

MODULE 7

Preparing for What's Next



You may not know what the future holds, but one thing's for certain: your returnship will end.

That's not meant to scare you. In fact, it's a great thing. It means that after this program is complete, you will have done what you set out to do – restarted your career!

These upcoming weeks are some of the most important in the program, and it's vital that you stay focused on the task at hand. Though we don't want you so preoccupied with the outcome that you miss out on the experience, it's a good idea to start planning for possible scenarios at the end of this program, including both internal and external opportunities. You may not need to enact plans for each outcome, but you'll be more confident if you prepare.

**"Plans are
worthless, but
planning is
everything."**

– Dwight Eisenhower



General Tips

As you venture deeper into the second half of your returnship, stay focused on doing all you can to get the most out of this time, including:

- **Meet expectations**

Ensure you understand your manager's expectations and metrics for success. Don't be afraid to ask for clarity and to check in regularly to see how you're progressing.

- **Make time to talk**

Don't let those 1:1s with your manager slip. Regular conversations about performance will temper your anxiety and keep your focus on your contributions to the work.

- **Conduct self-assessments often**

If you see areas for improvement or opportunities for growth, don't keep it to yourself. Talk to your manager about where you'd most like to improve and see if they are aligned with your evaluation.

- **Seek ways to bridge knowledge gaps**

Whether it be a training module, a resource your company offers, the chance to speak with a mentor or shadowing someone on the team, addressing your skills gaps will help you grow as a professional and stand out as a self-aware, high achiever.

- **Play to your strengths**

Be sure to acknowledge your strengths too, and look for ways to best apply and leverage them to the advancement of the team.

- **Keep setting goals!**

Remember that Returnship Success Plan? It's meant to be a fluid, working document. Your goals should continue to change and grow in scope as you gain more understanding and experience in your role.

Focusing on Performance

At this stage in the process, it's very common for returners to feel anxious about whether they are getting a full-time position. Our biggest piece of advice for you is to continue to keep discussions with your manager centered around your performance. Your actions are the only thing you can control and ultimately what your manager is assessing as they consider you for a full-time job. Depending on what stage of the program you're in, your manager might not have the ability to give you a guarantee on conversion just yet. Pushing them when they don't have an answer, especially on things like budget and headcount, will only frustrate you both.

Instead of asking for something they can't provide, center your conversations on the things they can provide, including clear expectations and feedback on your performance. When you feel yourself ready to ask "Am I getting the job at the end?" take a second to reframe your question. Around the halfway mark, be vocal about clarifying expectations: "I want you to know how



excited I am about this opportunity. I'm really enjoying the work and learning a lot. I want to be sure I understand and am meeting your expectations of me. Do you have some time to go over them with me this week?"

As you get further in your returnship, you can make your queries a bit more targeted: "Is there anything more or different that I can be doing now to put myself in the best position for a long term role on the team should a position be available at the end of my returnship?"

Towards the final month of the program, you can broach the topic of conversion a bit more directly: "I know we're getting to the end of the program. I've especially enjoyed working on (project) and contributing by (list personal accomplishments). Do you know when final decisions regarding conversion will be made?"

Exploring Opportunities Internally: The Do's and Don'ts

It's natural to be curious about other roles that may be available internally. If you find yourself meshing well with the company but not sure if there will be a longer-term place for you on your current team, or if you simply realize another role is a better fit for you, taking a second to look at open positions probably feels like a logical next step. We understand the impulse, but this one is tricky so be thoughtful and transparent. Check out the Do's and Don'ts below.

DO...	DON'T...
<p>Research Where is your company investing its resources? Are they increasing hiring? These answers likely indicate how your organization is growing, and help you visualize potential opportunities if you remain with your organization post-returnship.</p> <p>Consider other departments If you get the indication that you're not getting converted, but you enjoy the company, review current internal opportunities. You may even ask your manager if they would be willing to help make connections to other hiring teams and serve as a reference.</p> <p>Stay focused Remember to extract every last ounce of experience and value from your returnship. You should be primarily focused on doing great work, soliciting feedback and meeting as many people as you can in the organization up until the very last day.</p>	<p>Overexert yourself Even if conversion anxiety is eating you up, don't immediately start applying to any and all jobs internally. Take a step back and breathe. If a similar job to the one you're doing now opens up, you can consider asking your manager about it. It may even foster conversation regarding your manager's thoughts on your performance and potential conversion decisions.</p> <p>Skip past your manager You don't want to start applying for other jobs internally without first talking with your manager. We've seen scenarios where people didn't honor that simple rule of professionalism and harmed their relationships with their managers.</p>



Exploring Opportunities Externally

If you're getting signals that you won't be converted – or you've decided this company isn't quite the right match for you – you'll want to explore external opportunities. Before you do that, it's a good idea to ask yourself an important question. If not here, where do I want to work?

Yes, you read that correctly. Where do you WANT to work? Remember that you are in the driver's seat of your job search. A good general tip? Avoid job boards! While it's certainly possible to find a job through one of those platforms, chances are you'll be left feeling frustrated. Here's why:

**Job
Boards:
Where
Dreams Go
To Die**



- Many jobs have been posted and unanswered for weeks or months at a time.
- Listing employers are ones you've either never heard of or aren't excited about (and thus won't be able to convey the passion needed to get the job).
- You'll spend far too much time trying to fit yourself into these jobs rather than finding a job that fits you.
- Following the job boards may encourage you to follow the BAD advice that a job search is purely a "numbers game." A productive job search is about quality over quantity, not copying and pasting the same boilerplate cover letter and resume to every listing on the job board.





Creating a Checklist for Target Companies

When surveying the landscape of potential employers, it is easy to have one goal company in mind, or conversely, think that you will be satisfied as long as you have an offer.

We encourage you to keep some key factors in mind as you create your list of target companies.

Which boxes are your “must-haves” and which are your “nice-to-haves”?



Check which are "must-haves" versus "nice-to-haves"

<input type="checkbox"/>	PROXIMITY	What would your commute be like? Or is remote life perfect for you? Set yourself up for less stress day-to-day by figuring out how far you're willing to travel each day and only considering companies that fall within your range.
<input type="checkbox"/>	CONNECTIONS	Who do you know? The best source to learn about an organization is not the company website – it's the people who work there! Where do the people in your network work? Do they enjoy their roles? Are there openings in your field? Can they serve as a reference or give you a referral?
<input type="checkbox"/>	CULTURE	What do they value? Spend some time learning about whether the company's culture works well for you. Do they have resource groups for parents? Is there flexibility? If you can, talk to current or past employees to get that sneak peek behind the curtain. Research recent initiatives, any media coverage, and sites like Glassdoor or LinkedIn.
<input type="checkbox"/>	GROWTH	Do they foster professional development? You have restarted your career but you're not done growing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	MISSION	Do you believe in the mission? No one wants to spend their days slogging away on tasks not aligned with their values. You're more likely to be motivated to do good work when you believe in the work you're doing. Life is short. Don't work for a company you don't believe in.



Writing a Pitch Letter

As you seriously consider new positions, you'll likely have to pitch yourself in written form. Whether it's a cover letter or an email pitch to someone in your network, below are a few tips and examples.

- **Tip #1:**

Customize your letter for the intended audience. It's easy to spot when someone has sent the same cover letter to every employer under the sun. Showcasing that you've done some research on the specific organization you're applying for will give you an advantage over those who didn't bother to do the extra work. Demonstrate understanding of their business and why you want to work there specifically.

I am thrilled to apply for the (specific role) position at Company. I have followed your organization for many years and was inspired by the recent launch of the (product). As an avid consumer of the product myself, this launch proved that Company clearly cares about user experience. As an industry professional, it showed me that Company isn't afraid to reject the status quo and innovate at the highest levels.

- **Tip #2:**

Address any objections or concerns regarding your candidacy head-on. If you're trying to make a career pivot, explain why your diverse experiences make you uniquely qualified for the job and focus on transferable skills. Example:

While I spent the majority of my career in large firms, I am confident I can thrive in your startup environment. Startups require the ability to work collaboratively across different functions. I've always been a relationship builder and my returnship experience at (Company) allowed me to further hone that skill by allowing me to work cross-functionally. I thrived most when everyone rolled up their sleeves and focused on creating the best product for the customer, rather than worrying about whether something was or wasn't in their scope.

- **Tip #3:**

Use metrics to demonstrate the ways you've provided value in your career previously. Doing so not only highlights your know-how, it gives you a chance to showcase that you understand the measures of success that drive their business (again, this is where research becomes very important). Example:

I know how important customer satisfaction is to Company. Equipped with a customer first mindset, I've helped lead my previous team at (former company) to a 10% increase in customer satisfaction ratings after three years of declining scores. The ability to distill customer input in a way that leads to action from the team has always been my specialty and is something I feel I am uniquely suited to do for your organization.



“Bad” cover letters include copy and paste boilerplate business-speak, lack of research, typos, and even the wrong company name. Believe us – we’ve seen it happen more than once! Bottom line: each letter should be unique.

If your cover letter can be sent to multiple businesses without any editing, it probably isn’t an effective pitch. Learn more by checking out the millions of examples of good and bad cover letters across the internet.

Can I Do Another Returnship?

We get this question a lot. If you aren’t extended an offer from your company, we understand that another returnship can feel like a safe landing. Ultimately, we’re not the gatekeepers of returnship hiring – the companies are. Though we cannot explicitly tell you what to do, we strongly advise against doing a second returnship.

Why not? Well, to put it simply, we don’t think you need it. After completing a returnship, you are well positioned to leverage this experience into a full-time job. The biggest hurdle to getting back into employment is the gap on your resume. Thanks to your returnship experience, that’s no longer a concern. You have gained:

- “Bullet points” for your resume and new experiences to discuss
- A newly refreshed and expanded professional network
- Far more clarity as to how you can best apply your strengths and mitigate any areas for improvement.

Path Forward Alumni + Community

As you move into this next phase of your career, we strongly encourage you to lean on and contribute to the greater Path Forward community. Your fellow returners, past and present, can be a great source of camaraderie and can serve as resources for you in the future. Whether it’s immediately after this program or later down the road, if you find yourself looking for a new opportunity, this network has you covered. [Join us!](#)



Join Path Forward volunteers, alumni, and your fellow returners in our [online community](#) to find helpful advice, resources, networking, and more.