

Securing a Job with Amazon: The Importance of an Internship

By: Joe Gramley

Sometime over the last Christmas break, I was sitting in my room back at home. I had always heard that the January through March time period was a great point in time to begin searching for high-quality internships. As an engineering student, it seemed important to me to gain some valuable experience in a major-related work environment before I try to enter the work force for good, or at least that's what I had heard over and over from different professors. To be honest, at that point in my college career, I knew nothing about internships, companies, interviews, or really anything career-related. So, as any hopeful junior (or sophomore) would do, I started my wide search of online job sites and company career websites searching for that "really cool" job that probably every other student in the country wants. I stumbled upon the Amazon.com website and, out of curiosity, looked at their internship opportunities posted and sent in my application. Knowing absolutely nothing about what types of internships they offered or if they had any relation to engineering, I still applied, and quite honestly, expected nothing of it.

Low and behold, at the end of April, I was already talking to a few different companies that I had met at one of the career fairs on campus when I received an email from Amazon.com. The email was in response to an internship that I applied for, although I had forgotten. They asked me if I was still interested, and knowing how large of a company it is and just the sheer fact that everyone on the planet has heard of it, I said sure. The job was a facilities engineering internship, whatever that meant. But I did a phone interview anyway and, the next week, I received a job offer with some serious benefits and a solid monthly pay.

I took the job still not knowing very much information about where I would be or what exactly I would be doing. It turned out that I was placed in a building in Northern Kentucky about 10 minutes from the heart of Cincinnati. Just the fact that I was about to move 430 miles to a place called "Erlanger, Kentucky" and live in a Residence Inn for the next two months was a real eye-opener. It turned out to be a really cool place to live and in a way it was a fantastic opportunity to get over any nervous feelings and attitudes and become a more outgoing person, because I knew that I would not know a single person or place to go for nearly 400 miles.

The actual internship was structured in a really neat way to which no student with other internship experience with whom I have spoken can relate. Usually, when you think of an internship, especially for engineering, number crunching and making coffee comes to mind. This is almost the opposite of what I experienced at Amazon. The fairly new company strives to avoid a "project-oriented" internship program where instead they focus on team leadership and strong managerial training. This type of program was great; I had a great mix of opportunities in very different environments. I worked in a series of three different "fulfillment centers" (warehouses), each being completely different regarding what they handled and how they operated. As a facilities engineer, I was able to work with, and learn, from a wide variety of people to develop my own management and leadership style which would prove to be effective in that type of hectic environment, as well as apply technical skills learned from college courses. Nothing that I did was like a question out of a book, but I had the necessary knowledge to apply principles and practices to solve very important problems that would cost the company a great amount of money.

Just in the last week or so, I received a job offer for full-time employment as a facilities area manager starting next summer, in June, right after I graduate. It's such a cool and outstanding feeling to be talking with a recruiter from the company, working to juggle a base salary, and picking from multiple benefit packages, all while just starting my senior year of college.

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I try to imagine how things would be different if I had never sent in that one application and résumé to Amazon. Other than the fact that I now have a very good job offer, I still learned skills and things as small as what it is like to work in an office on a chaotic warehouse floor as a manager. These types of things cannot be taught in a class. They are skills that can only be developed with personal experience and an opportunity to be in a place where you are forced out of your comfort zone and have to adapt to survive. With or without a job offer, having an internship has taught me skills that I can take back and apply to any job or school project in my future.

I strongly urge everybody to take the time to sit down and write the best résumé and cover letter that you can, always be networking, and keep your eyes and ears open for any potential internship or job. My internship turned out to be a truly awesome experience, but it would not have been possible without sending in that one application back in January and hoping for the best. I urge everybody not to stay in your comfort zone. I tried something new and my summer still turned out to be a blast. This just goes to show how influential and important having an internship can be. I'm proud of what I was able to accomplish over just one summer. You may never know what opportunities are out there today, and who knows, you just might end up doing something you never considered and love it.

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