

The Top Five Reasons You *Need* to Intern, Part One

By Mary Waldron

It's June now. Graduation season. And many grads are asking themselves that golden question: "What do I do now?" Well, this is what they will do. They will spend the next six months or so scavenging the Internet desperately in search of *real* jobs—the types of jobs where their experience as servers at Fridays will not help them in the ways they need.

Finally, after months of mom and dad tapping their toes and raising their eyebrows, they will find typical entry-level positions—decent jobs. Emphasis on decent. However, they will still be behind those who had internships during college.

Why? Because those who served as interns got the hook-ups before they even needed real jobs. Interning is truly an investment—no matter what industry you hope to go into. I've spoken with many of the country's smartest and most successful attorneys, and they're all plugging internships. Read on to find out why.

1. Get a Heads-Up.

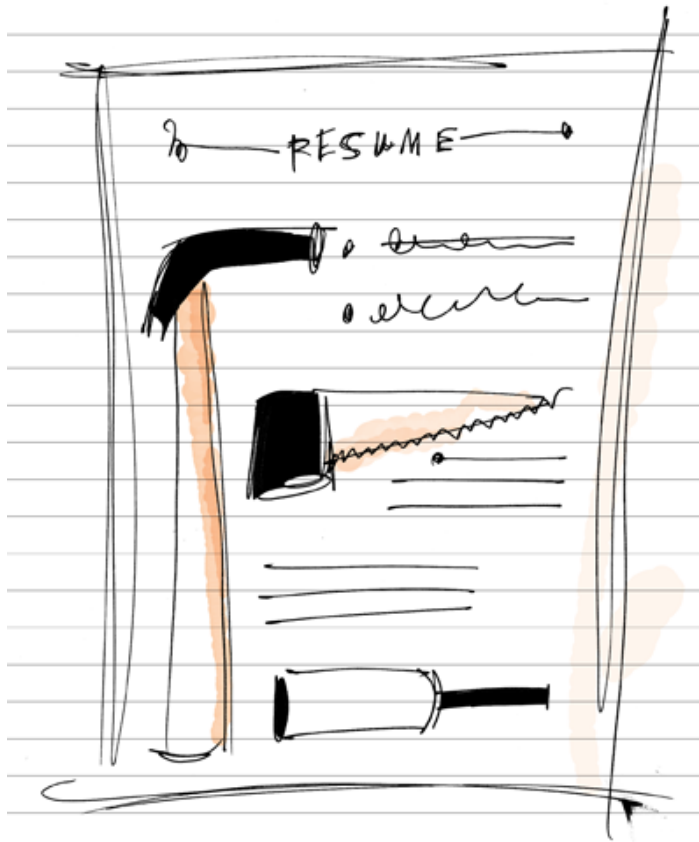
The most obvious, but not usually contemplated, reason that you should find an internship as soon as possible is to gain a foundation of knowledge

and experience in the industry. No matter how much "real" legal work a firm has you doing, you benefit by being immersed in the office's environment. In addition to observing firsthand how a firm works, you learn how to answer an office phone and direct calls; speak with and handle clients; research; and write and format important documents. Although these skills will soon become no-brainers, they will give you an edge over those who only know what their law professors told them in class.

Learning the language of law and actually putting it to use is another benefit that is equally as important. General legal office and industry terms are not always covered in school, and when you finally hear them and use them, you become even more assimilated into the law community. Later on, when you are interviewing for a full-time position, you will be able to talk the talk, which will make you much more appealing than the average fresh-out-of-law-school applicant.

2. See the Light—Whether It's Good or Bad.

The beauty of internships is that you get to test the waters at an early stage. For law students especially, interning should be done as soon as possible, even if it's for the summer. When some 1Ls start to see what practicing law is really like, they decide it's just not for them. Interning will help get this issue, if it is there, out in the open sooner, saving the student lots of time and money.



On a more positive note, interning can also help a student narrow down what practice area he or she wants to focus on someday, whether it's family law, wills and estates, or criminal law. If you find that you despise family law after you try it out for a summer, try another branch next summer. Hopefully by the time you graduate and pass the bar, you will have found an area that interests you. Again, it's all about tasting the different flavors of law, if you will.

Internships can only benefit you; if you don't like the experience, you can always leave without hurting your work history—maybe your reputation at that firm, depending on the situation, but not your work history. Everyone's situation is different, but many students work at regular paying jobs during college, filling their work histories for that period.

If you leave an internship early, you can always delete it from your work history because it is like an extra bonus. On the other hand, if you leave a job after a month, you will have to explain that to prospective employers.

3. Network, Network, Network.

In many demanding industries, including law, young professionals can always learn from their peers who are going through the same experiences simultaneously. Although it's also a must to find and confide in an older mentor, having a younger and more current mentor gives you a huge advantage. You may meet someone who knows about another internship at a very competitive firm. You might meet the nephew of a powerful attorney whom you'd love to work for and learn from. You never know.

That said, you can also meet lawyers and young associates who can advise you on your career in law. You can ask them about their career paths, where they interned, what their jobs are like, and so forth. Any person with whom you can have a verbal exchange is up for grabs. Take the people you meet out to lunch and pick their brains about the law.