

Internships a win-win for employers, interns

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By Don Wade

When Jon Hornyak is making a hire for the Memphis chapter of The Recording Academy he evaluates more than the immediate job that has to be filled.

"To use a sports analogy, we're drafting for talent and not the position," said Hornyak, the academy's senior executive director.

Hornyak, and many other employers, often have an advantage over the pro sports franchises that can find their businesses set back for years if they draft (hire) the wrong person. They regularly employ college students as interns and that pool of prospective employees has produced some nice catches.

"I was an intern myself," said Josh Holtgrewe, an electrical designer with the engineering firm of Allen and Hoshall. "It's always been our main recruitment program. You have plenty of time to test them out and they get to test the waters with us as well."

It is, as Porter-Leath president Sean Lee puts it, a "win-win."

Perhaps never more so than in the depths of a recession where the national unemployment rate stands at 9.5 percent; Tennessee's is 10.3 percent.

"It opens the door to show you have the skill to later become a full-time employee for them," said Dillon Nix, a University of Memphis senior interning at Allen and Hoshall. "Being an intern, basically, it's like an interview to see if you can perform or can't."

A recent survey conducted by CareerBuilder.com showed that only 43 percent of employers intended to hire new college graduates this year. That's down from 56 percent in 2008 and 79 percent in 2007.

"I have a few friends (in engineering) who graduated, and they're all looking for jobs. So I'm fortunate," said Nix, who already has been told he'll have a full-time position after graduation.

Lucia Kaminsky, 24, had an internship several years ago at The Recording Academy. Now, she works there full time as the chapter assistant.

"As the organization that gives out the Grammy Awards, we think it's important to help people in the music industry," Hornyak said. "You are who you know."

"Out of all the interns we've had, she stood out the most. We're looking for overachievers."

The interns, of course, are looking for real-life experience and perhaps to make sure they have made the right career choice. Candice Adams, 27, previously believed she would become a nurse or a teacher. She just completed an internship at Porter-Leath where she shadowed case managers at a group home, in family meetings and at Juvenile Court.

"It's a 24-hour job," she said of being a social worker, now her chosen profession. "My eyes were completely opened. You learn a lot about yourself. I was kind of emotional learning what the children had gone through. But it was invigorating."

Carolyn Mariano, who will be a sophomore at UofM, is an intern at Allen and Hoshall.

"I'm learning about things they're telling us about in school," she said. "I get to see the whole process of building. There are so many facets to engineering and so many different things I can do with it."



Dillon Nix (left), a University of Memphis senior and Allen & Hoshall intern, checks a loose duct support with Josh Holtgrewe, an electrical designer, and U of M sophomore and intern Carolyn Mariano at the Southwest Tennessee Community College Nonconnah Campus.

Employers not only like the fact they can train the interns to do the jobs their way, but that they can get a head start on integrating them into their corporate culture. While it was important for Kaminsky to learn about music production and administration, it was just as important that she proved herself a good fit.

"Our office is such a small team we have to work well together and get along," said Kaminsky.

A 2008 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers indicated that about 90 percent of the nearly 300 employers that participated in the survey have an internship program. Those employers reported that about 30 percent of new hires came from their internship programs.

"It's become part of our culture," Porter-Leath's Lee said. "We get masters-level interns from UT, bachelors-level interns from LeMoyne-Owen and the University of Memphis.

"Primarily, an internship is a learning experience for the intern. But we are looking for the cream of the crop. When I was director of human resources, I personally hired seven or eight. You can only tell so much in an interview. Generally, after you've spent six to 12 months with an intern, you know them very well."

Job Outlook for College Grads

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