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Land Your First Job Out of College With These 5 Tips

[Marcus Varner](#) August 30, 2012 8:00 am

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In the exciting but isolated world of college, your career and the real-world seem to lie beyond a great cliff, just out of sight. You cannot see it, but you know it is there and you know it is steadily heading your way. Ultimately, it is the vision of that future career that keeps them going to class and preparing for exams. Still, far too few college students prepare adequately for that transition.

This generation of grads may be up against a tougher challenge than any group before them. According to a [study](#) by the Pew Charitable Trust, one out of every five young adults ages 20 to 24 have been out of work for more than a year.

It's "put-up-your-dukes" time for college students, unless they want to join the 85 percent of college grads who [moved back in with their parents](#) last year because of underemployment and too much debt. And how will you put up your dukes? We're glad you asked. Here are **five tips to get you roaring out of the gate toward your first real job:**



1. Do whatever it takes to get an internship.

Imagine that you sit down for a job interview as you wrap up your last school term and the recruiter asks you, “Why do you want to work in Electrical Engineering?”

If you’ve never actually worked in the field, you’ll say something like, “I did really well in my Electrical Engineering classes and I just have a feeling that it’s for me.” In all actuality, you may know about the science and the theory behind the field, but you know nothing about the lifestyle or the environment that comes along with that field. And the recruiter knows it.

Now imagine the same scenario, except this time you’ve already interned at an Electrical Engineering firm for four months. You would respond with something sharp like, “In my internship at XYZ Engineering, I came to love hearing people’s problems and figuring out creative engineering solutions to...”

Internships give you real-world cred. They also expand your network into your field so you’re not just tossing your resume out into the abyss. You have friends waiting to carry your resume right to the hiring manager.

2. Build your resume while you’re in school.

The idea that students should focus on just their studies while they're in college is not just false—it's crippling. You know and hiring managers know that perfect grades prove only one thing about a job candidate: they can show up to class, absorb information, and fulfill assignments. How that performance translates over to the real world is a complete mystery... unless you can show that you can be just as successful in the workplace.

So, while you're keeping up with your classes and reeling in those A's, your mission has to be to grab as much real-world experience as possible. Working part-time on the side can be beneficial—it's best if that experience is relevant to your desired career. If a volunteer (i.e. unpaid) opportunity opens up in your field, by gum, get off your high horse and take it.

When you hand your resume to the hiring manager at your first interview, your experience will put you ahead of your fellow, experience-less grads and on par with the other experienced candidates vying for the same job.

3. Start collecting skills.

Accumulating x number of months of experience is good. But walking away with actual marketable skills is great. After all, if a hiring manager is smart, he cares less about how many years you spent at a company and more about if you can actually do the tasks he needs you to do.

So take advantage of every chance to take on a new skill. And, yes, you'll need to do this on top of your school work. If you're interning at an ad agency, get your little paws on a chance to help with media buys or designing a magazine spread. Aspiring

writers, it might be a good thing for you to pick up some basic web programming languages. Learn how to do things that people will pay you for.

4. Find out all you can about your desired field.

Committing to a career is like committing to marriage: you're either all the way in or you're on your way out.

Don't wait until you're no longer in the safe harbor of college to start earnestly studying your field. Begin from the day you decide on a career. Find authoritative websites in your field and follow them religiously. Read important books in your field.

When authorities in your field come to campus to speak, plant yourself in the front row. Find alumni in your field and call them up for an informational interview. The more you learn now, the more impressive you will be at hiring time.

5. Don't be afraid to beg.

I've already mentioned volunteering and taking part-time jobs, but this is a central mindshift that you have to make to successfully land your first job. These companies owe you nothing and they won't give away a thing. In this tight job market, they don't have to hire any new college grads—they can hire someone with twenty years of experience for the same price. So don't walk into the interview expecting them to fall down at your feet or throw a huge salary at you. It won't happen.

Instead, be prepared to be humble and to plead with them for the opportunity to prove yourself. That is what sets new college grads apart from old-timers, that eagerness to make your mark. So do what you have to do to woo them and show them that you will bring some serious fire to their organization.

What are you willing to do to get the career you want? Have you started building up your experience and skills? Share in the comments below!