

Advice for Employers: Creating a Successful Internship

From the intern's perspective:

The key to a successful internship is to have the opportunity to participate in meaningful work assignments that allow the intern to learn more about a career through practice by working closely with a mentor who takes an active interest in providing guidance and supervision. An intern has the specific goal of gaining knowledge, skills, and/or further understanding of a particular industry.

From the employer's perspective:

The benefits for the employer are the opportunities to pre-screen and recruit highly qualified and motivated students to meet the company's needs and provide the organization with fresh ideas and insights.

Ideally, an internship strikes a balance between the activities that provide a meaningful learning experience for the intern and the activities that will increase productivity in the organization.

Creating a Successful Internship

Clearly-Defined, Meaningful Work Assignments

- Interns want to be productive and learn new skills. It's important to clearly define the types of assignments and supervision an intern will have during the internship. This will clarify the expectations of both the intern and the supervisor.
- Short-term and long-term assignments help build valuable skills. Long-term assignments will ensure that the intern always has something to do to stay productive (especially during times when a mentor is unavailable).
- Interns don't usually expect to be constantly working on high priority assignments and tasks, but it is nice to provide them with some ownership of a meaningful project.

Mentorship

- A vital part of a successful internship program is a strong mentor component. An employee within the organization should be dedicated to guiding the intern, supporting them, and helping them learn during the period of the program.
- A mentor's willingness to provide guidance, evaluation, and offer feedback to the intern is crucial as it will undoubtedly take some time and effort on their part.

Education & Career Exploration

- Interns should gain additional skills, knowledge, and understanding of the industry and your organization.
- An internship is often their first hands-on experience in the industry.
- Teaching interns key skills will help them in a future career.

Other Features that Contribute to a Successful Internship

Consider providing an orientation. Your intern will want to know everything they can about the organization, including: co-workers, working conditions, organizational chart, working hours, mission of the organization, employer expectations, dress code, tour of the facility, company policies, opportunities to network, employment opportunities.

Compensation. It is recommended that all employers offer some form of compensation. According to InternBridge.com the average compensation for an intern is \$12.09.

Here are Some Ideas for Internship Projects

Consider having an intern...

- Research the viability of a new program, campaign, or initiative; compile and present statistics.
- Complete a backburner project that has been bogging down permanent staff.
- Create a proposal on a potential social media strategy, evaluate various social media platforms, or come up with suggestions for how your current social media strategy might be improved.
- Critique your company's website...from a user perspective; brainstorm ideas for boosting usability.
- Propose solutions for a mid-level problem that no one has had time to address.
- Research and identify the most influential blogs in your industry. Follow them and provide weekly reports.
- Scan industry media for news items; provide regularly scheduled updates.
- Accompany employees to client, sales, or other outside meetings; have them take an observer role, but ask for their input and ideas and answer any questions they have after you've left.
- Evaluate some area of IT functionality for tech-savvy interns; ask if they see a way to improve efficiency, streamline programs, or cut costs.
- Take responsibility for some regular task. Even if it's as simple as taking, and placing, the weekly supply order, it will demonstrate follow-through and an ability to take ownership.
- Prepare a budget.
- Create support materials, such as charts, graphs, or other visuals.
- Plan and coordinate an event or meeting.
- Generate a marketing plan, financial forecast, or other report.
- Produce a video or slide presentation.
- Perform a study or survey; analyze and present results.
- Write internal communications.
- Compile employee manuals or develop process directions for tasks with high employee turnover.
- Source goods or search for lower-cost sources for high-volume materials.
- Clean up a database.
- Serve as a liaison between the company and clients or vendors while freeing up staff members for more crucial issues.
- Aid in the modification or enhancement of your internship program.
- Help screen and train replacement interns prior to their departure.

When assigning tasks, try to strike a balance between those activities that provide a meaningful learning experience for the intern, and those activities that increase productivity in the organization.

Visit www.internships.com for more information about internships.