

## Internships

### What They Are

An internship is a **short-term, entry-level position** that gives you hands-on work experience. As an intern you would go to work for a company at regularly scheduled times (although you might work as few as eight hours per week) and carry out tasks assigned by your supervisor. The main difference between an internship and a regular job is that most interns are not paid.

Although you will likely be **volunteering** your services to a company, you get practical work experience that can be very helpful once you start applying for jobs or start looking for clients for your own event planning business. In fact, many employers consider internships as real work experience when making hiring decisions.

As an intern you can make valuable industry contacts, learn new event planning skills, and build your resumé and portfolio. You can offer your services for as little as a week; however, you will have the opportunity to learn more if you can arrange a longer internship.

### Finding an Internship

If you are a student at a college or university, they very likely have an internship program or work-study program already in place.

Assuming you are not attending a college that arranges internships, there are a couple of ways to set one up yourself. First decide which companies you would like to work with. Then start calling. If it's a large company (such as a hotel chain), you can ask their **human resources department** if they have an internship program. If they do have such a program they will tell you how to apply.

If you want to work with a small company such as a local **event planning firm**, ask to speak with one of the **owners**. (Ask the receptionist, or look the company up on the Internet first, to find out the owner's name.) Whether you get through to the owner, or speak with someone else in the company, explain that you would like to volunteer your services as an intern.

While you might think any company would jump at the chance for free labor, some companies are so busy the owner may feel they don't have time to train an intern. (In a few cases an event planner may not want to help train a potential competitor, either.) So be prepared to **sell yourself**, using your interpersonal communication skills. Explain why you will bring **value** to the company.

One thing that most companies need is help doing the tasks that no one else wants to do. If you are willing to answer telephones, make photocopies, run errands, do the filing – in other words, if you are willing to do **“whatever it takes”** to help them out – say so.

If someone is interested in having you intern for them, they will ask you to come in for an interview and may ask to see your resumé and portfolio. In many ways, applying

for an internship is similar to applying for a job.

## Making the Most of an Internship

Once you have an internship, do a **first-class job** with every task you are given, even the menial tasks. Everyone “pays their dues” when they are starting a new career, and those who do it with a positive attitude can make a great impression.

Look for any opportunities to get actual event planning experience—even if it means working a few more hours than you originally agreed to. Volunteer to help out whenever you can. Be someone who does such a great job that you will be missed when the internship is over.

Here are some other tips for making the most of your internship:

- Don't forget to **ask questions**. If you are unsure about a task you have to complete, or even if you're just curious about some aspect of the event planning business, ask your supervisor. It's their job to supervise you, but they can also be a valuable source of information, as well.
- **Work on what interests you**. If a project comes up that you would like to work on, ask your supervisor if you can get involved.
- **Get organized**. Keep records of your work. Consider starting a journal of your internship activities, and try to document every project you work on for your portfolio. Keeping track of everything you've learned can help you when you apply for a job in the future.
- Set up **evaluation sessions** with your supervisor. This gives you a chance to ask about projects or assignments and get feedback on your performance.
- Learn what the other employees in the company are responsible for. This will give you an idea of **other types of jobs** in the event planning industry.
- Attend **professional association meetings**. Your company likely belongs to at least one; ask your supervisor about attending a meeting.
- Keep a list of **networking contacts**.

At the end of the internship, ask your supervisor for a written letter of reference. If you have done exceptional work, you may even get a job offer from the company you interned for. You can find articles and a database of internships by registering at Internweb.com:

**Internweb.com** <http://www.internweb.com>

## Job Shadowing

For some companies, it may be easier to have you spend a short period of time with an employee than to find someone to supervise you for an internship. Job shadowing involves spending a day, a week, or some other limited period of time **observing** someone work. It allows you to learn more about a career, ask questions, and actually see what a job entails on a daily basis.

Most job shadowing is arranged through personal connections, although you might be able to arrange a job shadow by calling companies that interest you.

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