Advice for College Students: How to Maximize Your Career Development During Covid-19

By Katharine Marianacci

(The following is a career resource from NACE for career centers to share with students)

In this strange and uncertain situation, you might find yourself with less structure to your days and more time on your hands. Classes have gone remote, campus events and activities cancelled, and in-person social interactions drastically decreased. During these times, it's easy to become overwhelmed and debilitated by all the changes… or to view this as Spring Break 2.0: Self-Quarantine Edition. Try not to fall into either trap and, instead, see this as an opportunity to improve yourself and make progress toward your career goals.

Here are six ways you can make the most of this time and maximize your career development:

1. **Update your resume.** Your resume is typically your first introduction and key opportunity to convince employers that they should interview you. Yet, you have a limited amount of time to make an impression, with employers spending only about six seconds reviewing a resume before deciding if a candidate is a good fit or not. Many companies also use Applicant Tracking System (ATS) software to screen resumes, passing off only the top candidates to actual human recruiters.

   For all of these reasons, it is essential that you make your resume the best it can be—and now is a great time to do it. Identify your personal brand and strongest selling points. Highlight your unique accomplishments and transferrable skills. Optimize your resume with keywords and customize it each time you apply to a different position or company.

2. **Create a professional online presence (and clean up your personal social media accounts).** As part of the hiring process today, many employers check a candidate's online presence to learn more about them. This may be even more prevalent in the COVID-19 climate with employers having limited access to candidates in person.

   Take this opportunity to establish a professional online brand that you would be proud for prospective employers to see. Google yourself and clean up any inappropriate or questionable content. Create a LinkedIn profile, if you don't already have one. Depending on your industry, you might also consider developing a digital portfolio or a website to showcase your work.

3. **Build new skills.** In today's digital age, it's possible to learn almost anything through the internet. Use your extra time at home to build new skills that can get you ahead in your career. Study a foreign language or learn a new technical skill. Read a book or listen to a podcast related to your industry of interest. Complete an online certificate program or join a professional organization. There is so much to learn, and there are so many great skill-building resources out there. This is your chance to take advantage.

4. **Practice virtual interviewing.** In the wake of COVID-19, many companies have changed recruiting strategies to reduce or eliminate in-person interactions. For jobseekers, this means virtual interviews— so be prepared to take your next interview digitally. Choose an at-home interview space and check your technology. Research the company, practice commonly asked questions by webcam, and send a thank you email afterward.

   Through all of this, try to be patient if it takes employers longer than usual to get back to you. With the move to remote work and unexpected organizational changes, there may be delays in the hiring process.

5. **Cultivate your professional network.** Social distancing doesn't mean that youhave to put networking on hold. In fact, this might be an ideal time to cultivate professional relationships, with most people having extra time at home and a need to interact with others.

   Modern technology makes this easy too. Use email or LinkedIn to reach out to professionals in industries and roles of interest. Ask them to set up a virtual meeting or phone call to learn more about their experiences and get advice. Embrace the sense of community by participating in an online forum or joining in the chat during a webinar. Don't forget about existing connections either. COVID-19 is a shared global experience, so this is your chance to check in with the people you know and re-establish old connections.

6. **Get help from your career center.** You don't have to do this alone! Although not physically on campus, your school's career center staff is available to support you remotely. Take advantage of online resources, virtual appointments, workshops, and digital networking opportunities. Whether you're exploring academic majors, looking for an internship, or getting ready for life after graduation—your career center is here to help and can provide guidance specific to your goals as well as the current situation.

With the uncertain economic state, it is important that you use this time to maximize your career readiness and make yourself as marketable as possible. While it is true that some industries have slowed down hiring, others have not and may even have an increased demand for talent in the wake of COVID-19.

So stay hopeful, wash your hands, and try out these six ways to make progress toward your career goals.

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