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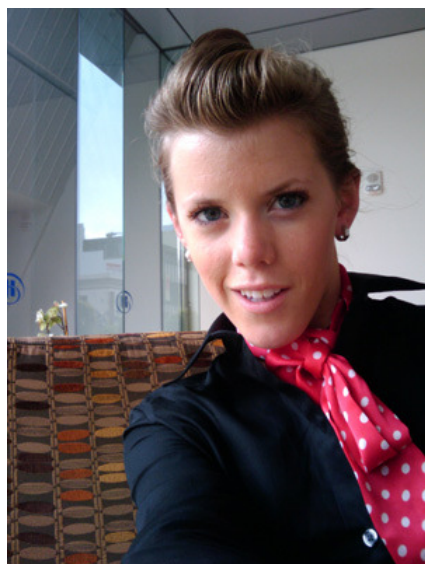
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[How CEOs feel about gap years](#)



Monika interviewed several CEOs on her gap year travels and presents the results for us here

The nation's industry-leading CEOs declare it will make you, "more mature, stimulating, passionate, assertive, and goal-oriented." No, they are not talking about a miracle pill. These are the adjectives that c-level executives use to describe how they perceive students that took a year off during any point of their education. While their reviews may seem glowing, there are several areas that former and future "gapers" must keep in mind before walking in for that all-important interview. So where exactly does a gap year get a student? I personally questioned nearly two dozen of North America's industry leaders—from telecommunication giants to food and beverage gurus—to find out how their industries perceive potential hires that have taken a gap year.

It all begins with praise: "Fantastic!" "Very positive." "Incredibly honorable." Joy Rothschild, Senior Vice President of Human Resources for Omni Hotels even says that she is, "jealous of gap year students". But while the reviews may be glowing, nearly every industry's response came down to making the year a productive one and clearing articulating your explanation. "As long as they can explain it, it's great. If their mother told them it was time to get off the couch, so they traveled Europe for a year, I see it differently," says Hal Rosenberg, General Manager of Veria, the nation's first and only 360-degree Media Company devoted to healthy lifestyle and wellness.

What students participate in during their gap year is vital to clarifying to employers why their experiences should move them from the "interesting" column to the "desirable" column. Rothschild stresses this importance saying, "What you did on your gap year shows us what you would do with your free time if you were given 365 days of it. Hence, those activity choices carry a lot of weight." Linda Matzigkeit, Senior Vice President of Strategic Planning and Human Resources for Children's Hospital of Atlanta adds that, "If you spent a year doing something related to our industry or philosophy, we see a clear match in you." Roopom Banerjee, President and CEO of RainDance Technologies, a life sciences tools and diagnostics company, highlights the science community's perspective of the gap year, "If a student has a specific goal or dream in mind for their gap-year, then they should take the time to go after it. To maximize the experience, candidates should do something relevant and impressive otherwise, we would rather pull someone right out of school."

Don Browne, President of Telemundo Communications, sees a gap year on an applicant's resume as an opportunity for an, "interesting line of conversation". From there, he inquires deeper into the instigating factors which clue him in on an individual's real personality and dreams. "There is clear risk in taking a gap year. It shows that an individual can handle the real world and academia."

While the overwhelming majority of executives agree that gap years certainly make for a more interesting job candidate, applicants must take on the responsibility of illustrating their year's experiences are marketable to their potential employers. Says Banerjee, "We love to see that a candidate has a hobby or passion that they pursue aside from their work, but if an applicant does not illustrate to us how their gap year will make them a more vital and valued employee, we see [the gap year] as a hobby."

Ben Berry, CIO of the Oregon Department of Transportation, places that question at the heart of his inquires as well, "If they have taken a gap year, where does that put them right now in terms of who they are and their goals? Is that a match for what we can offer? Prove it to me."

With the consideration of "marketing" and "matches" in mind, how do years spent doing community service versus doing professional internships make their marks with employers? While the overwhelming majority of industry leaders showed no distinct preference, Ocean Spray CEO, Randy Papadellis, and Telemundo Communications President, Don Browne, hold more distinct opinions. Says Papadellis, "we [the food and beverage industry] prefer professional gap years because we see you as pre-trained and more skilled if you did work in our industry. It also shows passion for what we do." Browne offers the contrary opinion, suggesting that, "We [the broadcasting industry] prefer service because it shows an enlarged perspective. Anyone that walks in the shoes of struggling people through volunteering efforts has gained a perspective that they cannot learn in academia or the workplace."

While outside experience may add diversity of thought, just like a college major or involvement in certain activities, what one chooses to do on a gap year sets them in a different track for what they can do when they finish the year. To this, Papadellis adds, "If you spent your year teaching English, while that may not relate directly to my industry, you may be able to say it helped you learn to work with people. I could use that in my sales staff. My project engineers? Not as important." Helene Solomon, Co-

Founder and CEO of Solomon McCown, a strategic communications firm in Boston, adds that while the gap year provides, "non-conventional spice and variety to the workplace", she sees a red flag if the year off shows no relevant commitment to her industry. "I can personally admire building schools in Haiti, but if you haven't done anything relevant or relatable to my industry, how can I tell if six months from now you won't declare that you love construction—not communications— and leave? That's a risk for employers."

In the end, the industry leaders want gap year students to stress the importance of setting a goal, planning out how they will approach it, and then following

through, while keeping in mind that the choices they make during their year could get them in the hot seat of their dream job— or sent across the street.

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