

How Burned-Out Workers Are Jump-Starting Their Careers

Plenty of professionals are resetting with mid-career internships.

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The old tradition of sticking with one or two major employers over a lifetime and eventually retiring with a gifted gold watch to enjoy grandkids and travel is no longer the reality for most of us. Workers who fall within the younger end of the baby-boomer generation will hold an average of 12 jobs over their lives. For millennials, the numbers are even higher. Almost half of them will quit their jobs by 2021, according to a 2019 Deloitte survey.

The simple truth is that most of us don't like our first adult jobs enough to stick with them for decades. At some point, many of us find ourselves longing for a sea change in terms of position, job duties, industry or all three. But one way to effectively explore career changes that's growing in popularity is the concept of a mid-career internship. Here's what these internships look like, and how to tell if they're a good choice for you or your company.

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Internship, Minternship, Returnship

– What's the Difference?

The traditional internship model describes a work experience that's part education and part transition. These interns are generally filled by college students or recent graduates and helps these young workers transition into their first professional experience. Mid-career internships, sometimes referred to as "minternships," turn that model around by targeting a different kind of transition. They're filled by workers with some amount of experience, perhaps 10 years or even more. These workers are exploring new possibilities, just like traditional interns, but the transition is from one industry into another or from one job path into another.

The "returnship" is a variation on that theme. It's for workers who have been out of the workplace for some period of time. For example, parents who took extended leave to raise children or employees who have been on sabbaticals could use this type of internship to transition back into their career paths or new opportunities.

Benefits of Internships for Older Workers

An internship might seem like an odd choice for an older worker, yet those who have taken this approach to changing careers report that it offers a number of benefits. For example, working directly with a company engaged in your new targeted field may give you access to valuable contacts. Those connections can assist you as you seek a more permanent position in that field. You may also benefit from participating in teams and projects that can teach you more about your new field or position and its accompanying skillsets.

From the perspective of the small-business owner, offering

mid-career internships may be a way to build a stronger pool of talent or even decrease turnover at your company. Workers looking to make a smooth move to a new career through a minternship may feel a sense of excitement, loyalty and pride by getting a new start with your company, even if they aren't being paid much.

How to Tell If It's the Right Move for You

A mid-career internship isn't necessarily right for every worker seeking to make a change. They're best suited for those who have already explored various possibilities and decided on a likely shift to a new role or industry, but who need to develop new skills, experience and contacts to bring to that job hunt. Additionally, minternships typically come with a much-reduced salary. To successfully navigate that type of work situation, you'll need to ensure you have sufficient funds saved to help offset a loss of income.

Many mid-career interns also find it necessary to reduce their standard of living. Some take on roommates, while others move to less-expensive housing and begin taking public transportation. This is especially likely if your new internship requires you to relocate to a different or larger city with a higher cost of living.

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Your Next Steps

If you've decided that a mid-career internship is the right move for you, your next step is to research potential placement opportunities involving the skills and industries you're most interested in exploring. Remember that an internship isn't quite the same thing as trying on and discarding a new outfit, no matter how apt the analogy seems

at first. An internship at any age involves a substantial commitment of your time and energy and an equal commitment on the part of the company to train and integrate you into its team. Treat the decision seriously and explore as many options as possible before seeking placement with a new company as a “mintern.” However, once you’ve winnowed down your options and researched them thoroughly, a strategically placed internship can help position you perfectly to spring into your next career.

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