Graduated Now What

Idea In Short

Treat your first job as an internship for acquiring skills and relationships. Learn business fundamentals, get fluent with Generative AI, and reverse-engineer the resume bullets you want.

Think Like a Business Executive

Many graduates ask which consulting path fits their psychology or marketing background. The truth is that consulting encompasses financial, operational, marketing, risk, and regulatory work. All of these involve sales and client psychology at senior levels. When you reach senior manager or director, leadership and sales dominate your day. Your college major matters less after your first or second job. Employers want to know if you can solve problems and create massive value for the company and its customers.

No matter what industry you enter, you must think like a business executive. Read an income statement and balance sheet. Tell stories with financial ratios. Understand the business model and how the company makes money. Learn customer acquisition costs and customer lifetime value. From a marketing perspective, determine whether the company has a top-of-funnel awareness problem or a bottom-of-funnel conversion problem. 1 Escape imposter syndrome by mastering the fundamentals.

Treat Your Job Like an Internship

Approach your current job as a place to acquire skills, relationships, and a career foundation. Treat it like an internship. Project-based work teaches project management, deliverable creation, and cross-functional collaboration. Client-facing work demonstrates maturity, patience, and communication. Get results because everyone needs to add value. Generative AI will absorb low-level paper-pushing and routine processes.

If you want management consulting basics, pursue structured learning paths. Coursera specializations scaffold topics into buckets and walk you through traditional approaches. They demonstrate interest and work ethic, even though many people never finish their courses. The faculty members organize the content into digestible frameworks. Online courses also give you a common vocabulary with other consultants. When you walk into an interview or a client meeting, shared frameworks like Porter's Five Forces or the SWOT analysis help you communicate efficiently. You do not need to master every framework but you should know which one applies to which situation.

Position Yourself for Consulting

Consulting firms typically recruit through top-tier Master of Business Administration [MBA] and doctoral programs. Breaking in as an experienced hire requires tangible skills the firm needs immediately. Get really good at something consulting firms want. Write a resume that highlights your achievements with clarity. Think of your resume as a marketing document, not a biography.

If you want to break into consulting within 12 months, prioritize Generative AI fluency. Companies desperately want to figure out which processes they can streamline, eliminate, or improve with Generative AI. If you can help them save millions in wasted time and customer frustration, you will get hired. McKinsey research estimates that up to 30 percent of hours worked across the economy could be automated by 2030, accelerated by Generative AI. 2 Demonstrate your fluency, entrepreneurship, and ability to build simple agents. Working with Microsoft Copilot and similar tools sets you apart.

Meet Successful People

Admit that your sample size of success stories is probably small. Get exposure to many different types of people worth imitating. This can happen in person, through books, podcasts, and stories of successful people. You need to know what success looks like for you. Feed your mind with diverse perspectives.

Learn like crazy because we are in a renaissance of intelligence. Generative AI feels like magic. Be a sponge, be coachable, and do more. Be humble and ask questions. Let masters share their craft with you. Take small jobs and do them with excellence. Run experiments and stretch yourself. Get into a safe environment where small failures are not fatal. Receive

harsh feedback and improve on it. Do not chase small trophies.

Do Great Work and Ask for More

Maybe you are not learning as much but you are performing well. Ask whether you are in the top 10 percent of your company at a specific task. Treat your career like a jigsaw puzzle and reverse-engineer the answers. If you are a solo contributor, the next level means team-based work. If you are a team member, the next level means leading something.

Ask for harder assignments. Effort and focus drive long-term success. Find where the value sits in your business. Is it in marketing to new people or converting existing customers into loyalists? Identify the perennial problem your company spends money trying to solve every year. Solve it. Build a win-win relationship with your manager and find ways to make her life easier. This is a fast track to being valued in the company. Look for opportunities to present your findings to senior leaders. Visibility matters because decision-makers need to know who produces results. Volunteer to present on behalf of your team when the opportunity arises. The more senior leaders see your work, the more trust and responsibility you earn over time.

Disrupt Yourself

Ask Generative AI the scary question about how it might take over big parts of your current job. Keep asking follow-up questions until you understand how you will be disrupted. Then either protect against that disruption or accelerate it and become the disruptor yourself. Toastmasters International offers a practical way to improve presentation skills and visibility. 3 This nonprofit organization meets weekly, has thousands of local chapters, and lets you practice public speaking in a supportive environment.

Evaluate Your Satisfaction

A mentor suggests evaluating any project, job, or station with three questions. First, what am I doing? Is this work you want to do and does it point in the right direction? Are you intrinsically motivated? Second, how well are you doing it? Are you exceeding expectations or struggling because it is new? Third, how much are you learning? In the corporate world it is easy to stop learning. Nobody forces you to work on new things or face feedback. Coasting happens, and in a Generative AI world you cannot afford to coast.

Build Your Resume Deliberately

Ask to join cross-functional team projects. You will be tasked for your current role while also working within the context of enterprise-sized problems. This expands your network and gives you milestones and chances to score goals. Reverse-engineer the bullet point you want on your resume. After finishing a five-month project, identify two bullet points that show problem, action, and results. Choose work that builds the skills and relationships you need for the career you want.

- 1Cal Newport On Deep Work And Focused Skill Building
- 2McKinsey On Generative AI And The Future Of Work
- 3Toastmasters International For Public Speaking Practice

Summary

Your career is a jigsaw puzzle, not a straight line. Build skills, nurture relationships, embrace Generative AI, and ask hard questions about what success means to you. Reverse-engineer the future you want.