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## Converting Your Internship into a Full-Time Job

Chandlee Bryan, M.Ed.

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## Promote Your Internship into a Full-Time Job: Five Strategies to Build Career Momentum

If you've just completed an internship – or short-term opportunity, you may find yourself wondering: "What's next?" or "How am I going to land a full-time job in an unprecedentedly tough market?"

You are not alone. One of the biggest challenges post-college is graduating from an internship to full-time employment.

Over the past ten years, I've helped over 2,000 students and recent grads land their first full-time jobs. Here are five winning strategies that I've seen in practice. Use these tips to leverage an internship or convert another short-term work opportunity into a full-time offer.



I hope you find this e-book to be helpful.

**To Your Success,**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "E. Chandlee Bryan".

**Chandlee Bryan**

## Tip #1: Be vocal about your interests for future work together – if it is a possibility.

If a short term position was a worthwhile experience for you and you are interested in working for the organization in a full-time capacity, let your supervisor know. Internships can be a major pipeline for full-time hires – even in a down market: in 2010, nearly 45% of all employment offers reported to the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#) were made by companies to former interns.

### *Know how your organization hires.*

Some employers hire entry-level employees in large numbers and can anticipate vacancies over a year in advance – these employers frequently participate in on-campus recruiting programs. Other organizations are able to extend full-time offers only when an opening is created by "budget" or "new vacancy." Educate yourself on how your past employer prefers to hire, and ask for advice on how to stay in touch!

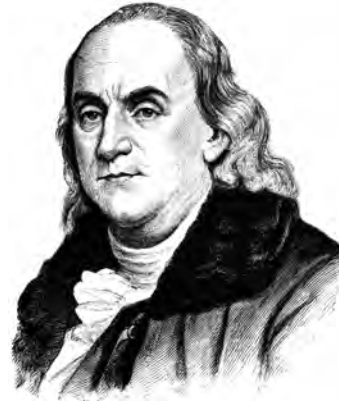
### *If there's a no vacancy sign now, don't give up.*

One way to stay "top of mind" for hiring later is to volunteer. Raise your hand if your former employer hosts events or programs that require extra help. If there are no additional obvious opportunities, express your interest in "contributing however you can."

Many organizations also enjoy having official or informal "ambassadors" on campus: If you can speak well of your experience and would enjoy serving as a source of information for future job seekers and interested parties – volunteer!

## Tip #2: Ask for a written recommendation.

In 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” The same holds true today – particularly with regard to employment. Even if your supervisor has over 15 years of experience within the organization, there is no guarantee that they will not move on within the next six months.



Organizations are not static; they are like individuals. They may expand, shrink, move, forge new alliances – or be abandoned. The only constant is change. Long-term memory can also be fleeting. Even if your supervisor says, “You were the best intern we’ve ever had...” your accomplishments could be forgotten as new projects are pursued, and new leadership takes over.

### *Ask for a recommendation now – even if you don’t need it yet.*

Through recommendations, you can supplement your resume with an additional record of your accomplishments and work experience – from the employer’s perspective. If your school offers a paper or electronic credentials service to store recommendations, take advantage of this service – and keep your recommendation stored for eternity. (Note: There are also online services such as Interfolio.com that enable you to store this information as well.)

### *Tip: Your supervisor may ask you to help prepare your recommendation.*

To make the writing process easy, supply your “recommender” with the information they need:

- A copy of your current resume
- A short list of the projects you worked on during your internship, and the accomplishments you achieved.
- Your anticipated need for the recommendation in the future. Provide information about your career goals. If you know your ideal field or job function, provide this information.

### *The Confidentiality “Wrinkle.”*

The question of whether to keep a recommendation public or private can be deceptively tricky. If you are applying for full-time work, a public LinkedIn recommendation from a previous supervisor is a wonderful option. If you are applying to graduate school, your recommendation may not be taken as seriously if it isn’t “confidential.” (Many schools prefer that recommendations are closed – so that you don’t even know what is said of your skills in the recommendation!)

Depending on your future goals, it may make sense to ask for two recommendations: one public recommendation that you can use for future work experience, as well as a “confidential” recommendation that you can use for graduate school or in formal applications. If you choose to go the formal route, consult your college career office for recommended guidelines – and “official forms.” (Don’t feel guilty asking for two versions of recommenda-

tions – frequently, your “recommender” will simply modify a paragraph in the first recommendation to create a second version that can be used for an alternate purpose.)

### Tip #3: Update your resume. Ask your supervisor for help in describing what you’ve done.

Sometimes even the most mundane tasks can make a significant impact at an organization. Don’t undersell the contributions that you’ve made.

**If the job descriptions on your resume only provide concrete details of tasks you’ve completed, you could be making a huge mistake.**

During my college years, I experienced this first-hand after an internship at a Fortune 500 company that specialized in paper manufacturing. One of my major responsibilities was to edit the corporate phone book. This involved calling company employees all over the world (but mainly in the U.S.) to verify their phone numbers. It wasn’t the most exciting project, but when it came time to write it up, my supervisor changed my resume description of how I “verified numbers for company phone book” to “One of two employees responsible for accuracy of information in corporate telecommunications directory for multi-national corporation.” Which sounds more impressive?



**Summarizing your experience can be a deceptively tricky business: You need to demonstrate what you’ve done and the impact of your work, without “overselling your experience.”**

If you’ve worked as a marketing intern, and your description of your work could be confused with the job description of the company’s chief marketing officer – this is a problem! Few things turn-off a hiring manager faster than an intern who misrepresents the organization or the nature of their individual contributions. You have to balance what you’ve done with how you’ve worked with – and learned from – others, especially with regard to more senior members of the team.

Your colleagues and supervisor can be invaluable in providing this feedback. They can help you articulate the impact of the tasks you’ve done, and share with you the results of your work. In most cases, you will find individuals willing and eager to help you with this editing work – after all, people want their organizations and work to be represented properly!

**Note:** If you’ve worked with external clients or sensitive data in your internship, this step is especially important. Many organizations will ask you not to name clients or projects in your resume, but will provide you with suggestions on how to accurately describe what you’ve done.

### Tip #4: Stay in touch.

***Never burn bridges – reinforce them.***

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[www.job-hunt.org](http://www.job-hunt.org)

Even if you don't want to return to your internship organization on a full-time basis, it's a good idea to stay in touch. Professional connections can provide career advice, help you identify strengths and weaknesses, and provide you with leads for future opportunities.

**Here are three strategies for staying connected – all of which take 15 minutes or less.**

### 1. Connect with your former colleagues via social media.

Social media platforms can help you remain in active touch with your colleagues – long after you've left the office. Most supervisors and hiring managers don't want to be "friended" by former interns, but you can connect with them on other social networks including LinkedIn, Plaxo, Twitter, and Quora.

Here's a quick overview of how your continued connections can help you on each of these social networks:

**A. LinkedIn ([linkedin.com](http://linkedin.com)):** Frequently described as the "Facebook" of the business world," LinkedIn allows you to see beyond your direct connections – you can also see who your former colleagues know, and ask for an introduction or a public recommendation. Your LinkedIn summary can be found by search engines.

**B. Plaxo ([plaxo.com](http://plaxo.com)):** A great site to keep as a virtual address book, Plaxo's features includes updating your communication devices – and keeping them in sync.



**C. StartWire ([startwire.com](http://startwire.com)):** Interested in applying for a great job – and getting an inside recommendation? StartWire will import your LinkedIn and Facebook connections, tell you who you know and allow you to share your job search interests with trusted friends and former colleagues – all in private, all for free. StartWire will also send you application status updates on jobs you've applied for via e-mail and text.



**D. Twitter ([twitter.com](http://twitter.com)):** Monitor Twitter's search engine and listen for updates of interest to former colleagues? See information they care about? Send it to them... You can also use the @reply feature on Twitter to communicate with virtually any users on Twitter – it's like a virtual postcard, and a barrier buster in the job search. Just watch what you say: All Twitter searches are indexed in the Library of Congress.

**E. Quora ([quora.com](http://quora.com)):** A great site for asking and answering questions; you can use Quora to gather information for your own career – and to follow-up with former colleagues... Establishing a presence on Quora and connecting with friends and individuals who share your interests is a great way to showcase your curiosity, skills, and aptitude.



### 2. Take note of what's important to your former colleagues – and share relevant information.

From professional interests and trends to "water cooler" discussions on hobbies, people frequently talk about what's important to them in the workplace. Make a note of this.

If staying in touch is important, a strong relationship building tool is to reach out to contacts when you don't need anything. Share information on common interests, or a news article that you think they'd like to read. Ask for their opinions on current trends, and provide them with an update on what you are doing.

Brief communications that let people know you are thinking of them – and that you haven't forgotten what's important to them – are a great way to maintain relationships.

### 3. Send thank you notes and updates when you make a move.

If your outreach efforts generate a response from your former colleagues, continue to keep them informed of your whereabouts. Stay in touch, and send quick "check-in" e-mails sporadically if you'd like to maintain communications. (If you are in an active job search, let them know what you are looking for.)



When you make your next move, let people know where you've landed, and acknowledge the role they've played in your success. People love to hear about the positive impact they've had on others... it also provides them with feedback on their own leadership style.

Tip: If you're stuck figuring out what to say, start here. "Thank you for teaching me \_\_\_\_\_." This especially works if you've used the information – or realized how important the lesson was – since you left your employer!

### Tip #5: Even if the experience was a "dead-end," reflect on what you've learned.

Internships are a wonderful opportunity to test your interests and preferences for a work environment – without making a full-time commitment. Most of the tips in this e-book have focused on the benefits of staying in touch with past colleagues and relationship building, but it's also important to acknowledge that not all internships are good experiences. This is not unusual, and a part of the learning process.

I learned this experience firsthand in college when I started an unpaid internship. The internship was with a handgun control organization. The "three month project" I was assigned on my first day was to read through gun magazines and cross-check a database of firearms to ensure that all the weapons mentioned were "in the database." I was completing the internship for college credit for a "significant experience," and my professor and I quickly agreed – this situation was not ideal! It was the only time in my life that I have ever quit a job after one day of employment.

**All internships may not be equal in terms of the experience you receive and the long-term connections you make, but you can learn about yourself through any internship.**

Whether you've completed an internship you loved, or one you despised, learning what job functions and work environments work best for you can help you move forward with your career. Here are questions designed to help you assess and determine "your best fit."

### Questions to Ask Yourself About What You Did (Job Function):

- Did you like the tasks you were asked to do?
- If not, do you think you would like to perform other job functions performed by someone with the same job title?
- Are there types of work you want to avoid in the future?

### Questions to Ask about Work Environment & Colleagues:

- Was the organization right sized for me? Would my ideal work environment be a large corporation or a small organization of fewer than ten employees? Or is my best fit somewhere in between?
- Would I prefer to work on a team with others who are working on the same project or do I prefer to work as the only person responsible for performing a specific role?
- What are my work preferences in terms of the age of my colleagues? Can I function well on a team where my colleagues are all significantly older than me or am I more comfortable working with a larger peer group? Did the age of my colleagues affect the dynamics of my work environment and my experience?

Your success in any position depends not only on whether you are capable of performing the responsibilities of the job, but also the work environment in which you carry out your assignments. Work environments vary in size, politics, and overall environment – and should be carefully considered when evaluating the success or challenges of any position. A common mistake that job seekers make is to close the door on a profession or career path because of one bad experience. Try to avoid this!

I share these questions to help you explore your preferences so that you can identify the jobs and work environments that may work best for you. In part, I share this information for selfish reasons: Even though I work in career management, I've made the mistake of "ruling out a profession" based on one bad experience!

I did this after my "one day internship." I stopped looking for opportunities with advocacy organizations, and pursued a career that combined my interest in writing with my interest in helping job seekers find work they love. I enjoy the work that I've chosen to do, but I'm sad that I didn't know enough at 20 to ask myself these questions! Occasionally, I wonder about the direction my life may have taken if I had taken the time to explore additional opportunities in this area.

As you move towards promoting yourself into full-time employment, take the time to clarify your interests and ask yourself these questions again.

Over the course of your career, you'll have jobs you love and jobs that you don't. Being able to isolate what does and doesn't work for you will help you move forward and land a job that better meets your needs and preferences – every time you search for a new opportunity. After all, even in a recession – the job search process is one of mutual selection: You pick your employer, and your employer picks you. It's easier to land in the right position, if you know where you want to go. Good luck!



## About the Author: Chandlee Bryan



**Chandlee Bryan**, M.Ed. writes about entry-level career management for Job-Hunt.org. A certified resume writer and career coach, she is the co-author of *The Twitter Job Search Guide (JIST 2010)*. Her past work experience includes working as the Director of Career Services at Dartmouth College's engineering school, hiring from the "other side of the desk" as a recruiter, and serving as "The Resume Specialist" for Microsoft Office's "My Resume Talks" campaign. Chandlee is currently the Community Manager and News Editor at [StartWire](http://StartWire)

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## About Job-Hunt

Job-Hunt.org is a free "employment portal" Website which links to over 18,000 employers and job search and career resources. Advice from various job search experts is also provided, from protecting your privacy to using Craigslist, LinkedIn, and Twitter in your job search.

Assisting job seekers since 1995, Job-Hunt has won much recognition for the quality of the content, and our goal is to continue to deserve that recognition.

- *US News & World Report* Top Site for Finding Work
- *Forbes* Best of the Web for Job Hunting
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