

COLLEGE

Going from well-known student leader in your campus community to a supporting role at a company is a tough transition for many recent grads. Why?



CAREER

Millennial researchers and career strategists report the more traditional and established companies can be less inspiring for today's grads and may lack the trendy culture associated with technology companies and start-ups. They also say all the responsibility doesn't fall on these organizations or hiring managers. Too often college students have failed to thoroughly research companies, and inform themselves of what their first professional job will be like. They don't know what they are walking into and don't understand what the beginning of a career path looks like. Therefore, these recent grads—new professionals—set unrealistic expectations of what a career launch is.

Having helped many new professionals identify and launch their career, there are some things you can do, beginning freshman year, to enter the workforce prepared and with the appropriate expectations. It starts by looking at college as your job for the next four years.

FRESHMAN YEAR

The more you learn about possible career paths, and which ones might engage you, the easier your transition will be from college to career.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

It's time to take control and focus your academic and extracurricular efforts and interests.

JUNIOR YEAR

Build your brand. Your major/degree is not your brand. Your GPA, is not your brand. Nor is your school.

SENIOR YEAR

Big dreams are great. But, if you don't create space in your life for making progress toward them, then they're fantasies. Turn a dream into a plan and work the plan to successfully land your first professional job

COLLEGE IS YOUR WORKFORCE PREP TIME

Assess yourself as an individual. What are you good at? What are your values? What excites and engages you? What are your likes and dislikes?

Don't think majors. Think skills and job functions. Economists and business leaders do not know what jobs will be available when you graduate. The world of work is changing so rapidly. But they can reasonably predict which skills will be valued by employers and what essential functions will be needed in the workplace. Take courses to attain and develop these competencies.

Get involved. Investigate and join on-campus organizations that provide opportunities for you to develop skills, make connections outside the classroom, and when the time is appropriate, lead activities to achieve goals. While most don't pay, some do—an added bonus.

Find a mentor. Faculty advisors, professors, school administrators are important relationships but are academic vs. work-focused. Your school may have a formal mentoring program that matches students with an appropriate mentor, most likely an alum. You want a mentor who is connected to the career field you are exploring. You are unique as an age group—the first to work with all four generations in the workplace. A mentor can give advice on what to expect in the workplace and help you feel more comfortable working with people who are older than you—who are not your parents or friends of your parents.

Not everyone is cut out for a STEM-based career. Humanities and liberal arts majors develop employer-valued skills—critical thinking, analytical-based decision-making, persuasive communications—and get excellent jobs. Declare a major that aligns with your interests and develops valued workplace skills. Ignore critics who ask: You majored in what?

Focus on a few vs. many things. Students—especially the success-minded ones—take on too many commitments. They think the more things they fill their resumes = better. The problem with this strategy is, if you try to do everything, you'll be good at nothing. Employers look for job candidates who demonstrate command of a skill and show leadership. Find one passion or thing you do well and stick to it.

Master the informational interview. One of the best ways to learn more about a potential career path is to talk to someone who's actually living your career. Towards the end of the first semester start to talk to alumni, your friends, your parents, and friends of your parents to see who knows someone in your field. It's a great way to start building your professional network. And you'll get practice interviewing.

Craft your personal story. You want to be memorable as a whole person, and convey why an employer should care about you and what value you bring beyond skills and functions. This is the story of you—a real person who knows what s/he does and why s/he does it. It's a unique way of describing yourself to people who don't already know you and informs them about your fit with the organization.

Get experience. Get an internship. Internships are an essential part of the college experience. Internships provide you the opportunity to test-drive a career field, make contacts, build marketable skills and figure out your likes and dislikes within specific fields and cultures. Today's graduates without work experience will stand little chance of securing a job after graduation.

Get into good physical and mental shape. You probably have some work to do to get back in shape. You do need to be concerned about the impression you make on job interviews. Employers fairly or unfairly make quick judgments about job candidates based on how they look and how they dress. Schedule classes during more standard business hours (8:00 or 9:00 to 5:00) to become accustomed to this time of day feeling mentally "on", ready to think, converse and do.

Start your job search early. Landing a job in today's market can take quite awhile. You have nine months from now until graduation. Between completing your coursework and planning for graduation you have little time to search for a job unless you build it into your schedule. Plan and use this time wisely. And be sure to attend on-campus career fairs.; great place to meet employers who are looking to hire young talent.

Develop a job-search plan. You really do not want to leave launching your career to chance. Understand what it takes to find a job in today's job market and develop a targeted plan with goals, daily/weekly tasks and deadlines to work to your way into the companies on your list.

It's not always who you know, but who knows you. Networking is NOT about you. It's about building a relationship with people who want to connect for mutual benefit. Even when starting a career it's about finding out what someone else needs and helping them get it—being a resource in any way that you can.