While a prospective employer is deciding whether an applicant is right for the job, the applicant should be deciding whether the job is the one he/she wants. It is very possible that the person conducting the interview is just as nervous as the person being interviewed. While concentrating on their own performance, students need to listen to the employer's pitch. People on both sides of the table have decisions to make.
- **Keep skills fresh and options open.** Students should know that they might not get the job they want right out of college. However, that doesn't mean they should give up. They can

keep the door open by doing volunteer work for nonprofit organizations. This will allow them to update their portfolios and to build new contacts.

- **Let someone else talk money.** Applicants who, with modest confidence, talk about what they can do for the organization impress prospective employers. They are not impressed by applicants who focus upon what the organization can do for them. Although students need to know the salary and benefits they want from a job, they should not introduce these topics during the interview process. Let the prospective employer talk money. Of course, if a job has been offered and salary and benefits have not been discussed up to that point, then students should inquire about the compensation package.
- **The first job usually doesn't include a gold watch.** As students weigh the decision of whether or not to accept a job offer, it is important for them to remember that they probably will hold many jobs in their lifetimes. They may even change careers. Advise them to view the first job as the initial step, not the final step, in building a career.
- **Luck is where opportunity meets preparation.** Hard work pays off. While it is true that others may have an advantage based upon contacts or personal relationships, those things can carry a person only so far. Each individual's value to an organization will ultimately be decided by how much he/she can produce. There are no shortcuts to the top.
- **Learning doesn't stop with graduation.** Education is a lifetime experience. A college education can give students skills that help them get and be successful in that first job, but continued advancement will depend on how well each person learns from the best teacher of all: experience. And there's always graduate school!

### **Building a Better Résumé**

Students look to their professors for advice on how best to prepare a résumé that will get them noticed by a potential employer. It is the single-most important marketing document a person can produce: Its content and appearance will say volumes about that person to a potential employer. To help you counsel your students, we offer some general advice:

- Spelling and grammar are absolutely critical. If you are not careful in the preparation of their most-important marketing document, what does that tell a potential employer?
- Résumés should include the your name, address(es), telephone number(s), education, occupational and volunteer experience, and a list of relevant honors and/or awards. A listing of hobbies/interests, professional objective, grade point average, and/or other personal information (age, marital status) is optional. However, remember that you want to keep the résumé to one page.
- Be sure to list past employment that, on the surface, doesn't appear to be relevant to the position you are seeking. The fact that you exhibited the initiative and responsibility associated with working and going to school may impress a potential employer.

- Be sure to list volunteer experiences. Just because they may not have been paid for doing something in the field of public relations doesn't make that experience any less relevant.
- Place references under a separate heading on a separate page. Some employers want references. Others may not. This approach provides flexibility. You should use a variety of professional and academic references. Get the permission of a potential reference prior to listing his or her name. Do not list family members.
- Appearance can be as important as content. You should not try to jam too much information on one page. If you can't list everything you want, list only that which is most important. Have your résumé typeset or laser printed. Although you are not limited to printing your résumé on white paper, don't be too wild.

Just as important as the résumé is the cover letter. It, too, must be free of spelling and grammatical errors. It is in the student's best interests to be direct. Don't beat around the bush. Tell a potential employer the purpose of writing him or her in the first paragraph. By including some research on the potential employer's organization, an applicant can differentiate his or her letter from the majority of letters that person receives. That may not guarantee a job offer, but it usually gets the letter past that crucial first-cut. Unless otherwise instructed, applicants should indicate that they will follow-up with a telephone call. However, the worst thing one can do is to say he or she will follow-up and then fail to do so.