



TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN FASHION AND RELATED INDUSTRIES

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Landing an internship or job in the fashion industry is a dream that inhabits the minds and hearts of many students. What many don't understand is that beyond the glitz and glamour is a very competitive, and sometimes very difficult, world to navigate. The rewards are great, but so are the challenges.

Four Key Steps

There are four key steps to follow as you consider involvement in a specific career, but especially in the fashion industry.

Step #1: Self-Knowledge. *Who are you?*

The journey towards career fulfillment, self-actualization, and success begins with a focus turned inward—not outside of one's self. One hundred years of vocational-psychology research indicates there are three principle characteristics people need to understand about themselves in order to meaningfully proceed to design their careers.

These important qualities are the person's **INTERESTS, VALUES, and ABILITIES**. The Career and Internship Center professionals on campus are always available to help you inventory their interests, values, and abilities and prepare to take the second step.

Step #2: Exploration. *Who will reward you for your unique set of INTERESTS, VALUES, and ABILITIES?*

There are many ways to explore this important question. Some of the techniques used by Career and Internship Center professionals include **counseling, experiential learning** (internships, mentoring, shadowing, and volunteering), **networking, researching, and availing one's self of presentations** by industry experts. Finding a successful match results in greater success and happiness in life.

Step #3: Marketing Yourself. *Telling your unique story—describing your INTERESTS, VALUES, and ABILITIES—in compelling ways to employers most likely to reward you for them.*

The challenge of presenting one's self as a strong candidate (for an internship, a part-time job, a full-time career, or graduate school) becomes less daunting when we have successfully taken ourselves through the first two steps and have engaged Career and Internship Center professionals in providing assistance. They are equipped to assist you in presenting your "hard skills" (those such as **self-marketing plans, resumes, cover letters, and thank-you notes** that one can touch) and "soft skills" (such as **networking, interviewing, and negotiating**).

Step #4: Professionalism. *How should you behave in the workplace?*

In our ever-changing and increasingly global workplace, it is of paramount importance to conduct one's self professionally, be strong contributors, and promote one's self sensitively. You need to learn professional etiquette, communication and listening skills, and how to build strong **allies, advocates, and references**. You also need to learn how to assume **responsibility** for social contracts and how to **network** for the mutual benefit of individuals and organizations.

It is very important that as you consider an internship with a fashion-related organization, you must do thorough research and have serious conversations about the viability of the business before you accept any internship offers.

Qualities Interns Must Exhibit

- A lot of flexibility about many things related to the world of work
- Ability to multi-task
- Significant computer skills
- Their IDEA (innovation, design, emotion, and art) abilities
- Participation in the culture and knowledge about what's happening in the world; they can't live/work in a vacuum
- Well-rounded entry-level professionalism with well-developed workplace skills
- Ability to innovate, evolve, and experiment—ability to go beyond what sold last season
- Ability to see/hear/observe trends and assurance that they and their organizations benefit from them-- not just to “finish college”
- Willingness to accept, and incorporate in useful way, supervisory feedback and criticism

Example Of Good Internships

Design

- More and more business leaders are realizing how design impacts their overall strategies and affects their bottom lines. These business leaders are using design as never before to differentiate their products, appeal to consumer's interest in the new, and generate consumer interest in spending.
- Accessories Design interns and graduates have bright opportunities because the accessories market thrives even in down economies
- Jewelry Design interns and grads can look forward to good employment opportunities; the jewelry market is the third-largest employer of “creatives” in NYC
- Fashion Design interns and grads are benefiting by reduced buying cycles (to six weeks from eight week as manufacturers need more designs to take to market).

Buying

The role of buyer has changed greatly. Over the coming years successful retailers and their buyers will:

- Maintain a growth-of-market-share focus in order to take advantage of ongoing industry consolidation
- Monetize technology—both in-store and online—as a prime tool for engaging the consumer
- Recapitalize their businesses to maintain a healthy balance sheet
- Adjust pricing to provide consumer with a more realistic price/value equation
- Adapt the European fashion model—i.e., smaller, more focused product offerings
- Concentrate on compacting the supply chain—even in luxury retailing—to provide consumer with consistent innovation throughout the year

The Big Transformation

The biggest transformation in retailing history has arrived. This transformation is the result of a century-long evolution and the convergence of two enormous economic and sociological shifts—

- From a production economy to a consumption economy (also known as a service economy) converging with a cultural shift
- From consumers needing life's necessities to consumers seeking life's ecstasies: fulfillment of individual aspirations and self-actualization

In essence, people are moving to a whole new set of values. This includes how they value products and services. This transformation is not just about the retail business and consumers - buying and selling. It's about real peoples' values changing and forcing changes in the world around them, specifically in retailing.

This new retailing model (which has already been adopted by leading companies like Apple, P&G, Abercrombie & Fitch, and J. Crew) operates on three driving principles—

- Precise and preemptive distribution
- Superior brand relevance to the value now sought by consumers
- Control of the entire value chain

Today's Need

You need to be a “generalist” in today's marketplace. You need to think about how to institutionalize “lifestyle” interests. These are big issues in the fashion industry, especially with regard to production and the use of green/sustainable materials in textile development.

New Developments In Technology

- Devices that create hundreds of designs in seconds
- “Intelligent textile technology” that will—
 - bring knowledge to textiles
 - expand and contract fibers
 - shape moods on demand
 - allow fabrics to react to sensory cues
 - allow fashion to interact with its wearer and its surroundings
 - produce “cell-informed fabrics” and liquid form
 - produce luminous clothing that will light up the night/fiber lights
 - produce “sound-transforming texture”/optical and audio cues that transform the look and feel of cloth

The Primacy Of New York City

Despite the effect that the faltering economy is having on NYC fashion and related industries, it is still the fashion capital of the USA and one of the top fashion capitals of the world. Points to keep in mind:

- There is still some sample-making and production here. However, if this sample-making and production leaves, the talent base will follow, and this will change the NYC fashion industry drastically.

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- 90% of industry, including large mass retailers and those at the low and medium end, design here but produce offshore. Examples of this phenomenon are Liz Claiborne, which has become a “brand stable” because it has sold its Liz business to JCPenney and Iconix Brands has also become a “brand stable”; essentially it just manages licenses
 - Less than 10% of the garment business that used to be in NYC is still there
 - Small high-end designers/suppliers are still in NYC because they can’t take the time to go offshore and they need access to production in order to make changes. They must keep the design people/function close to the production people/function, so they can maintain the relationships that the industry used to have in NYC.
 - Typical of these small, high-end designers (each working with about 300 pieces) thriving and working actively to keep production in NYC are Nanette Lepore, Nicole Miller, Yeohlee, and Anna Sui.
 - These designers have mostly vertical businesses, which means they do all their designing, sample-making, and production in NYC. Polo Ralph Lauren also does his sample-making here. Their distribution centers are also in close proximity to clientele (including Saks and Bloomingdale’s), so they can fill orders fast. This vertical business model allows these small, high-end designers to refill orders in a short time frame, to deliver goods on time, and to sustain profitability.

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