

Your internship place might be your first workplace, if you are hardworking

By Owen Waqshaza

Finding a dream job takes a lot of hard work. Getting that dream internship is not any different. Despite being a short-term arrangement often lasting not more than three months that may not yield any money, the search for an internship placement should not be taken less seriously than finding a job.

Below, we look at how one can get that dream internship placement and how well one can utilise it.

START THE HUNT EARLY

Each company has its timetable for internship and as such, internships are almost available throughout the year. It is, therefore, important for a candidate to keep an eye out for the latest opportunities that fit their timeframe.

Moses Ogwal, a lecturer of human resource management at Makerere University, says competitive internships with a formal application process will have strict deadlines. It is, therefore, important for one to familiarise with the recruitment cycles for these opportunities.

Ogwal says for one to get a dream placement, it is important that you start early. "From the first day of the second semester, start casting your nets for internship opportunities. By starting early, you can seek opportunities elsewhere in case you are rejected in one organisation. Most students have a tendency of waiting up to the last minute to start the search for placements, which is wrong," Ogwal explains.

"Apply early to get that dream placement. Placements in big organisations are not only competitive, but also work on a first come, first served basis. The earlier you apply the higher your chances of getting a placement. If you leave it to the last minute, you will narrow your options," Ogwal says.

Most reputable companies now give preference to top students for internship placement, Ogwal adds.

"They demand partial transcripts and students with a high Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) are given priority. Therefore, it is important for students to start working on their grades from the first year of study to get placement in these reputable organisations," he says.

USE TRADITIONAL ROUTES

Kanak Shah, the general manager of Premier Recruitment, a labour recruitment firm, says candidates should treat their internship applications with the same mentality as they would an application for a job.

"Whereas social media provides a great platform to communicate with a range of people, including potential employers, it is important for a potential intern not to apply for a placement through sites such as Facebook or WhatsApp," Kanak says.

"Many companies still welcome contact from potential interns via more traditional routes. Rather than making contact through online sites, a well-written letter or email to the human resource manager is more likely to get you noticed," says Kanak.

Many companies outsource their search for interns to recruitment agencies, Kanak says. It is, therefore, important that potential interns get

How to get your dream internship placement



Students on internship relaxing after a field tour. Internship exposes learners to the world of work

in touch with the leading recruitment consultants to improve their chances of getting that dream placement.

Kanak also argues that it is important for candidates to have their CVs in order. "If you have not updated your CV for some time or if you have never written a CV, now is the time to get on it. A good CV should be clear, concise and easy to read. For students, one page is sufficient," he advises.

"One should start the CV with one's personal details at the top, including name, address, telephone number and email address. The CV needs to be engaging and a candidate must emphasise his or her key skills and say what they are bringing to the table. The CV should also have a candidate's main academic and work achievements, the degree you are studying as well your O'level and A'level grades, among others," Kanak, a human resource expert, explains.

Kanak says companies want to be sure of taking on people whose intellectual capacities are paired with an ability to develop strong and productive working relationships.

"It is important that you demonstrate interpersonal skills and an ability to communicate your ideas and suggestions. These commercial roles should equip you with transferable

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

While there is no guarantee that you will secure a paid job at the end of your internship, many companies will hire graduates from their pool of interns.

Moses Ogwal, a lecturer of human resource management at Makerere University, says: "The best way to increase the chances of that happening is to treat the internship more like a job. Behave like an employee, by being punctual, acting in a professional manner, coordinating your work effectively and complying with workplace policies and procedures."

It is also important for one to have a good attitude. "During your internship, build rapport with your co-workers and widen your network of contacts. Attend any events if you are invited, and treat every opportunity that you are given as one to meet new contacts and build relationships," Ogwal explains.

He says the candidate should also be motivated. If you take on new tasks, stay receptive to change and put all your effort into the completion of the tasks that you are set; this will earn you greater than recognition. If you see some of your co-workers have an increased workload, ask if you can help.

No matter how hard you work and how well you fit into the team, your internship won't always result in a permanent job offer. If that is the case, remember that your internship is a valuable learning experience and also an excellent opportunity to boost your employability by enhancing your key skills and areas of expertise.

skills," she advises.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

One point of an internship is to give

students real work experience that will eventually lead to a job in their chosen field, or help them decide whether that field is really where they

want to work after graduation.

According to Kanak, the key to finding a really useful internship is asking yourself the right questions.

"Questions such as, 'What professional outcomes am I going to be able to obtain from this internship?' Will this allow me to develop teamwork skills or apply learning to problem-solving in this area? Will I be able to obtain a good overview of potential careers in the organisation, or have a chance to experience some of the basic fundamental responsibilities in this organisation?" Kanak says.

Moses Baguma, a human resource consultant, explains that good internships will have structure. The employer should be able to tell an intern beforehand what sort of things he or she will be doing and the kind of support that they will get.

Baguma adds: "Although you cannot expect to be running the show as an intern, there needs to be some hands-on experience on offer. If the organisation just wants someone to do the dirty work, think again."

"Conversely, be wary of companies that use interns to replace real staff cheaply. If you are doing a job that is essential to the daily running of the company, then you are not an intern but a very cheap employee," Baguma says.