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Helping Undergraduates Generate Internship Opportunities Through Relationship Marketing: A Case Report

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Undergraduate students often seek summer or academic-year internships as part of their academic and professional development. This case report illustrates a systematic self-marketing approach to generating internship opportunities, based on the theory of diffusion of innovations, and insights from the field of relationship marketing. Steps in the process for obtaining job or internship offers include: identifying areas of desired contribution; enlisting allies; identifying role models; interviewing role models; and demonstrating your value and joining the team. This case report illustrates how one student followed these steps to generate an internship opportunity. Overall, relationship marketing skills can help students improve their career prospects. Diverse students from under-resourced backgrounds may face barriers to accessing allies and role models. Such students should seek out pipeline programs that provide mentoring and other connections. These programs will improve student ability to engage in relationship marketing by expanding their network of allies, role models, and mentors. Employers should also identify pipeline programs and partner with them to assure greater inclusion of students from under-resourced backgrounds in their internship programs.

Keywords: undergraduate, internship, job-seeking, self-marketing, relationship marketing, role models, interviews, diversity

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INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate students often seek summer or academic-year internships as part of their academic and professional development (Hora et al., 2017). Internships generally offer students the opportunity to gain experience and exposure to clinical practice or research, while contributing to the work product of the sponsoring organization (Coco, 2000). Some internships are paid; some offer academic credit; some are part-time during the academic year; some are full-time during the summer (Maynard, 1997). Some are structured as part of a college curriculum (Carter, 1998).

Many students pursue an internship as their first foray into job-seeking. One challenge that students face is how to flip their orientation from self-centered to other-centered in their pursuit of professional opportunities. Students are at risk of approaching employers with a self-centered presentation because parents, teachers, and professors have naturally focused on student growth and development (Kohn, 1993), and some students may internalize this as self-centeredness (Miller, 1983).

Moreover, as students seek assistance in their job searches, counselors often suggest introspection as a first step. For example, college-based career centers often help students discover and articulate career goals (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Hinkelman and Luzzo, 2007; Sampson et al., 2014; Kronholz, 2015).

On one hand, this student self-centeredness is important so that students can become self-aware, develop a sense of their own identity, and be strong advocates for their own interests. On the other hand, when approaching employers, students who present as very self-centered may not appeal as much as students who demonstrate that they are looking to understand and advance the employer's agenda (Burnett and Evans, 2016).

Students who wish to focus on the needs of employers should gain exposure to principles of marketing, which involve discovering and addressing market needs. Some prior work does emphasize the importance of applying marketing principles to student job searches. In one approach, marketing professors created a curriculum and taught students to create a self-marketing plan (McCorkle et al., 1992). In this curriculum, self-marketing includes the step of "positioning" in which students "identify the career skills sought by each target market." That article calls for more research in positioning and in contact strategies. However, subsequent articles on self-marketing have not elaborated in depth on positioning and contact strategies for students (Kitchen, 1994; Smith, 2004; Myers et al., 2011; Hood et al., 2014).

The present article starts to address this gap in the literature with a case report. We use this case report to illustrate a systematic method for helping students position themselves relative to market needs, and for contacting prospective employers and surfacing or generating opportunities. This systematic approach is based on the theory of diffusion of innovations, and insights from the practice of relationship marketing. We now present the context for this case report, before summarizing the theory of diffusion of innovations, and the practices of relationship marketing.

SETTING FOR CASE REPORT

Along with colleagues, author JB has led a service learning internship at a university-based medical center since 2003 (Belkora et al., 2015). This program, the Patient Support Corps, trains students to serve as health coaches, navigators, and advocates for vulnerable patients.

The program has grown to involve 79 interns in 2020, ranging from first-year undergraduates to post-baccalaureate students. The program now has over 250 alumni, 178 of whom are connected through an online group for ongoing mentoring and knowledge sharing.

Author JB has counseled dozens of students on how to strengthen their applications to the Patient Support Corps, and has counseled dozens of intern alumni on how to find other opportunities. Using his knowledge of diffusion of innovations theory, and the practices of relationship marketing, JB has developed a systematic other-centered method for students to use in pursuing work opportunities.

The need for such a method arose from JB's observation that most college students applying to the Patient Support Corps explain their appeal in terms of their self-interest. They generally explain that they need to gain experience before applying to professional school. Here is an excerpt from a recent such email elaborating on one student's rationale for applying:

"I believe that your program would provide invaluable experiences that would allow me to combine my passion for teaching with my interests in medicine and the healthcare system."

The Patient Support Corps does exist in part to nurture the passion and interests of students like this one. However, like other internship sponsors and employers, the program needs student growth to take place in the context of delivering the organization's primary services, which are oriented to patients. Prospective employers are generally more likely to respond positively to students who focus on the employer agenda in addition to the student's needs (Burnett and Evans, 2016).

Therefore, the goal of this article is to provide concrete guidance to students about how to appeal to the employer's agenda when seeking internship or job opportunities.

CASE PARTICIPANTS

To advance this goal, this article features a case report in which a mentor (author JB) guided a student (author NK) through steps to generate an internship opportunity. At the time of the events we describe in this case report, NK was a second year premedical student at Dartmouth College, majoring in biomedical engineering. JB was a faculty member at the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine.

INTERVENTION THEORY

The mentor's strategy in this case was based on insights from the theory of diffusion and the practice of relationship marketing. We describe these in the next two sections, before we present a chronological account of the intervention itself.

Diffusion Theory

Diffusion theory articulates how adopters (such as employers) choose or reject innovations (such as job applicants) based on the adopter's agenda. Rogers found that adoption rates increase with an innovation's simplicity; trialability; observability; relative advantage; and compatibility (Rogers, 2003).

Simplicity means that the innovation presents a low burden to the adopter. For example, consumers might preferentially adopt one type of smartphone because of a simpler user interface. In the context of job-seeking, simplicity means the applicant should not burden a prospective employer with complex communication or requests. For example, prospective applicants who request an email exchange or brief phone call are lower burden than those who ask employers if they can meet in person, or over coffee or lunch. Email and phone calls are much simpler overtures.

Trialability means the adopter wants to start with a low level of commitment. To continue the earlier example, emails and phone calls allow a prospective employer to try out an interaction with an applicant, compared to the higher commitment of an in-person meeting.

Observability refers to when the employer can observe evidence of the applicant's performance. For example, submitting a portfolio of prior work may enhance the observability of an applicant's prowess. It's worth noting, too, that in every interaction, an applicant is providing evidence of how they communicate and conduct themselves. As the adage goes, "How you do anything is how you do everything."

Relative Advantage means the adopter wants to see a higher return on investment from one path than others. In the context of job-seeking, the employer wants evidence that the applicant will advance the employer's agenda better than other applicants.

Compatibility means that the adopter does not have to make too many changes to their standard operating procedure to accommodate the innovation. In job-seeking terms, the applicant's skills should fit into existing or planned workflows and culture.

In summary, adopters seek innovations that advance their agenda. According to the theory of diffusion of innovations, job applicants will improve their chances of being adopted if they focus on the employer agenda. The employer's agenda includes not just the promise of higher productivity (what Rogers calls relative advantage) but also other adoption factors such as simplicity, trialability, observability, and compatibility.

Diffusion theory provides high-level insights to promote adoption of diverse innovations, including job applications. Field marketing strategies help translate those insights into action. Therefore, we now describe key field marketing practices before presenting the details of our case report.

Field Marketing Practices

Among field marketing strategies, relationship marketing can be highly compatible with the insights of diffusion theory. A key principle of relationship marketing is that people, including job applicants, should leverage existing relationships to learn more about market needs and to pursue opportunities (Jaffe, 2010).

A good way to understand relationship marketing is to contrast it with the approach known as content marketing (Pulizzi and Barrett, 2009) A longstanding tool in content marketing is captured in the acronym AIDA, which stands for Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action (Hassan et al., 2015). In this type of marketing, the path to success is to build a high-volume funnel of opportunities leading to a relatively few successful transactions, such as sales or, in our domain, a job or internship offer.

As an example of a funnel-based approach, content marketers suggest creating awareness with as broad an audience as possible at the top of the funnel. For example, job-seekers might identify a large number of potential employers and attract their attention with cover letters, resumes, emailing, blogging, tweeting, instagramming, etc. Over time, you cultivate the audience's desire for whatever you have to offer, until some of them take action, for example by purchasing your product or offering you a job.

AIDA-based content marketing can be successful. However, it can also be time-consuming and inefficient, since it relies on building a funnel, and filling the funnel with people who may never enter into relationships with you.

Relationship marketing flips the AIDA marketing funnel. In relationship marketing, you take stock of the people who are already taking Action with you and have "bought" what you are offering. Thus while action is the last step in the AIDA funnel, it's the first step in the "flipped funnel." For students, people who have taken action with you can include the people who have admitted you to your existing or prior educational programs; or taught you; or have employed you in the past; or mentored you previously.

When seeking to sell your services (e.g. find a job or internship), you first enlist these people as your allies and seek introductions to a wider audience of people who may Desire you (step 2 in the flipped funnel) because they are Interested (step 3) in the area to which you are contributing. Your allies can help make them Aware (step 4) of you.

As this case report will describe, students can use relationship marketing to campaign for their adoption by internship sponsors. According to diffusion of innovations theory, to maximize success, students should flip the funnel in ways that maximize simplicity, trialability, observability, relative advantage, and compatibility for employers. Based on mentoring dozens of students with these principles in mind, author JB has articulated the following steps in a job-seeking adoption campaign: identifying areas of desired contribution; enlisting allies; identifying and interviewing role models; and demonstrating your value and joining the team. As a mnemonic device, the acronym CARD describes this adoption campaign: Contribution; Allies; Role models; and Demonstrating value.

CASE INTERVENTION AND RESULTS

We now review each step in a CARD campaign with examples, drawn from the case of author NK applying the steps under author JB's guidance.

Identifying Your Target Area of Desired Contribution

When embarking on a campaign to be adopted by an employer, students need a domain in which to focus their search. Career counselors often advise students to hone in on an area of personal passion or desired development (Kronholz, 2015). Author JB suggests that students should express their interest as an area of desired contribution. When students articulate an area of desired contribution, they will focus on advancing the needs of others.

How can students figure out their area of desired contribution? For some, it will be obvious–a puzzle that they are intrinsically motivated to solve; where others clearly value and benefit from the solution; and relevant to their course of study. Other students may not feel moved to contribute to any cause or mission, and may feel that they are drifting without direction. Some may feel moved to contribute in too many directions, and that they lack focus.

According to Cal Newport, a computer scientist and educator, the best strategy is to pick one potential area of contribution and start building skill in that domain (Newport, 2012). Don't worry about whether this will be a lifelong pursuit. You can refine your areas of contribution over time, and contribute to several in your life. You will want to pick a domain where you anticipate sufficient psychic and material payoff to keep you going. You should also choose an area where you have some aptitude for growing your skills. And you should feel intrinsic interest in solving puzzles in this area. It should be an area where you can lose track of time as you work. That state of flow is a sign of intrinsic interest (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

For example, author JB began his career by contributing to progress in the area of patient advocacy. He and his colleagues developed methods to help patients get care aligned with their personal goals and priorities. This led to spinoff initiatives, such as training prehealth students to serve as patient advocates. Training students to advocate for patients led to other lateral career moves, such as training financial advisors to help people save for retirement.

In the case at hand, author NK became interested in contributing to progress in the design and implementation of prosthetic limbs after beginning his undergraduate studies in biomedical engineering. This led NK to look for entry-level opportunities to contribute in the field of prosthetics.

Enlisting Allies and Finding Role Models

Having established a target area of desired contribution, you should next enlist allies from among your existing contacts. For students, these might include your teachers and people in the admissions department who admitted you and have a stake in your future success. You do not necessarily need to have a big network, or cast a wide net. Start with what you have instead of lamenting anything you don't have.

Ask your contacts if they know any role models who work in your area of desired contribution. Explain that you wish to interview role models as part of your career exploration. Framing these interviews as role model interviews is inherently flattering. Who doesn't want to be seen as a role model?

If you are a student, you will also benefit from what author JB calls the rookie card. Role models will be motivated to help you because you are a rookie and they remember starting out themselves. Just don't ask them to do anything other than share their story. Don't ask to pick their brain (something that vultures do), or tell them you would like them to be your mentor, or give you an internship. Don't offer to buy them lunch or a cup of coffee. Just demonstrate that you have done your homework, and request a brief call to hear the story of how they came to be a role model for someone like you. We'll describe in the next section exactly how to conduct the role model interview.

Sometimes you can find role models indirectly rather than through direct introductions. You may find them through Google searches. They may have authored books or papers. They may be cited in interviews and articles, or appeared on podcasts or webinars. People who know of your interests, even family members including parents, may forward you resources.

For example, on hearing of author JB's graduate school interest in statistics, his father mailed him a newspaper clipping about the use of a computer system for aiding intensive care. JB took this article to professors at the Stanford medical school, who pointed him to a surgical fellow working on evaluating the system. This doctor ended up advising JB on his PhD thesis on the topic of medical decision making and they have worked together ever since.

To continue our primary case study for this article, author NK began his recent quest for an internship by searching the internet, social media, and his university's alumni network, Through trial and error, he homed in on keywords to find relevant connections in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he would be spending his breaks at home. Keywords included: prosthetics bay area, University of California (UCSF) orthotics and prosthetics, and UCSF prosthetics faculty.

NK eventually found a prosthetist (specialist in prosthetics) in UCSF's Orthotics and Prosthetics Center, through the university's online directory. To increase the chances of a reply, NK enlisted JB, a family acquaintance working at UCSF, as an ally. JB wrote an introductory email.

The introductory email requested permission to put NK in touch with the UCSF prosthetist. The email included:

Niklas came across your work recently and was very inspired by it . . . I was wondering if you would be able to carve out 20 min on your schedule to speak with Niklas by telephone? If you are agreeable to this, I can connect you to Niklas by email to work out logistics of scheduling a brief call.

If you find someone who doesn't fit exactly what you are looking for but may be indirectly involved in your field of desired contribution, ask them for introductions to other role models, and then do the same to the sources they recommend. By using this process and "snowballing" your introductions, you can hone in on the best possible role models for your desired area of contribution.

In addition to casting a wider net by snowballing your most relevant contacts, you can improve your chances by keeping your communication brief and making specific requests.

In the case of author NK, the prosthetist responded affirmatively to the introductory email. NK then emailed the prosthetist a message offering specific windows of time:

If you are free, anytime next Wednesday after 11am or Thursday between 7 am and 11 am would work great (Pacific Time). Friday between 11 am and 1 pm would work as well. If you are exceedingly busy next week, I would be happy to speak at another future time as well!

The UCSF prosthetist again responded positively. In other recent cases, if role models balk at the request to be interviewed, author JB has encouraged students to offer to transcribe the interview and use it as the basis for an article about the role model. This becomes a work product that the role model can share with students, peers and colleagues, or family members. This leverages the compatibility dimension of diffusion theory. Role models likely field recurring requests for explanations of their work and career, and having an interview-based summary could save them time and promote their agenda. This kind of offer can sweeten the appeal to role models, because busy people like to see that their time investment will be leveraged to benefit more than one person. In accordance with diffusion theory, creating a work product out of the interview can also serve the purpose of making your relative advantage more observable. You will demonstrate your initiative, writing skills, and client-centeredness.

Generally, as you set up a role model interview, you should be also demonstrating your relative advantage through your professionalism, your clear communication, your specific requests, and your level of preparedness.

Interviewing Role Models

By now you have defined your field of contribution, identified role models, and requested role model interviews.

Before Interviewing a Role Model

The main goals of a role model interview are to listen and learn from your role model. This is called a discovery interview (Belkora, 2015). Your goal is to stimulate disclosure. You want your role model to disclose their career path, their mentors, success factors, barriers to success, and emerging puzzles and trends in their field.

The interview should also give you new leads on other potential role models to interview. Finally, through the conduct of your interview, you will demonstrate your qualities and build a relationship with this role model.

Any serious interviewer creates an interview guide before conducting an interview (Stewart and Cash, 2008). The interview guide is your agenda for the interview, including an outline of how you will begin the interview, and what questions you will ask.

When preparing your questions, design them in a way that maximizes your listening time and minimizes your talking time. Start by giving a very brief description of your desired area of contribution, if you haven't talked about this previously. Then, start with the following question: "What's the story behind how you came to be a role model for someone like me?" The wording of this question is important. It's an open-ended question ("what's the story") with an embedded presupposition ("you came to be a role model."). Presuppositions establish a stake in the ground for the respondent to react (Schwantz, 2005; Simons, 2006). Some will deny being a role model, but will understand the gist or desired direction of the question. The phrase will anchor them on attributes they would find salient if they were to consider themselves a role model. Others may embrace being a role model as part of their identity and will be appropriately triggered to elaborate.

Shortly we'll describe how to ask follow-up questions that get the role model to elaborate on their story. However, you should also have a checklist of backup questions in your interview guide. Again, you should be ready to ask about turning points on their career path; mentors; other success factors; barriers or obstacles to success that they've had to overcome; and puzzles and trends.

Share your list of questions/interview guide with other allies and mentors, and they may think of some to add to the list. Evolve your interview guide over time based on what you are learning about working in your area of desired contribution.

The interview guide and the manner in which you ask and answer questions are critical for your success, as we will see in the next section. However, too many interviewers neglect the other conditions for success, which include the circumstances under which the interview will take place.

Recording: Make sure you are set up to audio-record the interview. You do not want to rely exclusively on taking notes. It's hard to conduct an interview while also taking notes. Instead, you will record and transcribe the interview for best analysis and interpretation. This will also facilitate creating a transcript or article or other work product for your role model to use for their own purposes. For legal and ethical reasons, ask your respondent for permission to record, to alleviate your note-taking, and tell them you will share back a copy of the recording. You can record calls using apps like Zoom or Uberconference, among others. Make sure to conduct a test with whatever system you select prior to the interview. Recording is the most important success factor in the conduct of role model interviews.

Location and scheduling: Ideally, you want your respondent to be in a quiet place and on a landline or strong internet connection. The audio quality is of paramount importance, as is the respondent's ability to focus on the interview. You don't want them answering your questions while they drive, or attend to pets or children, run errands, do household chores, or otherwise attend to distractions. Demonstrate your professionalism by asking them to find a time on their calendar when they are likely to be in a quiet environment with access to their work files and when you can speak uninterrupted.

Timing: You would like the respondent to know exactly what time the interview starts, and when it will conclude. Request 20 min for the interview while scheduling it in a 30 min slot. Send a confirmation email with the information about how you will connect, in addition to a calendar invitation with that information embedded. Build some redundancy in to your plans–if your initial audio connection fails via computer, have a backup plan to connect by telephone.

Your audio quality: Make sure you are set up so the audio quality on your end will be outstanding. Avoid cellular connections or wifi if possible. Get on a landline, or if calling by computer, connect your computer to an ethernet cord so your connection to the internet is wired not wireless. Use a wired headset, such as one that connects to your computer via universal Serial Bus (USB-A or USB-C), not a Bluetooth or other wireless headset.

In the case of author NK interviewing the prosthetist role model at UCSF, NK reserved a landline at the Dartmouth Career Center to conduct his interview in order to ensure a quiet room with good internet connectivity. He also set up an Uber conference account, as this was the best option to record voice calls at the time, and practiced using the software with a family member.

NK's interview guide included the following questions, which demonstrate his preparation and commitment to contributing in the area of prosthetics:

1. How did you decide to pursue a career in Orthotics and Prosthetics?
2. Were you first interested in surgery or prosthetics? (which one led to the other?)
3. What does a day in your life in the Orthotics and Prosthetics Center look like?
4. How much are you involved in the design of prosthetics vs. the actual surgeries to implement these devices?
5. What does it take to create a new product such as myoelectric prosthetics?
6. What was your major in college? (Right now, I am interested in the medical route (pre-med, med school), and the engineering route. I am trying to decide whether to go one way or the other, or study both in college.)
7. At what point did you know you wanted to get into this field?
8. What are the main challenges of this field as a career?
9. What skills are important in your work?
10. Do you see the field of prosthetics changing dramatically in the near future? How/will brain-machine interface technologies change your work?
11. Any general advice you would have for an undergraduate looking to get into medicine/engineering?
12. I am home at the end of this fall and am free for a few weeks before Christmas? Any shadowing/volunteering I could do? (such as organizing/analyzing data, working on a survey, etc.)

During Your Interview of a Role Model

Conduct the interview by telephone, or if online, without any cameras on you or the role model you are interviewing.

Video calls may be useful for other purposes, but for the purpose of stimulating disclosure, the video component will only distract you and your respondent. Narrowing the communication channel will increase the attention both parties give to the verbal communication. This will reduce the opportunity for implicit bias and misinterpretation. Human beings think they are skilled at reading non-verbal cues, but we are not, unless the non-verbal cues are intentional (Elfenbein and Eisenkraft, 2010). In an interview, what this means is that if you frown in concentration, your respondent may think you are frowning in disapproval, and this may color how they elaborate. Turning off the video will also conserve bandwidth to maximize audio quality.

When following up on a role model's answers to your questions, use author JB's SLCT interview process to get them to tell you what they are thinking but not saying (Belkora, 2015). SLCT stands for Scribing, Laddering, Checking, and Triaging.

First, ask them to tell the story of how they came to be a role model for someone like you. Scribe what they initially have to say, just by summarizing and paraphrasing what they say in outline format. When they stop, be silent until they continue. If they don't fill the silence, ask them to continue the story.

Once they have saturated what they wanted to say, proceed with Laddering. This is the process by which you review your notes and ask them to elaborate on any parts of the story that strike you as vague, or unclear, or particularly important.

When you have satisfied your curiosity about the initial scribed notes, use your prepared list of questions to probe or Check in on your topics of interest.

Later you will Triage your interview notes to distill maximum insights and learning.

Good preparation for your interview is very important, but also be prepared to change the direction of your interview if needed. If your interview gets cut short, know which questions are most important and skip to those.

For example, about 25 min into the interview with the UCSF prosthetist, author NK was notified by the Dartmouth Career Center staff that they were closing early. NK skipped to the end of his question list to talk to the prosthetist about visiting. This paid off as NK was able to wrap up the interview within the next 5 min and schedule a visit to the UCSF Orthotics and Prosthetics Center.

After Your Interview of a Role Model

As soon as you access the recording of your interview, you should transcribe it yourself. This is because we typically transcribe at about one-sixth the speed of conversation. This means that you will get to review your interview in slow motion, which will allow you to absorb more than you do at full speed. Also, when you type or hand-write, you activate different parts of the information processing apparatus in your brain (Longcamp et al., 2008), compared to just listening or recalling. You will gain new insights by transcribing yourself.

Having a written transcription of the call will give you easy access to all the information said during the call for future reference and is a good way to critique your own interviewing skills.

Then use your transcript and your notes to create a summary of the interview. Think of ways you can write up the summary in ways that might be useful to your role model. For example, you might create a brief article that they can share with colleagues or clients or family members.

Send a handwritten thank you card to your interviewee and let them know how much this experience meant to you. Few people send handwritten thank you cards so this will help communicate your gratitude most effectively.

With good preparation and follow-up, you will also come across as professional and serious about your work. A strong role model interview will go a long way in demonstrating your competence.

In the case of NK interviewing the UCSF prosthetist, here is a critical portion of the transcript in which the role model shares key insights about choosing a career path, drawing distinctions between becoming a surgeon; an engineer; and a prosthetist who fits prosthetic devices such as artificial limbs. Notice that he suggests shadowing professionals such as himself, which creates an opening for NK to follow up later and request to visit.

I would strongly suggest, if I were in your position, go spend physical time with someone in an office, round specifically with an orthopedic surgeon in areas where you could apply engineering type principles.

Arthroplasty is the one area of orthopedic surgery where you see I think the most mechanical engineers turned MDs because there is *such a need for that in that area, and in fact most of the mechanical engineers who turned to orthopedic surgeons have been arthroplasty specialists who also work for industry, so they wear three hats. And you are going to be most valuable in that position. That's gonna be a springboard in any direction you want to go. At that point, you could do research, you could teach, you can be 100% clinical practice, you can be private, you can be in an institutional setting, you could then choose to go corporate and work on the R and D [research and development] side, you are really well positioned.*

If you don't want to be a surgeon, which is really the question you need to ask, then perhaps be an engineer. We need really good engineers that can understand these principles and create good implants for us as well as good prosthetic components.

But [if you're going to be a prosthetist] you should really get a sense of if you like working with implants.

For example, someone can wheel into our office and we can fit them with a running prosthesis and in 25 min I can have them sprinting and they haven't run in 10 years. And there are tears of joy and it's a feel-good moment, and to me that's one of the reasons why I am continually drawn back to this profession, you have this immediate gratification. You can tweak the prosthesis, you can customize it-you'll see these patients chronically, obviously a leg isn't going to grow back, so I'll see my patients their entire life.

If chronic care isn't of interest to you and you just want to do a surgery and then never see that patient again, which a lot of people admit to and that's fine, then you want to maybe think about more of a surgical route [rather than prosthetist].

So really I would categorize the different options for yourself and find people that, well, find people like you found me, that their careers are one you would want to model yours after, and then go on a plane and hang out with them for a day or 2.

Demonstrating Your Value and Joining the Team

Having interviewed a role model, you may have the chance to help them in meaningful ways. Your interview may have illuminated projects they are working on, or smaller tasks you can help with. Rather than asking for a position, take the initiative and suggest a way in which you could be useful.

One of author JB's students recently learned during an interview that their role model's research project was being delayed by the need to manually package and mail a large number of kits to research participants. The student offered to help with this chore and thereby accelerate the research project, creating value for the role model.

You may not be able to identify specific tasks where you can contribute right away. Still, if you followed up after your interview with a valuable summary, you've demonstrated some value. Now you can request to shadow your role model with the promise that you will once again summarize and share insights. During your shadowing, you will be able to identify more areas of possible contribution.

Your summary should be a written critical reflection on your visit. A critical reflection is just that-a short review summarizing your thoughts on their work, including areas you think work well and those where there may be opportunities for improvement. Spend the time to think about all the complaints your target has had with their field, or any tasks you noticed needed to get done. Expand on these by proposing solutions, and offer ways you could help the situation.

In the case of NK, at the end of the role model interview, NK asked if he could visit the UCSF Orthotics and Prosthetics Center. Having just recommended this kind of shadowing during the interview, the UCSF prosthetist acceded to this request. After the visit, NK wrote a critical reflection, which included the following:

Thinking towards projects I could pursue; it may be helpful to start compiling a list of 'stories' about patients and their experiences with limbs. These stories may help [the UCSF prosthetist] and his team to recognize patterns when it comes to common difficulties, and smaller adjustments that helped patients in the past. Since there are elements of subjectivity in the selection of limbs, creating a record of past encounters, what worked, and what didn't, may be a meaningful way I could make a difference.

In regard to innovation, the role of insurance also played an interesting role. New limbs weren't being held up by limits in technological advancements, but the bottle neck actually existed with insurance companies. If a new product wouldn't be covered by insurance, it would be nearly useless as a viable option for patients. This issue presented an opportunity to potentially help the team. If I could make myself useful here somehow, it would be a great chance to show my value. One idea would be to make a comprehensive spreadsheet of all insurance companies and what products they cover. It could be an impactful way to help them keep track of insurance policies and streamline the decision making when it comes to bringing new products into their repertoire.

NK followed up after his visit with a handwritten thank you card, and emails with the Clinic Manager at the UCSF Orthotics and Prosthetics Center. The Clinic Manager suggested that NK return to the clinic on his next break to shadow, learn, and contribute to the team as an unpaid intern.

DISCUSSION

Summary

This article has described how author JB uses diffusion theory and relationship marketing principles to guide students through the process of obtaining internships and job offers. Author NK followed this process and offers his experience as a case study to illustrate it. The process hinges on conducting a campaign intended to stimulate an employer to adopt the student as an intern or employee. The campaign requires the student to focus on the employer's agenda and needs. Such a campaign will succeed to the extent that it demonstrates the simplicity, trialability, observability, relative advantage, and compatibility of adopting the applicant as a member of the team. These attributes are known to be forces that promote adoption across a wide range of innovations. To demonstrate these attributes, applicants can identify their area of desired contribution; enlist allies and find role models; interview the role models in a way that demonstrates professionalism and preparedness; and then start to add value to the team's work ahead of a formal job application or offer.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of next frontiers in research and practice, one key issue is that some students have much lower access to relationship marketing strategies than others. In our case study, author NK found author JB through a family connection. However, students from under-resourced backgrounds can be at a disadvantage when it comes to enlisting allies, identifying role models, and accessing the resources needed to conduct interviews and follow up. That's because the personal networks of students from under-resourced backgrounds may not feature as many allies and role models as the personal networks of students from resource-rich backgrounds (Hora et al., 2020). Students from highly resourced backgrounds often have access to broad and deep networks simply through family and peer connections.

This disparity accentuates the need for pipeline programs that actively recruit and support students from under-resourced backgrounds (Bouye et al., 2016). These programs often provide mentors and role models that expand student networks. Better networks facilitate the kind of relationship marketing that leads to job and internship opportunities.

Increasing diversity and excellence in internship and employment settings will require positioning students from under-resourced backgrounds so that they can engage in relationship marketing strategies, and demonstrate their value to potential employers.

One public/private partnership has recently emerged in California to tackle diversity of the health workforce. The California Future Health Workforce Commission issued a report in 2019 outlining its blueprint for success (California Future Health Workforce Commission, 2019). Their top recommendation is "Expand and scale pipeline programs to recruit and prepare students from underrepresented and low-income backgrounds for health careers." A key strategy will be to "level the playing field by providing role models, information, and connections that students from more privileged backgrounds already have in their daily lives."

Pipeline programs for under-represented or under-resourced students can improve student access to allies and role models. Students should seek out pipeline programs in order to obtain their support. Employers should seek out pipeline programs in order to increase the diversity and excellence of their internships.

University students may find pipeline programs or opportunities among the student organizations on campus, or through their university's Career Development offices. For example, at NK's college, the Center for Professional Development offers personalized career help and workshops to all students and has compiled a Diversity Directory Guide with specific programs for diverse populations. The college's Institution for Diversity and Equity also offers special programs and internships for certain groups of students attending the university. Getting involved in university programs that focus on inclusion and equity is another way that students of all backgrounds can make connections and find mentors. For students unable to afford unpaid internships, NK's college offers several fellowships to finance learning opportunities outside of the university. This may include stipends for travel or living costs as well.

In conclusion, the relationship marketing strategies described in this article can be useful to students seeking internships and other job opportunities. We must do more to ensure all students, including those from under-resourced backgrounds, have access to allies and role models and can engage in relationship marketing to obtain internships and job opportunities.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusion of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JB devised the method for generating internship opportunities and described it in this paper. NK applied the method to his search for an internship, and described this experience in the case report section of the paper. Both authors contributed to drafting and revising the article. Both authors are accountable for the content of this work.

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