

## Paving the Path to the Future

*Internships are often a precursor to employment in the real world. Savia Rajagopal-Shah looks at how to make the best of this opportunity*

An internship literally refers to putting theory into practice. For students, it's a great opportunity to learn about your chosen field of work or specialisation. Swati Salunkhe, a noted career counsellor, says, "Most of student life is spent dwelling on theory. Internships are a good time to expose students to practical work-life situations." Adds Deepak Deshpande, Human Resources head of Lionbridge Technologies Pvt Ltd, "An internship provides a valuable opportunity for students to gain experience in their field and to determine if they really have an interest in a particular career path. "

Securing the internship is probably the simplest part of the whole process. It's what you do after you've joined that really makes a difference. Students should look beyond the glitz of 'big names' and opt to work with smaller and medium-sized companies as the work force is limited and therefore a student receives cross-functional experience. When it comes to those participating in professional internships, Swati points out, "Employers expect students to take the task at hand seriously and use it as an opportunity to apply their learning, display enterprise, value for time and commitment made and willingness to go beyond the obvious." It is automatically implied that there is always potential to be hired at a full-time position at the very same company upon completion of your study.

Nisarg Shah, a student from McMaster University, Canada, who successfully converted his internship experience into full-time employment says, "Employers love to see someone who is a quick learner. They want to see that you take initiative and do more than the bare minimum. If you can impress them by offering a value-addition to the company, then half the battle is won."

So what are the hidden mantras that can leave a lasting impression on employers? As Swati shares, "The right attitude, value for time and willingness to take initiative as well as out-of-the-box thinking are some of the key qualities. Besides this, energy and enthusiasm towards learning is always appreciated by any organisation and speaks volumes about the student's attitude and involvement with his/ her work." These guidelines also apply to international internships. States Hari Seshasayee, Student Sector Vice President of AIESEC Mumbai, "International companies expect the student to adjust and understand their work environment and cultural differences."

An intern should always be careful in interactions with his/ her seniors. As Shah shares, "While working with the senior members of a team, you have to be respectful of their skills and experience. Don't think you know it all. Be open to criticism and ask questions when you need clarity." During the internship period, it is vital to build your network of contacts and relationship with your employer. This can be done by getting to know as many people as possible and attending company events.

Once your internship is over, it doesn't necessarily mean a severance of all relations with the company. A good piece of advice is to maintain contact with your former employer. This could be done through occasional phone calls or an email to your supervisor, updating them with your progress and subtle hints towards your aspirations. Events and holidays also offer good opportunities to send out greetings. "If the perfect position does become available, the employer will remember the intern and the work done by him, thus increasing the chances of landing the full-time position," adds Deshpande.

