

Principles of High Quality Internships

The beginning of an internship can often be the defining days for success or disappointment of interning in your organization. When you instruct interns about their first tasks, you are signaling what can be expected in the future. To give the student nothing to do sends the student a signal that this job will be easy—and boring. This is the last thing that an intern wants/needs, and neither do you as the sponsoring employer.

Many student interns are unfamiliar with the activities, nature of work, environment, and objectives of the business. Consider an orientation session for the intern to emphasize the partnership and commitment to your student intern and the reinforcement to their potential success. The sooner the intern understands what your organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume responsibility and become productive.

Suggestions for the orientation might include:

- Tour the facilities with the intern and introduce them to other employees
- Provide company/organizational materials to read such as newsletters, annual reports, an organizational chart, or memos from the CEO
- Encourage the intern to utilize their break and lunch times by spending time in places where employees gather
- Schedule regular weekly or biweekly one-on-one meetings with the intern
- Offer opportunities to observe (or participate in) professional meetings
- Allow the intern to interview organizational personnel
- Encourage the intern to move around your facilities to observe and discuss work issues with employees

As an intern supervisor you must invest time to establish an important bond with the intern and set a crucial tone for the internship experience.

KEY POINTS

- Maintain an open channel of communication with formal and informal meetings
- Keep the intern busy and directed toward their learning objectives. Students rarely complain of overwork, but they do complain if they are not challenged
- Provide opportunities for increasing responsibility
- Encourage professionalism by assisting the intern to develop human relations skills, decision-making abilities and manage office politics
- Remember that you are a role model
- Develop connections to support the success of the intern