IN HINDSIGHT

hiring experts share their own career firsts
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Have a career question? We have more than 60 hiring and recruiting managers from 30 Fortune 500 companies contributing and ready to answer your question. Each question you submit is reviewed, considered and answered by three or more individuals that hire interns and recent grads.

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# Story List

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INTRODUCTION
Everyone loves stories. And not just mysteries or non-fiction. When you’re telling someone about your day or a difficult assignment at the office – those are stories too. We read to learn, and we listen to learn.

In college and shortly after graduation, you experience dozens of “firsts.” This could be as simple and obvious as your first roommate, to the more ambiguous first job interview.

What you’ll find in the following pages are Jobipedia contributors – hiring managers, talent acquisition directors, and on-campus recruiters – offering their own short stories as they reflect on some of their own career firsts.
CHAPTER 1: YOUR FIRST INTERNSHIP
from day 1 to the job interview
When I did my internship years ago all I could think about was how great the experience was going to be (and it did not hurt that it was also for class credit)! It didn’t take long to figure out that this experience was going to teach me a lot – but not what I would need to know as I started my professional career in less than a year. Sure - I learned patience (waiting for someone to come up with the next assignment), perseverance (I had to stick it out for the summer) and I can’t forget the all-important clerical skills.

But what was all this going to do for my career? I learned no job related skills, and I was not able to apply my coursework to my internship (I was working in a Political Action Committee office and knew I was NOT going to be doing that – I was going to do recruiting or Human Resources).
So where did that leave me? I could put the experience on my resume – check that box. But what else? I did not get exposure to other parts of the company. I did not get an opportunity to explore jobs that might have been a better fit. I did not do meaningful work that would help to prepare me for my future career.

So, if I got to do it all over again what would I do differently? Given the opportunity to coach my former self, I would focus on a few key things:

- Look for a company I could see myself working for after school. You never know when the internship will turn into a full-time opportunity (and most employers are looking for interns that will want to come back after graduation to fill full-time roles).

- Look for a position in which I could build technical competence or get exposure to a different part of the workforce (nothing better than a paid learning experience).
• Ask about the types of projects and work that I would be doing and how they connect to the department’s overall objectives and mission (who doesn’t want meaningful work that adds value to the company?).

Today, when I meet interns and recent grads and ask them about the best parts of their internship experiences I hear the same things:

• It’s how I found my full-time job!

• I had meaningful work and it was easy to see how I was contributing to the company.

• I was part of the team from the beginning – people listened to my ideas and encouraged me to contribute.

• I was able apply my classwork.

• I met great new people and I was able to learn from them.

Make the most of your internship by picking the right one, taking advantage of every opportunity...
presented, doing great work and having a little fun too. At the end of the day the best internship will be one that provides learning and leads to the position you want after graduation!

**Advice For You**

So how do you get from the first day of your internship to having a positive conversation with your manager about possibly becoming a full-time employee after you graduate?

Go the extra mile, and be fearless in what you undertake. It’s an internship. The purpose is for you to gain experience. Your managers know that. You’re not going to be perfect, so don’t put that pressure on yourself.

Instead, pressure yourself to get involved with as much as you can. Meet with as many people as you can. And listen to as many – can you guess - stories as you can. You never know where a conversation may lead you.
CHAPTER 2:
YOUR FIRST JOB INTERVIEW

how to make the best impression
While in college pursuing a degree in Psychology at Temple University, I had the typical waitressing job at a local Italian restaurant to help pay for school. I had the same handful of regular customers that would come in daily, but in general, it was a pretty small volume of people that would dine there, so my income was low.

One day, a new customer sat down at the bar where I was working and we began conversing about the restaurant. He jokingly said “Man, it’s really dead in here. How do you make any money?” He asked me why I was working there, and suggested that I should work somewhere that would be more of a resume builder.

It hadn’t occurred to me that I could be working in an entry level position for a large corporation while I was in school...
an entry level position for a large corporation while I was in school, which would ultimately be a good career move towards my professional development and career goals. At the time, I didn’t really know where to start or who to network with. Then I realized, by simply talking with my customers at the restaurant…I was actually networking!

It turned out that the new customer worked at Merrill Lynch, and asked me to provide my resume, so I did. A few days later, I was contacted by a recruiter from the company and they invited me in for an interview. I was ecstatic! This was my first real interview with a big company, and I wanted to make sure I did everything right to ensure I landed this job.

I was prepared to talk about my education, experience, and community service activities, since I didn’t have a ton of work history under my belt yet. Some of my customers were managers, so I asked them to conduct mock interviews with me, which helped me practice how I would respond to behavioral questions. I also researched the company, in addition to seeing what their competition was up to, so I could mention it during the interview.
I also figured it would be a good idea to drive to the campus the night before the interview. This way I would know how to get there, and avoid getting lost (since GPS devices didn’t exist yet). The thought to drive up there was smart, but to make the trip at night wasn’t such a good idea.

It was about midnight when I was driving through the campus, as I circled around each parking lot, looking for building 1400. Apparently, this type of behavior is rather suspicious in the eyes of the security, and I was pulled over by the security guard. At the moment, I was petrified, and worried that this run in with the security officer would jeopardize my employment with the company, or worse… what if I got arrested or fined for trespassing?

After explaining to the guard that I was just looking for the building where my interview would be, he let me be on my way. Feeling frazzled, I drove home and realized that wasn’t such a smart interview preparation idea after all.

There’s no such thing as being over-prepared for an interview.
The next day, I was on-time for my interview, but still worried that the security guard had reported this event to the hiring manager. As I met with the interviewer, ironically, one of the questions she asked me was how I prepared for this interview. I thought for sure that the guard told her, so I immediately told her about the mix up with the guard. Holding my breath, I waited for her response…and she laughed. The security guard hadn’t talked to her, but she thought it was funny that I was nervous about it. I guess the story made me stand out over the other candidates because I ended up getting the job!

Moral of the story, while it’s great to prepare for an interview, there’s no such thing as being over-prepared. However, if you’re going to take a test drive to the interview site, make sure you do it during the day.

Advice For You

Interviewing is like sporting matches. Fans watch ‘the action’ for a few hours on game day, but the real work is done the day before or week leading up to the game.
Prepping for your interview is the most important thing you can do. Ever shown up to a test without preparing? You’ve done it – most of us have. And all of us have experienced that nauseous feeling as you know the harsh judgment for your poor planning will be reflected in a low grade.

When it comes to preparing for an interview, think logically. What would you want to know about yourself if you were the interviewer? What’s a good way to show enthusiasm for the role you’re interviewing for?

As you prepare, you know the interviewer will ask you some basic questions. Why did you apply to this position? Is there anything in your past work experience that would help prepare you for this position? What is your greatest weakness?

Prepare your answers to these questions! Think critically about your responses. Write down your responses, memorize them, then practice answering out loud.
The unfortunate reality is that most people wing their interview. Many do not research the company before they show up to the interview.

You aren’t most people. If you put in a little preparation before the interview you’re guaranteed to stand out.
CHAPTER 3:
YOUR FIRST RESUME

how to craft an advertisement for you
There are so many different types of resumes that you can create. My advice is to just make it simple, easy to read, grammatically correct and keep it to 1 - 2 pages at the most. Do NOT list any personal information on your resume such as date of birth, social security number, marital status, and gender. This is personal information that is not to be shared with an employer when you are looking for a new position.

Use a logical format, clean type, and clear headings.

I have been recruiting for 17 years and have seen many different versions of resumes. My most memorable resume was from an applicant who sent me a shoe box with their resume, which had their picture on it, and a brand new tennis shoe. There was a sticky note on the resume that stated: If
the shoe fits, hire me! First off, don’t put a picture of yourself on your resume. And why would you buy a brand new pair of shoes, only to send one shoe with your resume? What are you going to do with only one shoe? In my opinion, it was a little extreme and too aggressive. Again, just make it simple!

**Advice For You**

- Format your resume wisely. Typically a resume gets scanned for 25 seconds so make your resume easy to read.

- Use a logical format, clean type, and clear headings.

- Selectively apply bold and italic typeface to help guide the reader’s eye.

- Use bullets to call attention to important points (i.e. accomplishments, work experience, education).

- Identify accomplishments, not just job descriptions.
• Focus on what you did in previous jobs - not what your job was.

• Quantify your accomplishments by listing percentages, dollars, number of employees, how many products you represented, etc.

• Replace your objective with a career summary.

• Give a brief overview of who you are and what you do. Spend time developing a summary that grabs their attention and describes you as a solution to their problems.

You can also check out company career pages for more information and also identify early career hiring managers that you may be able to connect with via LinkedIn.

Remember your resume is the first impression of you, so take your time writing it.
CHAPTER 4:
YOUR FIRST NETWORKING OPPORTUNITY

it may be uninvited, but it’s not cold
It’s never too early to start networking, even as a freshman! I wish someone would have told me to grow my network while in college. While in college, and especially as you approach graduation, you should connect with experts in the field or industry you wish to work in. You may not know many professionals, if you’re in or just out of college. Today, you have resources to connect with professionals more easily than you did a decade ago.

I wish someone would have told me to grow my network while in college!

LinkedIn is a great starting point. Search for people in the roles you aspire to be in and even the companies you’ve admired over the years. Another great resource is your career services center on campus. They work with many companies throughout the year and can help you target
the right industries and connect you to those companies. When reaching out, be sure to have a tactical approach, don’t just send a resume through LinkedIn asking what roles the company has that are a fit for you. Instead, ask targeted questions about their day to day activities, and ask if they can spare 15 minutes for a quick introductory call to better understand their career progression and company culture. People are more inclined to talk about themselves and help someone get their career started when there is a personal connection. You can even see what companies have hired alumnae from your college. That’s an easy way to connect, as you have a shared interest.

Take advantage of companies coming to your campus. If you belong to student organizations, find out if there are speakers planning to come talk with the group, or reach out to the career center to find out which companies will be hosting

**People are more inclined to talk about themselves and help someone get their career started when there is a personal connection.**

**Asking for referrals is a great way to expand your network.**
information sessions. These events tend to be more intimate than the traditional career fairs. It’s a great venue to network with employees and if they aren’t in the field you wish to be in, they may know others who are. Plan to meet with as many contacts as possible, and don’t be afraid to ask for other individuals to network with - asking for referrals is a great way to expand your network. Most people would be happy to refer you and set up introductions.

Fortunately, I was able to find out one of my personal connections worked in HR. Discover who works where and does what! You’d be surprised knowing who in your current network is involved in what. Look to your family, family friends, friends of your parents, friends of friends, siblings and their connections, professors, etc.; use what is readily available to you at first, and build from there. ...

... just remember when you’re nervous about reaching out, that everyone started somewhere.

When I was starting out, I had a contact that was able to coach me and get me in front of the right
people at the right time, which helped get my foot in the door at HP. It doesn’t end there! You will constantly be networking throughout your career, and soon enough it will be second nature (you will forget how nervous you were when you first started out!). By networking with other professionals inside my organization, and out, it has allowed me to develop professionally and move into new roles every couple of years. It’s about knowing how to present yourself and keeping your network close.

Just remember when you’re nervous about reaching out, that everyone started somewhere. Don’t forget to send thank you notes to all your contacts and keep in contact regularly!

Advice For You

If you’re looking to advance yourself ahead of your peers, networking is the way to go. Why? Because no one takes advantage of networking like they should, especially people straight out of college.

A lot of people don’t use networking as a tool to advance their career. And, people are intimidated by the idea of networking.
Networking is hard. But so is building your career and reputation. The common theme in all this hard work is relationships. Careers, networking, advancing to more money and responsibility – it’s all about reputation and relationships. Work hard, be respectful and treat every interaction as though it’s with someone that will help advance your career.
CHAPTER 5:
YOUR FIRST DAY
ON THE JOB

dominate as the ‘new kid on the block’
You can’t make a first impression twice. Those words resonated with me over and over again as I was driving into my first day of work. This was literally my first page of the next chapter of my life after graduating from college. I received a job offer from a prestigious financial services firm the week before graduation and it was a no brainer. I eagerly accepted the offer and then began planning for my first day, which was 4 weeks post-graduation.

I parked in the rather large parking garage and walked into the building with a combination of fear and excitement. I looked down at my light mauve suit coat and skirt and smiled. It took me so long to find the perfect first day of work outfit, but I felt sure this was it. I exemplified young, investment banker. My 3 inch heels were getting caught in the sidewalk spaces. I made a mental note to wear flats and bring heels going forward.
At the security desk, I introduced myself to the guard and provided him with my driver’s license. The guard took my photo for my ID card and then sent me to sit with a group of about 10 other people, who were also starting their first day.

Everyone was just staring at each other at first, until one guy, Paul, cracked a joke that he hadn’t been up this early since he pulled an all-nighter for a test for an 8am Econ class. That seemed to break the ice and then we all proceeded to introduce ourselves. I felt a sense of calm in that instance, like I would be part of a team and not off in a corner trying to figure things out. I was feeling great from the social connections I made and I had only been with the company for 20 minutes.

The guard then directed us to a second floor conference room, where we would be having our training. The conference room was spacious, with big floor to ceiling windows that overlooked a man-made lake and walking trails behind the building.
There was a whole spread of various breakfast items for us to indulge in. I thought this day could NOT get any better. Nice people, beautiful office, and delicious, free food; what else do I need?

The trainer came in and introduced himself, and we had a few ice-breakers before we got into learning more about our roles and their impact on the company. Next, we were divided into groups and assigned team leaders. I was so excited to meet my team leader, Joan. I got up when the trainer announced my team leader’s name and she walked through the door. I stopped in my tracks when I saw she had on the exact same mauve suit I was wearing. My heart was racing and I felt sweat form on my forehead. All I could do was smile, shake her hand and hope she didn’t notice. Her eyes met mine and she let out a deep laugh. She took my hand and said, “My name is Joan and I’m glad to meet you. You have a great sense of style.” She completely put me at ease and I realized everything was going to be alright.

That first day turned into many years that I stayed with the financial services firm and moved through various roles and promotions. Since it was a large company, I didn’t stay connected with everyone
I met in my first role, but when we would run into each other in the hallway or cafeteria, we would always be friendly. What stuck with me the most is that every time I saw Joan, she would always compliment what I was wearing, and note my strong sense of style. Her comments took me back to the words that I thought of on my first commute into the office, “You can never make a first impression twice.”

Advice For You

A first impression is one of the most important interactions you’ll ever have with someone.

When it comes to your first few months, it’s all about managing time, tasks and deliverables.

Some say that you should show up early and stay late. This isn’t always the case. If you’re always staying late, your manager may think you’re not managing your day well or struggling with assignments.

Time is your most valuable resource. How you spend it, and what you spend it on will tell others what you truly value.
In your first few months – watch. Watch how your colleagues and peers interact with each other and senior level staff. Discover what your manager needs and how you can start to anticipate those needs. Thinking about how you can anticipate your supervisor’s needs will take you far.

As you watch, also keep an eye on dress code and office culture. Observe how the leaders in the office interact on internal and external emails. Notice how they dress on “jeans Fridays” and engage during team or department meetings. Mimicking can be flattering, so as you’re starting your career do anything to help yourself advance.
CHAPTER 6:
YOUR FIRST MISTAKE ON THE JOB

everybody fails, most people don’t learn
It all started with the best intentions, like most things do!

I received an email from my supervisor requesting the timing around a project I was working on for holiday staffing. Being as this was a direct request from my supervisor, I really wanted to impress her so I started working on the reply email. My goal was to exceed her expectations and get it back to her as quickly as I could.

Once my reply was written, of course being new in my position, I started second guessing everything; the salutation, should I say Hello or Hi, or maybe just skip it and get straight to the answer. I dissected every letter in the email. I started considering making it really impressive and include a visual incorporating all the details. It would be...
perfect! I started putting together the visual, when I realized I had a conference call with my team. During the call I finished the visual and it turned out better than I thought! I put it in my drafts folder so I could review it one more time before sending it. Remember it had to be perfect.

After the call, I resumed my daily schedule and responded to a few things requested during the call. At the end of the night I packed up and headed home feeling great about what I had accomplished that day and knew my supervisor was going to be so impressed when she got my email.

The following week, I was invited into my supervisor’s office and knew this was what I was waiting for: the “oh my goodness, that was fantastic” moment.

As soon as I arrived at her office and she stood up from behind her desk - I remember like it was yesterday, she was wearing a navy blazer and
white pants - she slowly went to the door and shut it behind her. This had never happened and I wasn’t sure exactly what was coming next. She ask if I had received her request for the timing for holiday staffing, and with a look of pride I said, “Absolutely.” She then went on to ask if I was having trouble putting the timeline together, and of course my response was, “No, not at all.” I asked her if the reply and the graph were not detailed enough and what else could I get her.

I knew immediately by looking at her face something was very wrong. This is where the mistake comes in; the email was never sent, it was still in my draft folder and I definitely had not exceeded my supervisor’s expectations! While trying to multitask on the call, I lost track of what I was doing, and what I still needed to do.

I felt like a loser. How could I make such a big mistake and forget to go back in and hit the send button? This was a very memorable lesson: this was not a win or lose moment, even though I had

I felt like a loser, how could I make such a big mistake...
let down my supervisor, this was a win or learn moment. As long as I took this mistake and learned from it and ensured this didn’t happen again, I was a winner. Multi-tasking seems to be a very efficient way to getting many things done in a short amount of time, but it often doesn’t produce the very best you can deliver – stay focused on one task at a time and give it your very best!

Advice For You

Failure is necessary for any modicum of success. So embrace the fact that failure happens to everyone. It’s not a matter of ‘if you fail’ instead it’s ‘when you fail.’ So the question becomes what do you do when you fail?

A number of people will immediately default to self-deprecation and self-doubt. Which is why changing the tapes in your internal thought stream is so vital.

First things first, though, own your mistake. Tell your supervisor you made a mistake. Be ready to give an account of what happened and what your thought process was behind the mistake. Giving the play by play will allow your supervisor to see it
was a genuine mistake and not outright negligence. Most importantly owning your mistake will tell your supervisor you’re honest and forthcoming, which will lead to a greater degree of trust.

Once you’ve disclosed the mishap with your supervisor they will probably advise some course of action to correct the mistake. Be sure to follow this to the letter because it’s a crucial step to building trust.

Lastly, learn from the mistake. What went wrong? Why did it go that way? What could you do differently next time to avoid the same or similar circumstance? What are the bits of wisdom that can be gained from this experience which will carry over to completely different circumstances?

The more you can gain from your mistake the better. If you don’t learn from it and implement the things you’ve learned then you’re setting yourself up for career failure.