

The Career Coach

Title: **The Zen of College Internships** by Elaine Voci, Ph.D.

Zen – a state of uber coolness and inner peace; a way of being; a state of mind

What gives college students the benefits of working at something meaningful, being mentored by an expert in their chosen profession and developing a network of professional connections? The answer is: an internship. Whether paid or unpaid, a college internship can be a wonderful way to add two things needed on a resume: valuable work experiences and real world accomplishments. On average, only 30% of graduating seniors have job offers before graduation; after completing an internship, however, that figure rises to 58%.

Ellen Dunnigan, owner of Carmel-based **Accent on Business**, has frequently utilized student internships and often works with more than one intern at a time. Her ten year-old company provides business communication training, public speaking and presentation training, as well as accent reduction, and voice therapy. Her interns have come from the Kelly School of Business, IUPUI, Purdue, and the Indiana Intern Net (<http://indianaintern.net/home.asp>)

Trained as a speech pathologist, Ellen is motivated to seek interns for several reasons:

- It gives her a chance to provide practical hands-on learning experiences that bring classroom lessons to life
- Young, talented interns keep her on her “toes” professionally and she enjoys the challenge of working with skilled, energetic students who bring industry knowledge fresh from lectures
- She loves being able to “give back” out of a sense of gratitude for the great mentors and training experiences she has had in her own career

When selecting student interns, experience has taught Ellen that every bit of preparation that can be done ahead of the actual interviews is a worthy investment. Determining exactly what she wants in an intern, and using behavioral interviewing, allows her and her team to select bright “A” level students who can:

1. Follow directions and take the initiative to get started on a task
2. Participate in discussions without being too critical and give feedback openly without having to be coaxed
3. Represent her company well in professional actions, appearance and attitude when interacting with clients, the public and one another
4. Be a bit of a perfectionist and proof read their work before it comes to her desk for final approval
5. Persevere and not be easily discouraged

Ellen stresses that one of the most important lessons she passes on to interns and clients alike is that in the world of work it's not about the job, it's about relationships. It's *how* you say it more than what you say. Show up as like-able and "trust-able" and do the right thing and you will engender confidence in your words, your contributions and your presence.

If you are a college student, talk with your advisor about internships; study the various types of companies, locations, placement criteria, and benefits that an active and engaged internship can add to your college experience, as well as the invaluable "life lessons" it will foster.

Note to employers: The laws that govern internships go back to 1938 when Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, which includes many of the basic labor laws we take for granted today. A Supreme Court case in the 1940s prompted the Labor Department to create a "six part test" the employers must meet in order to have unpaid workers. Before instituting an internship program it would be wise to review this test to ensure that you are in compliance with the law. (<http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>)

Elaine Voci is a published author and a career coach located in Carmel at Elaine Voci Life Skills Coaching, LLC. Read more of Elaine's musings on her blog located at www.elainevoci.com