

Boost Your Career Prospects With 3 On-Campus Activities

By Robin Reshwan

"Plan for what is difficult while it is easy, do what is great while it is small." Famous Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu likely was not thinking about careers after college when he penned this, but his sentiment is spot-on motivation for college students as they approach the middle of the fall semester.

One trait shared by many satisfied and successful professionals is dedication to expanding knowledge in advance and building relationships before actually needing to use them. In other words, people who focus on expansion have a much wider network and range of options than those who procrastinate. Not only do they reap greater benefits, but they also expend less energy and experience less stress in acquiring these assets. So, in the spirit of Sun Tzu, here are three simple activities for college students to expand their professional prospects.

Strike up a conversation.

Relationships are the turbo-booster to professional endeavors for many reasons. They can provide personalized insider information to deepen your understanding of a process, business structure, job, profession or industry. They can help you gain a needed reference for a job application. Speaking to professionals of different seniority levels with a range of backgrounds can give you added confidence in future social and professional settings. And, as an extra bonus, building relationships allows you to learn about interesting people who can become part of your long-term network.

To build a new relationship before winter break, initiate a conversation outside of class with a professor, administrator, career center worker or other university employee. Sounds simple, right? It is – yet most college students don't do it.

A college campus is filled with an entire village of professionals who have chosen to add benefit to the lives of students. Helping you is not only in their DNA – it is in their job descriptions. Don't let your nerves deter you from striking up a conversation. You can ask:

- How did you choose your career? This job? Your college major?
- What would you do differently?
- What's your take on the job market?
- What dream job would you pursue?
- How have or might things change in your field?
- What can I do to figure out a career I love?

The list is endless. The key is to pick any question, ask a chosen contact if he or she has a few minutes for some advice and have a conversation. Be sure to be a polite listener (since you did initiate the discussion). Hide your telephone so you can be attentive. Show up on time for your meeting. And, thank him or her in person and via email or LinkedIn later.

Break out of your comfort zone.

The professionals who experience the most growth and find the most career opportunities are those who can learn, unlearn and relearn. The rapid change of technology demands an ability to move from comfort to discomfort and uncertainty over and over again. Know how to drive a car? In a few more years, they may drive for you.

To increase your flexibility, sit in on a class, lecture, presentation or event that is outside of your comfort zone. Feeling confident in your own skin while grasping new concepts, ideas, viewpoints and methods is a must – and it requires practice. Use the rich diversity of activity on campus to build a wide (or wider) range of interests, inspiration, influence and empathy.

Learn from a manager.

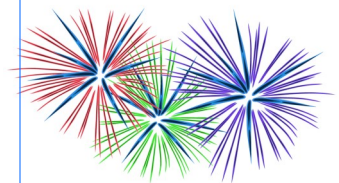
Find a manager and ask him or her, "What do you look for when hiring?" This can be a professor with a research team, the supervisor of the coffeehouse, a staff member at the career center or even a family member of yours.

The more times you ask this question, the more you will learn that while everyone has a few specific preferences, some desired traits are universal. In general, managers look for likable, coachable, respectful, honest and driven employees. With this raw material, you can go almost anywhere as an intern or new graduate. As you progress in your career, roles may require some more technical and tactical professional skills, but this combination of qualities continues to serve as the hiring standard.

The great news is that expanding your opportunities is a very manageable endeavor if you act on the "little by little" approach. Seize the simple, available activities whenever you can. The results will have a major benefit to your internship and career options.

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Ask Job Interview Questions That Set Yourself Apart

By Peter A. Gudmundsson

How to prepare queries that reinforce your value. During job interviews, ask questions that elicit useful information about the company culture.

Most interviews conclude with an invitation for the candidate to ask questions. Too many job seekers let the opportunity slip with a feeble throwaway question or two. Some even decline to ask anything with an insistence that they know all they need to know at present.

This is a lost opportunity that could have markedly increased the odds of winning the job. The concluding candidate questions are a great opportunity for the job seeker to reinforce his or her value proposition, learn more about the hiring organization and ask for the sale.

Reinforce your value proposition.

For every job opening, a candidate should present a clear and convincing job fit thesis (to explain exactly why they are the right fit for the position). Every communication between the hiring entity and the candidate should reinforce that rationale. Since all job interviews seek to answer questions of ability, willingness and fit for a given position, the final candidate questions must underscore these germane features.

Consider these questions:

"I have found wisdom in the saying 'that which gets measured gets done.' How will you measure success in this role?" This type of question shows a seriousness of purpose and a maturity that expects accountability. Immediately, the hiring manager starts to think that it would be nice to have a team member who seeks to be held to a performance standard rather than avoid it.

"Tell me about the success or shortcomings of the prior occupant of this role." This interrogative also conveys maturity and emotional

intelligence because the candidate appreciates that all positions do not exist in a vacuum of time or context.

"What would you like to see accomplished as part of a 90-day quick-start plan?" This candidate expects to show up and add value on day one. He or she understands the importance of priorities and planning. Who would not want such a team member?

Learn more about the organization and position.

Interviews are designed to be two-way evaluative experiences. The employer is evaluating the candidate but so also is the job seeker evaluating the employer.

As such, incisive questions can lead to insight concerning the nature of the organization. The questions should be open-ended and not inquire about information that is publicly available. In fact, the candidate should do some level of research on the hiring organization to tailor questions as a form of follow-up.

Consider these questions:

"What do you like best about the company and your role?"

"What would you change about the company if you could?"

"I have read reviews online that this is a very aggressive operating environment. Can you tell me more about the culture of the organization?" The candidate should not be afraid to follow with questions that demonstrate good listening skills. For example, "What do you mean by laid-back or a performance-oriented culture?"

Most hiring managers or recruiters are in "sell mode" and will not be starkly candid about their organization's shortcomings. Others, however, will be surprisingly reflective and, frankly, the failure to be open also tells you something about the company.

Make a trial close.

In sales, there is a well-known technique called the trial close. In it, the salesperson seeks to remove any barriers to the sale by flushing out what the hiring manager is thinking.

Consider these questions:

"Is there anything else I could tell you about my candidacy to help you ascertain my suitability?" Some employers are caught flat-footed by this question, but it shows that you are interested and prepared to earn the position. Some interviewers will take the opportunity to ask a follow-up question that is giving them pause.

"I am very interested in this position, what are the next steps in the process? When should I follow up if I have not heard from you?" A skilled interviewer should be prepared for these questions, but in any case, the candidate will show a seriousness of purpose and professionalism by foreshadowing a follow-up.

Job seekers are sometimes so eager to finish an interview that they do not squeeze the last bit of value from the experience. Most interviewers will allow the candidate to ask questions, but even if they do not, the job seeker should not be shy to ask for the opportunity.

Interviews are a mutual evaluation experience. The savvy job seeker will use good questions to reinforce his or her suitability for the role, learn more about the position and company and attempt to seal the deal.

Peter A. Gudmundsson has written for U.S. News and World Report since 2015.

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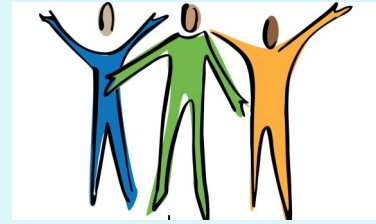


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3 Tips to Help You Remember What You Have Learned

By Michael Grant

You've probably heard the expression use it or lose it. It turns out this applies to learning as well as physical fitness. There is a force that gradually erases all the great insights and instruction you stored in your brain during a learning event called "The Forgetting Curve." German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus first researched this concept in 1885. The curve illustrates the decline of our memory retention over time if we make no attempt to retain our learning. The further we get from the educational experience, the less information we remember.

The speed at which we forget information is influenced by various factors including the difficulty of the material, how meaningful the information is and how it's presented. Stress levels and lack of sleep can also have a negative impact. Thankfully there are steps you can take to help you retain what you learned. Here a few of my favorite tips to help you remember.

Leverage note taking apps for efficiency

Most learning events (conferences, workshops, virtual classrooms, etc.) present a vast amount of information in a very rapid manner. If you can't successfully capture rapid-fire insights, then you can't retain or apply that learning because those insights escaped you. Leverage technology to maximize these moments and keep you in the race for valuable

knowledge. Instead of frantically searching for a new pen once yours inevitably runs out of ink just when the best key takeaway is being shared, consider exploring some powerful apps to increase efficiency.

One of my personal favorites is Evernote. This app has the capability to format text, integrate images in-line with text (using the camera feature to photograph whiteboards or slides is popular), search within notes and tag locations and much more. Evernote is downloaded on both my iPhone and iPad. I use it to synchronize all my notebook entries.

Share and distribute

Summarizing your key takeaways and insights as if you were planning to teach them could be one of the best ways to retain and apply learning. Research studies show that you can only teach something when you've retained that information. An easy way to do this is to share your insights with colleagues at work, via social media channels and/or communities of practice. If you leverage technology apps for efficient note-taking, you have the capability to post directly to Twitter or LinkedIn.

Designate a drawer and bookmark browser articles

At your workstation or in your home office use folders for storing articles, slides and participant workbooks from conferences and workshops. Digitally you can store

infographics, articles and whitepapers in your online browser bookmarks. Or create a Pinterest board for your professional development. You can pin things you want to read or review later and even share your board with your peers.

Each person has their own preference pertaining to hard or soft copy documents, but mine is to walk around, even if I am just pacing around the office, with documents in hand. I use one color highlighter to mark the strongest, most relevant points and a different color for the nice-to-know points. These valuable documents are then stored in a drawer designated for professional development. My calendar is blocked for two hours of professional development each week. Pulling open my drawer can push my efforts forward towards retaining and applying learning insights with greater intention.

Actively engaging with educational materials and sharing your learning will help you make the most out of your professional development opportunities. Determine what works for you and create a plan before your next learning event to help you commit your new knowledge to memory.

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