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Prospective Employees: Your Job In College Is Not To Get A Job

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“Alan”, a client of mine who runs an eighty person manufacturing firm just did an unusual thing last month: he hired “Zack”. That’s not something you see every day in this economy. What made it even more unusual is that he hired someone straight out of college. An engineering student. The kid had interned with his company over the past summer and had stayed in touch. Zack’s a good kid. But that’s not the main reason why Alan hired him.

Maybe it had to do with the results of an interesting [new study](http://millennialbranding.com/2012/11/student-career-development-study/) (http://millennialbranding.com/2012/11/student-career-development-study/) that was just released today?

The study, sponsored by Millennial Branding (a Gen Y research and consulting firm) and StudentAdvisor.com found that “students are not aggressively preparing for their post-college careers” which is “one of several reasons that many struggle to find jobs after graduation.” The study says that although 85% of students surveyed consider internships important to their future career prospects, only a third have a presence on LinkedIn, a primary online mechanism for connecting to internship opportunities and only 1 in 9 have a presence on WordPress, a major home for blogs. The study also reports that 93% do not have an understanding of personal branding and although

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almost all are active in social media, most are not using these services in a career-oriented way.



“Part of the reason why students are struggling to find jobs is because they fail to develop their careers while in college. Students should strive to market themselves online through social networks and actively network offline in order to secure more internships and jobs,” says Dan Schawbel (<http://blogs.forbes.com/danschawbel/>), author of Me 2.0, a book for Gen Yers.



AT&TVoice: Mobile Tools Pay Back By Saving Time And Money
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2012/11/12/prospective-employees-your-job-in-college-is-not-to-get-a-job/>)
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What? College students are mostly using Facebook (<http://www.forbes.com/companies/facebook/>) for fun? They're not branding themselves? They aren't using LinkedIn to bolster their future careers and writing blogs in college to attract the attention of prospective employers? Good for them.

I wish our society wasn't like this. I wish we could be more like the Europeans and Australians where kids are encouraged to take a year off and travel or work for Greenpeace or the Peace Corps. Wouldn't it be great if they could spend four years studying the arts instead of preparing for a job at Price Waterhouse Coopers? But that's not reality in the United States. The reality is that today's colleges are all about getting a job after college. Forget about lifeguarding down the shore after your junior year. Darn it...you're almost twenty years old! I realize that you're not even legal yet to buy a beer, but it's time to get serious! You must have an internship! You must network! You need to begin marketing yourself now, now, now!



Bill Gates On Why American Colleges Have To Change
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2012/11/12/prospective-employees-your-job-in-college-is-not-to-get-a-job/>)
gates-on-why-american-colleges-have-to-change/)

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But this is not why Alan hired Zack. The economy is slow of course. Getting a job isn't easy, particularly for those just entering the market. But as the owner of a technology company that employs ten people full time and dozens part-time and on contract, I'm not sure "personal branding" is the answer. I think Alan, like most of the 600+ small and medium sized clients my firm serves, would agree.



Note to Gen-Y - You Do Not Have To Work For Free

(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/sheneegotiates/2012/11/12/note-to-gen-y-you-do-not-have-to-work-for-free/>)



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Alan, like most business people I know, isn't spending a whole lot of time on LinkedIn or reading blogs. These activities are useful but he's a little too busy running his business. Last year when he decided he could use a part time, entry level technical person to help support his engineering group he did what most business owners do – he asked his office manager to find someone. And she did what many office managers do...asked around, and turned to the local university's career office. And that's where she found Zack. And that's how Zack got his internship at Alan's company.

Was it because of his excellent personal branding? His prolific blog? His intense activity on LinkedIn? No, it was for none of those reasons. Maybe some of these things would've helped him get noticed by certain employers. But Alan wasn't looking for this. And Alan is like most of my clients. He was looking for just two simple things.

He wanted someone smart. It made no difference to Alan whether that person came from the local community college or a private university. He needed a technical kid. A science oriented kid. But most importantly, he wanted an engineering student that got good grades. Marketing, branding and social media activity is nice. But c'mon...in college, the most important thing for a student is academics, isn't it? And, as a technology employer, we all want to hire the smartest kid in the bunch.

And the second thing? "Attendance," Alan told me. "I wanted to know how often the kid showed up to class. A smart employee is useless to me if he doesn't show up to work." I agree. A 4.0 GPA and work experience and hobbies are nice when evaluating a new employee. But it's all about showing up, isn't it? Being dependable is almost as important as being smart to most of my clients. A smart enough person can learn the job. But some people can never learn to be relied upon. A growing number of colleges today are providing class attendance figures as part of their transcripts. Alan paid close attention to these. "I didn't want to hire some genius who never went to class and managed to do well on a test," he said. "I want a smart kid that works hard and will come to work every day, on time."



Photos: How To Land A Job Interview: 10 Tips For Millennials
(<http://www.forbes.com/pictures/1mj451fmm/clean-up-your-social-media-sites-3/>)



Jenna Goudreau
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Photos: Beware! 10 Worst Pieces Of 'Good' Career Advice (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/efile5hink/the-worst-career-advice/>)



Sherri Edwards
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(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/06e9y1isa1w0n5d/>)

My three kids are all in 12th grade (in case you're doing the math, two are twins and the other is eleven months older and all are in the same school year). None of them are smart enough to get in the Ivy League, mainly because they inherited my genes instead of my wife's. But no matter – they'll do fine. And there are a lot of great schools for them to choose from. So how should they prepare for their careers?

I recommend that they not worry so much about LinkedIn, or WordPress or personal branding. Instead I want them all to enjoy themselves and have fun while in college. I want them to meet as many people as they can, because some of these friends may be friends (and connections) for life. I want them to drink in the experience without drinking too much beer. And I want them to get good grades. I want them to be in the top 5% of their class. And I want them to show up to class. Be dependable. Work hard. Getting an internship would be nice too if possible. Of course nothing is for certain and in every economy a college grad will need to hustle to find a job. But you'll have more options this way. Your job in college is to focus on being the best student you can and your career, with a little luck, will take care of itself.

And don't even think about moving back in with your mother and I after you graduate.

Besides *Forbes*, *Gene Marks* (<http://blogs.forbes.com/quickerbettertech/>) writes weekly for *The New York Times* (<http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/author/gene-marks/>) and *Inc.com* (<http://www.inc.com/author/gene-marks/>).

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