

# Preparing for a Return to Work

## The Value of Internships

by Greg Cusick, San Diego Community College District's WorkAbility Program

***Internships:** Internships are an excellent way to transition into the workforce. The following are benefits of completing an internship:*

**Building Work History** - Many individuals have incurred a disability that precludes them from working in their occupation. The result is the individual needs to be retrained. This is an exciting option for most, but also starting a whole new career can cause a fair amount of anxiety. Many people are concerned about their marketability upon completing their retraining because they have no work experience in their new occupational area. The answer --- become involved in an internship. An internship may be paid, or unpaid. Regardless of pay, the purpose of the internship is to gain valuable work experience while a student is completing their new training program. As a result, when a student completes the training the student can go out into the job market with an educational credential, current work experience and a letter of recommendation from the internship supervisor. Also, the first statement of work experience on the resume will be related to the occupational area in which the individual is seeking work.

**Will The Internship Turn Into A Job?** - Remember, while an individual gaining valuable work experience in an internship, the individual is also showing off their skills. In some respects, the internship can be a job tryout. If a person does an outstanding job, this will open the eyes of the employer. There are no guarantees; however, an employer knows what the intern can do, how they fit in with the other employees and the potential they have as a future employee. So, if the timing is right, hiring the intern on can save the company from having to recruit, hire and train an unknown person. Whereas, the employer knows what it has in the intern. So, yes the internship can lead into a job.

**Get Used To Looking For Work And Working** - For many, it has been a while since they ventured out into the job-seeking world. This is a scary place full of rejection. Everyone has gone through this. Filling out numerous applications and sending out multiple resumes only to get a few responses and even fewer interview opportunities. Then one lays it on the line in the interview only to find out they didn't get the job. This is a rough process. One that tests confidence and self-esteem. Looking for an internship can get the individual's feet wet. Since, one may be looking for unpaid work experience (basically offering their time to a company in exchange for work experience) the process is a little bit less threatening. However, it forces the individual to create a resume, create a master application, prepare for interviews and seek out opportunities. All skills one will need to fine tune when the time comes to look for the "real" job. It's time to go to work! For many it has been months or years since they have had the responsibility of having to be someplace three/four days a week at 8 or 9 in the morning. The internship allows the individual to get used to the rhythm of getting up and going to work. *Tired* is going to be the key word for the first few weeks, but those who hang in will find that their body will adjust and their endurance will increase. All of this is important in preparing for the permanent, full time position.

**Working With People** - For many, returning to work in the form of an internship is a return to the world in which they have to get along with many different people - co-workers, supervisors and customers. For some, this can be the most difficult part of the job. The technical aspect of the job is handled well, but dealing with many different personalities in the workplace can be stressful and overwhelming. During the internship, an individual is encouraged to stay in touch with a peer, a counselor or a family member to talk about the social aspect of work. Also, the coping strategies that have been learned will be put to the test during the internship.

**The Letter Of Recommendation** - At the end of the internship, ask the supervisor for an evaluation of work performance and a letter of recommendation. The evaluation is useful in knowing strengths and areas in need of improvement...and we all have both. The letter of recommendation will help as one looks for new employment.

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