James Vincent

Posted on Tuesday 6th August 2013

Cementing Technical Specialist,
MEng Chemical Engineering, 2008

Even if you don't have a clear idea of what you want to do when you graduate, start building your cv right now

I came across Schlumberger while trawling for companies to apply to, and their assessment day was so inspiring that when they offered me a job I gladly bit their hands off. I worked for Schlumberger for 4 years and had a fantastic career in upstream oil, working offshore and then in the office designing and executing cementing operations in wells. Many of the big oil companies started to increase their in-house cementing expertise and so I had the opportunity to join BP and now work in their Sunbury technology centre near London.

What is the best thing about what you are doing now?

Working in the upstream oil industry is a truly global experience. I have worked in Scotland, England, Norway, Abu Dhabi, Algeria, Mauritania and the United States all in the space of 4 and a half years. In the near future I will be travelling to Libya, Egypt, Indonesia and Australia. The shear variety both in terms of the work itself, and the environments you work in, is staggering.

What was the best thing about your time as a student here?

The opportunity to develop yourself is definitely there. I wish I had taken more advantage of that when I was a student. I certainly had a lot of fun though.

In what way did living and studying in Birmingham live up to your expectations?

Birmingham university has every degree subject under the sun all concentrated on one campus and so the opportunity to meet (and go drinking with) people from various backgrounds is much greater than it is at other universities where it may be less centralised. Being the UK's second city also has its advantages in terms of night life and entertainment.

How did you grow as a person by coming to University Did it change your life in any way?

University is supposed to help bring you out of school and into the real world as a young professional with huge potential, and my time at Birmingham definitely helped that. I definitely feel I could have done more to make the most out of the opportunities available but I did enough to get started on a career path that I would not trade in for anything else.

What advice would you give to current students studying on your degree programme?

Definitely keep an open mind with regards to what careers are available and beneficial to you. Even if you don't have a clear idea of what you want to do when you graduate, start building your cv right now. Look at activities and organisations to get involved with which will give employers evidence of your having been in a leadership position, organisational skills and working with others. If all you can talk about in job applications is the design project and degree thesis, you will not stand out from anyone. So pick an organisation, and there are hundreds at Birmingham, and get involved early and try and get to a position of leadership or a position that involves organising events or working with people. Then when interviewers ask questions like "tell us about a time when you handled a difficult team member..." etc etc you aren't always referring back to group work done on your course like a broken record.

On top of that, do the year in industry! Or at the very least a summer placement. I did a year in industry with Nestle and if it hadn't been for that, I'd have been dead in the water at job interviews and even with that I was turned down by many companies because I had little else on my cv. On top of that doing the year in industry gives you a good perspective on the world of work so you can make a more informed decision on where you want to go next. And of course it goes without saying, take your degree subjects seriously, even if you get a good overall result, most companies will ask for a break down of your modules and the results you got!

© University of Birmingham 2015