HOW TO TURN YOUR HILLTERNSHIP INTO A JOB

There is a direct pipeline from intern to congressional staffer. If you make the most of your internship, then you can work your way up to writing policy for a member of congress. There are a lot of barriers on the road to becoming a congressional staffer. The application and interview process for staff positions is more intense than it is for interns. Applicants must network all the time to make the connections they need to get an interview. The biggest advantage that autistic people have when job-hunting is grit. Autistic people do the impossible every day. Finding a job on Capitol Hill is just another opportunity to prove everyone wrong. If this is something you want, the most important thing you can do is to never give up.

Start job-searching early. Start looking for a job as soon as you realize you want to work on Capitol Hill. Your internship makes you qualified to work as a staff assistant, legislative correspondent, and scheduler. Offices post job openings in the resources below:

- Dome Watch Virtual Job Board (Democrat offices only)
- Senate Employment Bulletin
- House Employment Bulletin

Check these resources daily for new postings. Apply as soon as you see an opening. Your materials do not need to be perfect. They only need to be good enough to get an interview.
Offices get hundreds of applications for every opening they post. Your application will not stand out unless you have someone flag your resume. Use your network. The right people will fight tooth-and-nail to find you permanent employment on Capitol Hill. Tell them every time you apply.

**Network in a way that works for you.** You will need to network to get the most out of your internship. Capitol Hill is full of interesting people who are excited to share their knowledge with interns. Networking takes a lot of social interaction and can lead to sensory overload. Below are some networking tips for autistic people.

- **Find staffers who work on your special interests.** They would be happy to talk with you and will be impressed by your subject expertise.
- **Meet somewhere quiet.** Capitol Hill is loud and busy, but there are a few quiet spots. *Consider meeting in the following places.*
  - **The Rayburn Cafeteria:** It is usually dead
  - **Dirksen Cafe:** It is usually very quiet
- **Avoid the following places:**
  - **Longworth Dunkin' Donuts:** It is ALWAYS loud and hectic. You cannot hear the other person speak.
  - **Cups (in the basement of Russell):** Cups is amazing. Everyone loves Cups. That is why it is busy.
- **Get to know the people in your office.** You do not need to travel far to make great connections. These people will notice your work ethic and grit. They will work hard to help you succeed on Capitol Hill. Ask about their work as a staffer. Offer to help work on projects that interest you. Just ask them for coffee like everyone else.

**NOTE: Getting coffee just means meeting someone. It does not always mean actual coffee.**

- Say thank you. Send a short “Thank You” email to everyone you meet with. If you forget to send a “Thank You” email, then send one when you remember. It is never too late to
let people know that you appreciate their time. It does not have to be long. A short two-sentence note is perfect!

SAMPLE THANK YOU EMAIL:

Dear [insert name here],

Thank you for meeting with me to talk about [insert topic here] and hear about my internship experience. I appreciate your time and advice.

Thanks again!

- [insert your name here]

• Go to briefings. Organizations host briefings about all kinds of topics. Briefings are presentations for congressional staff that promote a certain bill. The presentations are quiet and sensory-friendly. Let the staff in your office know about your special interests. They will send you to watch briefings and take notes for them. Also, keep an eye out for briefings that you are also interested. Let your office know that you would like to attend. Briefings usually give out free food.

• Skip the receptions. Organizations host “parties” with free food for congressional staff. These parties are loud and crowded. Do not go to network. Go for the free food. Bring your noise-cancelling headphones and other assistive devices. You can find a schedule of receptions here.

• Go to disability events. There is a strong disability community in Washington D.C. Watch for events around the city. My personal favorites are the ASAN gala and NCIL reception.

• Keep your network updated. Let your network know when you apply for jobs. Give them a copy of your resume. They may send it to offices looking for full-time staffers.
Know the process. The application and interview process for congressional staff is long and difficult. It involves three to four interviews, most of which are in-person. The questions are hard. There is a lot of competition. Bring your a-game to every interview. An outline of the process is below:

- **Applying:** Send your resume and cover letter to the email, or portal, listed in the job posting. Let your network know that you applied.
- **First interview:** This interview probably will be over the phone. It will be similar to your internship interview.
- **Second interview:** This interview will probably be in-person. Expect to interview with two to three people. Do everything you can to calm down before this interview. Jobs are very competitive.
- **Third interview:** This interview will be similar to the second interview. More senior staff may be present. If you are asked the same question twice, keep your answers consistent. They were good enough to get you the third interview.
- **Fourth interview:** If you made it to this stage then you pretty much have the job. This interview is with the legislator that you will be working for. It is usually less than fifteen minutes and informal.
- **If you do not get the job:** Stay positive. Jobs are competitive. It is not a reflection on you. The process is hard. It can take more than a year to find a job on Capitol Hill. Try to learn something from every rejection.
Staff application and interview process

Applying
- Send materials to office
- Let network know you applied

First interview
- Phone interview

Second interview
- In-person
- 2-3 staff members present

Third interview
- In-person
- Senior staff present

Fourth interview
- With legislator

Applying
- Send materials to office
- Let network know you applied

First interview
- Phone interview

Second interview
- In-person
- 2-3 staff members present

Third interview
- In-person
- Senior staff present

Fourth interview
- With legislator
Know the position. Read the job description carefully. Take time to think about how your experiences relate to the job opening. Your internship experience will give you a lot to work with. Research the office you are applying to. See what issues they work on and prepare to be asked about them.

Only apply to jobs that you are passionate about. Working as an autistic person is difficult. You will always have to work harder than neurotypical people. It is not worth it unless you are in love with your job.

Capitol Hill is a revolving door. Internships qualify you to do all kinds of work. If you find a job outside of Capitol Hill, remember that you can always come back. When you do, your job experience will make you even more valuable.

It takes determination and sheer grit to find employment on Capitol Hill. The most important thing you can do is to never give up. Finding a job on Capitol Hill is difficult, but not impossible. Keep all of your accomplishments in mind during your job search. You are qualified and worthy of meaningful employment. You will find a congressional office that thinks so as well.

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