

Stepping into the world of work – Find the job you love and survive the transition

By Liz Bremner

There seems to be a huge amount of information available for graduates about how to study effectively, search for graduate jobs, psychometric testing and how to survive interviews. Dedicating yourself to finding the perfect graduate job is extremely important. It is a long and exhaustive process. If you do not find a company and job offering the right 'fit' with your needs and expectations, chances are you are not going to be very happy in your new job.

What is rarely mentioned though is just how challenging the transition from uni to the world of full-time work can be. You spend on average three to five years of your life at university, getting good skills and knowledge to set you up for your future career. But what you are rarely taught at university are real business skills essential for survival in the professional world. A recent Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) survey amongst employers of graduates highlighted three main areas where the skills of graduates are often lacking. These are problem-solving ability, oral business communication and interpersonal skills with other staff.

One of the best ways to acquire these types of skills while still at university is to get a part-time, vacation or volunteer job in your chosen field. This will not only give you a chance to develop your professional skills, but also to see if your chosen career path is really for you. What you thought was your calling in life can seem like a very different kettle of fish once you actually see the everyday realities of the job. Some universities, especially the technically oriented ones, offer work placements as part of their courses. If this is not the case with your course, you may have to organize this for yourself.

Start by looking on your University's Career service jobs website or notice boards. These are updated every day and often have vacation and part-time jobs on offer that may be relevant to what you want to do. I found a part-time job in my field by looking on the Monash University Careers and Employment website. You could also just contact companies direct, even if they are not advertising, to enquire if they may have job opportunities in the near future. These jobs are great because they generally don't have a gruelling application process like most graduate jobs, and look fantastic on your resumé.

If you are successful in gaining one of these positions, make it your mission to gain as much experience as you can. Accept that you will probably start out doing pretty menial tasks, but once you have gained some knowledge and experience with the organization, can start putting your hand up for special projects or tasks to broaden your experience. You should also use this

opportunity to practice speaking in a professional manner with people at all levels of the organization.

This is also a great time to network. If you can, get your immediate supervisor/manager to take you to meetings and professional gatherings. Don't be scared to call people you don't know for information. This can be a great way to find graduate positions that may only be discovered through word of mouth. Building your confidence in meeting new people is also a great benefit of this type of work.

So now you've got your work experience, you've developed your professional skills and your resumé is looking good. It's time to start looking for a graduate position that is just right for you. What a lot of graduates forget is that not only is the company looking for someone who will work well for them, but that you should be scrutinizing them as well! You are going to spend a lot of your time there over the next few months or years, so you want to find a company that offers the type of work and environment that you will prosper in. I know graduates who have applied for top-tier firms for their prestige and challenge and have ended up unhappy and exhausted. I am not saying you shouldn't apply for these firms, but do your homework to ensure that the company and the job offer a good fit with the amount of hours you want to work, the pay you would like and the organizational culture you would be happy in. Also research what kind of support and development opportunities that organization offers and potential career paths.

When you start your new job, chances are you're going to be pretty overwhelmed and tired. Long gone are the days of your regular 3.00pm appointment with Oprah and the couch. Just getting out of bed early in the morning every day can be a real struggle. You need to be realistic, and try to get a good balance between time spent at work, social activities and sleep. The best way is to think of the weekend as fun time. During the week you should try to get a good sleep nearly every night, or you will find yourself tired and lackluster at work. Another challenge can be remembering everyone's names, what department they work in and what they do. This will take time, but a good trick is to repeat their name when you first meet them. For example, say "Nice to meet you Jo". You also need to be realistic with what you can achieve. You are not going to be a senior manager straight away, so accept your position within the company and try to be really good at the tasks you are assigned. Show initiative and, above all, enthusiasm!

The transition from University to work can be a real challenge, but one that can easily be overcome with some preparation and a passion for your chosen career path. Enjoy your final days at uni, but remember there is a big wide world out there with endless possibilities for you and your chosen career.