Forbes

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**11/12/2012 @ 6:05PM |30,894 views**

**6 Things You Must Do To Get Your First Job After College**

November may seem awfully early in the school year to be thinking about how you’re going to get a job when you graduate. But Dan Schawbel, Forbes contributor and founder of Millennial Branding, a one-man research and consulting firm that focuses on so-called Millennials or Generation Y, aged 18-29, the new generation of college students needs to get mobilized much earlier than spring of senior year. Schawbel, who is 29 and the author of a book about personal branding, [*Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future*](http://personalbrandingbook.com), says students should take action as early as high school, if they are going to map out a promising track to getting a job straight out of college.

The majority of college students are not doing this. A new [study](http://millennialbranding.com/2012/11/student-career-development-study/) Schawbel put together with college research website StudentAdvisor.com, underlines his contention.I talked to Schawbel about the results of the study and asked him what students should be doing to set themselves up for jobs when they graduate. The study was relatively small—a survey of 200 students across the country taken in August 2012. But Schawbel says it’s borne out by his research among members of Generation Y. Here is his advice for students:

**1. Create a LinkedIn profile**.  
Schawbel says young people should do this as early as their senior year in high school. Even if the profile is just a bare-bones list of where you attend high school, your extra-curricular activities, including awards or accolades, what you see as your skills, and a summary of the sort of career that may interest you, it’s a good idea to create this early. Do include jobs you’ve held, like working at a summer camp or babysitting; they show you’re enterprising and have shouldered responsibility. As you grow and accumulate more work experience, you can delete your early jobs and add new ones.

I’ll add one more LinkedIn strength: It can be extremely helpful to start building your list of connections early. Most adults you know have LinkedIn profiles with multiple contacts. Do connect to as many people as you can.

Schawbel says most students figure that because they already have a Facebook page, they are doing sufficient social networking. But most employers don’t troll Facebook looking for job candidates. “It looks good if employers can find you on LinkedIn,” insists Schawbel, who predicts it will remain the pre-eminent professional social networking site in the foreseeable future. Among college students, the survey showed that only a third have a presence on LinkedIn. You will stand out from the competition if you create a LinkedIn account.

**2. Establish a presence on WordPress or through your own blog.**According to the survey, only one in nine students has a presence on WordPress, which Schawbel says is the best site to put together a personal blog. He also advocates buying your own domain name through a service like GoDaddy.com, and then installing WordPress on the site you have created. What should young people blog about? If you don’t know what career path you want to pursue, pick a personal interest and write about that, whether it’s pop music or tennis or Model United Nations. It’s preferable if you can zero in on a professional topic like marketing, but if you can’t, do write about a subject that interests you.

**3. Get an internship as early as possible.**  
Like establishing a LinkedIn profile and a blog, Schawbel believes it’s never too early to start interning. According to the survey, students know that internships are valuable but they are failing to land them. Some 85% said they believed having an internship is either important or very important for their career and 52% said they hoped to have had three or more internships before graduating. But only 40% had done at least one internship thus far.

Schawbel says the best internships to get early on are with companies that have wide brand recognition. The summer of his junior year in college, Schawbel interned at Reebok. He is convinced that having the Reebok name on his résumé helped him land a marketing job at data storage company EMC the July following his graduation. “The reality is I did almost nothing at Reebok,” he says bluntly. “But brand names open doors.”

**4. Get creative about finding a mentor.**Of the students surveyed, 70% said they had at least one mentor. Of that group, the greatest share, 37%, named their parent as their mentor, while 28% said they relied on a professor, 21% said they used a family or friend and 17% said their current or former employer was a mentor. Just 10% said they found a mentor through social networking. Schawbel understands why students turn to parents, family and friends, but he recommends making use of social networks. Unless your parents work in the field you want to pursue, they are not going to be able to help you most effectively.

“You’ve got to find someone who is doing what you want to do,” says Schawbel. He recommends doing an advanced search on LinkedIn for the company and field where you want to work. For instance, if you want to work in marketing and MTV is your dream employer, enter those two search terms and see who comes up. Or if you’re interested in human resources and you fantasize about working at Microsoft, search on those words. Send off emails to the people you find and ask if they will meet with you. To me this seems like a long shot but Schawbel observes that many adults perceive such an approach as impressive, and you only need one person to say yes. “If you get one mentor, it can change everything for you,” he notes.

I’ll add one suggestion to Schawbel’s: If you are directed enough to know the field and company where you want to work, ask your parent to do a search on their LinkedIn accounts. If you have a connection through your mom or dad, that can yield a fruitful way to approach someone.

**5. Use your school’s career services office.**Though this seems like the most obvious way to get career help, the study reveals that only 29% of students use their college’s career office. In the best case scenario, the office will connect you with an alum who works in your field of interest who will help you get a job. Though career offices can also help with résumé and [cover letter](http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2011/03/24/how-to-write-a-cover-letter/?lc=int_mb_1001) writing, and job interview preparations, the most powerful resource is the alumni database. At my alma mater, Brown University, there is an online alumni database, BRUnet, with more than 5,300 alumni registered who are willing to share their career experiences with Brown students or alumni. Other universities have similar resources. Take advantage of them.

**6. Join a professional development or industry-specific group.**According to the study, only 22% of students belong to a professional development or industry-related group. This is another untapped resource. Most schools have college or university chapters of big professional groups. Some examples from Schawbel’s files: Boston University has a chapter of the American Marketing Association. The University of Illinois has a Finance Club and the University of Northern Iowa has an Accounting Club. These groups can connect you to established professionals in your area of interest. This is a great way to make mentoring connections and to form relationships that are likely to be helpful in the future.

Schawbel insists that the old-fashioned idea of spending your time at college exploring intellectual pursuits and putting off entry into the real world of work is no longer relevant. If you haven’t started networking, putting together a LinkedIn profile and doing internships in high school, you should start your freshman year. Don’t put it off, he admonishes: “The longer you wait, the worse off you are.”