



The Value of an Internship

Employers today want to hire individuals with education and experience.

by **Tosha Powell**

Practice makes perfect. This can be said for just about anything. It takes experience to get a good job. It is important for today's youth to understand the value of finding a good internship. With increasing competition in the current job market, employers are looking for individuals who can give their organizations the edge. They want individuals with education and experience.

What is an internship? It is an opportunity for a student to gain supervised, practical experience

in a professional field. Now, to put that in more interesting terms, it's a way to get your foot in the door and sometimes earn college credit. However, internships are not limited to college students. Those who simply want the experience can take internships with businesses to determine if the job is right for them.

Internships offer other opportunities for students too, such as helping them choose courses best suited for their careers and providing networking opportunities.

So how can you get an internship? The key word here is "get"; internships are not given to you. First, sign up for an orientation course when you enroll for classes and learn about internships offered. Second, internship positions are posted throughout colleges on bulletin boards and office doors. Third, career services place students in internships yearly. And finally, internships can be created. Obtain contacts through advisors and call a company to ask if it has an internship program in its organization. The worst that can happen is that the answer will be "no." When you find an internship, contact your advisor to see if you can earn college credit, if needed, for that internship.

The fact that you have real life experience outside of the classroom makes you more marketable.

A student with a good internship program has a definite advantage over a student without an internship.

One former Hereford junior says it is never too early to start looking for internship opportunities. Emilie Miller, Middletown, Pa., is a past National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) member and past NJHA director. She advises junior members to become familiar with their chosen job industry and to begin looking ahead for career goals.

Résumés 101

Building a strong résumé is the first step to securing a good internship. Employers get their first impressions of perspective employees from résumés. When organizing a résumé, keep in mind the needs of the employer who will be reading it. Determine what he or she is looking for in a candidate and make it easy for the reader to pick out those skills by selecting appropriate categories, using underlining, boldface or capitalization. The Department of Career Services at Oklahoma State University's (OSU) College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) suggests the following are some great tips to keep your résumé clean, informative and job winning:

- **Contact information.** Use only professional names, not nicknames. Always include phone numbers with area codes and an e-mail address, if you have one and if you use it. E-mail addresses are a direct representation of the job searcher and should present him or her in a professional manner (partyanimal@hotmail.com is not acceptable).

- **Objective.** Include a career objective on the résumé. An objective informs potential employers that the potential employee is moving in a certain direction, and it relates to their working preferences and serves as a focal point from which to review and analyze the résumé.

- **Education.** This category is important if you have not had a lot of work experience. Remember, most recent educational experiences should be listed first.

- **Work experience.** Many students have limited work experience but have been involved in volunteer, practicum or other working experiences. Be sure to include all significant or relevant work experience.

- **References.** Ask individuals if they would be willing to serve as a reference before you give away their information to prospective employers. Names of references are not usually on the résumé, but employers will ask for them, if needed. **HW**

"I held two internships while in college," Miller says. Between her sophomore and junior years, she served as the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC intern.

Miller's internship with CHB LLC gave her an array of experiences, from creating sales presentations to writing press releases and coordinating customer events and promotions.

"I learned a lot about the meat side of the industry, along with gaining a better understanding about consumers and how to best market our product," she says.

Don't feel limited to completing only one internship. Miller gained experience from two summer internships and says it helped her to get a full-time job.

"I also served as the livestock marketing intern at Fort Dodge Animal Health," she says. "There I was more involved in the research and implementation of those products and learned the important role marketing plays in selling product. It was a completely different environment, working in a corporate office with hundreds of employees in different departments, but it was great to witness how everyone worked together with the same goal in mind."

Miller says when she began looking for a job, the value those internships had on her résumé was outstanding.

"Prospective employers told me one of the most important things they look for in job candidates is experience," she says. "Internships are a great way to show desire to achieve. I received job offers from both of the companies I interned with, however, I decided to move back to Pennsylvania and became the director of retail and food service relations for the Northeast Beef Promotion Initiative."

However, internships are not limited to those who want to work in an office environment. For students hoping to get back to the family farm after school, internships can provide a good learning opportunity. Working at a farm or ranch during the summer can serve as an unconventional sort of internship. That work

experience can provide students with a good example of how other successful ranchers operate, giving them a good idea of how they should implement similar actions in their own operation.

Ryan Breiner, Kansas State University Purebred Beef Barn manager and assistant instructor, agrees that internships of all kinds are extremely valuable.

"We started a program with students where they travel to a seedstock operation for an internship for time spans of one month to even a whole semester," Breiner says. "For students looking to work in production agriculture, experiences such as this can be well worth their time. I wish I would have looked harder for such an experience while I was in school."

Breiner says the learning experiences made from such an opportunity can benefit students in numerous ways. "Students that take the seedstock internship come home more confident, more mature, and the level of things they can be held responsible for is heightened," he says. "We sort of push students on the edge of learning with this experience and hope they can learn whether production agriculture is the way they want to go."

Learning experiences on an actual operation can help students take principles taught in the classroom and put them to use.

"You sit in a classroom where you are taught basic production principles, but you can't visualize what your professor is saying until you are in the moment," Breiner adds. "Internships with farms or ranches allow you to put those basic principles to action. Some things you learn while on the job can't be taught in a classroom setting. Students with those opportunities can honestly say they've had good learning experiences."

Breiner says if the internship experience is positive, both sides — employer and student — can benefit. Internships are a good way to get your name to potential employers. He says, "Internships are helpful to the employer as it gives them a pool of potential

employees that have already demonstrated their abilities in that operation. They also give future employers an idea of the kind of work environment that the student has been introduced to."

An internship won't guarantee a vacation home in Italy or a 75-foot yacht behind your new sports utility vehicle when you get home, but it will provide a great opportunity for experience-based work. Building relations with an internship can provide the winning edge. **HW**

Cover letter dos and don'ts

Sending a cover letter with your résumé is another good way to impress potential employers. Cover letters allow employers to get a feel of the prospective employee's character. The following are suggestions from Oklahoma State University Career Services Coordinator Amy Gazaway.

Dos:

- Match the paper and font style to your résumé.
- Keep the cover letter to one page.
- Address the letter to a specific individual. Call the business to request the name of the individual responsible for new hires.
- Minimize the use of the word "I." Focus on the needs of the employer.
- Be positive and confident. Make the reader want to learn more about why he or she should hire you.
- Tailor the letter to the needs of the company and the requirements of the position.
- Make the letter perfect — no typos, misspellings or factual errors. Get someone to proofread the letter before mailing it.

Don'ts:

- Don't forget the date or salutation.
- Don't address the letter to "To whom it may concern."
- Don't handwrite the cover letter. It is OK to handwrite thank you notes.
- Avoid unusual fonts and graphics. Business letters should be conservative.
- Don't leave any errors.
- Don't forget to include your phone number.
- Don't forget to sign the letter.
- Don't forget to include the letter and résumé in the envelope. It is true: employers report sometimes receiving empty envelopes. **HW**