Top 10 Job Hunting Tips from the Fresh Faces in Interior Design

This year at NeoCon World’s Trade Fair in Chicago, IIDA hosted a standing-room-only panel presentation for students and recent graduates appropriately titled "Career Boot Camp." The panel was a huge hit, and the event sold out before anyone arrived at the show. We moderated the panel which was comprised of four designers who recently landed jobs and had agreed to share their stories, advice, and tips in front of over 150 design students at the IIDA Headquarters.

Although the panel was the first student event taking place on the last day of NeoCon, following a huge lineup of daily celebrations and evening festivities, it didn’t stop attendees from lining up an hour before the event was to begin. Our panelists gave such incredible insight on their job search strategies and such great feedback to the audience questions that we simply had to share. Read on for the top 10 job hunting tips we gleaned from the session.

#1 Network, Network, Network!
Networking could not have been stressed enough. According to the panelists, it is by far the most important activity for you to engage in while job hunting. When asked for their networking suggestions, panelist Michelle Carroll mentioned that being a part of IIDA was her gateway to networking:

“I went to countless networking events. Even though I was two hours away [from Chicago] I did everything I could to be there. I knew that I needed to meet people, I needed to..."
collect business cards, and I have a stack of business cards from people I have met through IIDA.”

It is always possible when talking to people that you will meet someone who knows a contact that is in need of designer. With the countless resumes firms receive, employers are more likely to hire someone they have a connection to rather than read through a stack of resumes.

How to Use Twitter | www.nicolewilliams.com
Get People to Read Your Blog | www.nicolewilliams.com
5 Networking Mistakes | www.nicolewilliams.com
Informational Interviewing: 10 Tips to Prepare | Monster

#2 Gain Experience in the Industry through an Internship
It’s a fact. Gaining experience in the industry will help you market yourself during your job search. Your future employer knows you’ve been busy with school, which is why they love seeing that you took the initiative to find an internship experience as well. And in this economy, more and more employers are hiring straight from their intern pool, since they already know and trust you.

What would they have done differently? Two panelists stated they wished they would have gained more experience or undertaken another internship. Another way to look at it is that interning is a great way to understand what specific type of design work you enjoy, the type of firm you want to work for, and the type of people you want to work with. Even if you don’t land the job after interning, with the use of sites like LinkedIn, it is easier than ever to keep in contact with those you have worked for and it is a great way to obtain quality recommendations.

Internship Do’s and Don’ts | www.nicolewilliams.com

#3 Get a Mentor
In this tough economy, the best mentor for a recent graduate is a professional who has experience in the industry. Whether they have successfully landed or kept a job in this recession, they know what it takes to be successful in today’s economic climate. Let’s face it; job searching is not the same game it was 10 years ago. So talk to people who have gone through the same things you are dealing with right now.

SAVE THE DATE: Get involved in your local IIDA Chapter and attend Student-Mentoring Week, February 21st-25th

How To Find a Mentor | Monster

#4 Start Your Job Hunt as Soon as Possible
Sure, sites like Careerbuilder.com and indeed.com are great ways to see what's available currently in the job market, but it's not enough. And you have to start early. Think about where you want to work, what's your dream job? Do research on your ideal companies to work for and monitor their corporate websites for job openings. Don't be afraid to reach out to someone at the company who has your dream job. Call them and ask them for an "informational interview" so that you can spend 15 minutes asking
them what their profession is really like. Hopefully, you'll make an impression, and that employer might think of your name first if a job should open up at their company.

**Mastering the Informational Interview**

#5 Talk Your Way In the Front Door
A great portfolio isn’t enough anymore, you have to believe in yourself and show confidence that you are the perfect candidate.

“I can honestly tell you and my boss will tell you, I didn’t get a job because I had this amazing portfolio. It wasn’t coming down from the world and being this amazing designer, I talked myself in the door and that’s what stood out,” said Amberlee Isabella.

There’s no doubt that self-assuredness will carry you a long way, but be careful you don’t come off as smug or conceited. If you are a recent graduate, your interviewer won’t expect you to have years of experience in the field. So play up the strengths you do have with honesty and confidence.

**Entrepreneurs Give Career Advice - Business Tips from Successful Entrepreneurs - Marie Claire**
**Job Interview Advice - Best Things to Say at Interviews - Marie Claire**

#6 Construct Your Resume like A Design Project
Another great tip given by the panelists was to package your resume like a design project. The great advantage of working within a creative industry is that designers can think outside the box rather than constructing everything in black and white.

“I put together a CD of my portfolio and put everything in a folder and sent it out to everyone so when they opened it up they can see who I am,” stated Christine Kenline.

**Reinvent Your Resume | www.nicolewilliams.com**
**Best Resume - Resume Tips - Get a Job - Marie Claire**

Think outside of the box and do a creative video resume:
**Video Resume Tips**
**5 Tips For a Better Visual Resume | www.nicolewilliams.com**

#7 Be Involved In Extracurricular Activities
Interestingly enough, it is not just your grades that make you stand out, but your interests and what you do outside of school. If you have the time to get involved in extracurricular leadership on campus, it will show potential employers that you are a great multi-tasker and that you’re passionate about things outside of design. In other words, you won’t just be a one-dimensional designer. Extracurricular activities won’t just look great on your resume, they are also a great way to network.

**How to Become a Leading Job Candidate in a Dead Economy**

#8 Work on Your Time Management
These days, students need to study, spend time in the studio, work, research internships, work at their internships, volunteer, *and* find time to be with friends and family. How can you balance everything? It is
all about time management. The trick is to learn what works best for you; then you’ll be able to accomplish anything. If you feel like you’re taking on too many projects, don’t hesitate to cross some items off of your list. Here’s what two of our panelists had to say about time management:

“I think a really big thing in our industry is time management and I worked at a restaurant, I bartended, I worked at a coffee shop. I did so many different things during college,” said Christine.

“Actually for the past year, I worked full time at Gensler and full time at Savannah getting my masters. To be quite honest with you, I didn’t do it in the most graceful manner,” Amberlee said. “Whenever you do add things to your plate you are cutting into the depth of your work. You really need to try and be diligent. Don’t try and do everything.”

#9 Know the Difference between Expectations and Goals

When you have high expectations, there’s a possibility you will be disappointed down the road. Not everything goes as planned, but that’s okay. Many students are taking the recession as a good time to further their education, like attending grad school instead of jumping into a job right away. Goals keep you motivated, and are part of the bigger picture, so always keep them in mind. Look at situations that didn’t go as planned as advantages rather than disappointments. Michelle Kraker, Manager of Student Marketing and Social Media, advised the audience during the panel:

“It’s important to know that things won’t go exactly how you want, so that you won’t be disappointed when they don’t happen exactly according to plan. But at the same time, don’t compromise what you want to do.”

You have a goal, but not sure how to make it a reality?
Click here: 9 Secrets of Motivated People | Real Simple

#10 Do Your Research

Lastly, the panelists mentioned the importance of always putting in your research before you write a cover letter or show up for an interview. Employers will ask you about what you know about the firm and just like a professor knows when you haven’t read the material, the employer will notice you haven’t done your research. If you take the time to do research, it can help you construct questions for your employer as well as highlight your enthusiasm. Employers expect you to know who they are, what they do, and why they do it.

We're confident that if you follow these tips, utilize your IIDA Student Membership resources and stay positive, you'll soon be looking at a shiny new job offer.

Happy job hunting! And be sure to send us your comments and success stories!