

HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

Recent studies have shown that more than 60% of employers report intern-to-permanent hiring practices and that internship experience is the most important résumé credential for landing a job after graduation. It's no wonder employers and students are both more focused than ever on this important learning-by-doing model. However, not all internships are created equal, and in an increasingly competitive landscape for top talent, employers that establish powerful internship experiences, are likely to have a better chance of converting interns to full-time employees. Consider these tips when developing a transformative internship at your organization.

SETTING UP AN INTERNSHIP

Create a clear job description. To start, we recommend taking some time to think about the job description. Students want to learn new things and gain experience, as well as make a contribution by applying their skills and knowledge. Job descriptions that offer breadth (in understanding the dept/organization/market and/or industry more broadly) combined with depth (by being able to dive into a key project where they can see how it impacts the department/organization/client) is good for them and you. It's okay for interns to do their fair share of daily task, but they also want to work on problems and processes that allow them to contribute their talents and intellect. Having a combination of independent and team assignments will help your interns stretch their abilities across different kinds of work settings.

Discuss learning goals. We also suggest that employers ask students to identify their learning goals for the position and to review them with the interns before the internship begins. This gets students thinking about the relevance of the work they about to undertake to their academic and/or professional pursuits, and proactively manages their expectations. It also provides you with ideas for potential components to add to the experience that you may not have initially thought about.

Choose the right supervisor. Select someone who is happy to have the extra help and who is known for being a solid mentor. A supervisor who can introduce them to the company, department, position, and industry in an effective and efficient way benefits both the students and the organization.

Share company norms. Before interns arrive, address key topics like company dress code, daily work hours, when and where to meet their supervisors, parking rules, security clearance, required HR paperwork, and anything else that will help them be in the know about core company expectations and processes that they'll encounter on their first day.

AT THE START

Make introductions. Have someone show the interns around and make brief introductions to key colleagues. Assigning someone to have lunch with interns on their first day can also be a nice way to introduce lunchtime protocols as well as provide opportunities for meeting more staff members.

Provide a workstation. Make sure interns have a set place to complete their work with the necessary equipment and resources ready to go. Be sure computer, calendar, email, file-sharing, and phone accounts have been pre-arranged. Provide keys and/or clearance badges to access the office, and stock their desk with basic office supplies.

Offer orientation and welcome materials. If your company has a formal orientation process for interns, be sure to schedule your interns to take part in it. Share any on-boarding documents like office manuals, intern or employee handbooks, company directory, phone and workstation login instructions, and other materials that may orient them to the work and the organization. Review job descriptions with each intern and the supervisor's goals for the

position. Clarify standing meetings they should attend, and review workplace and position expectations. Additionally, providing an intern welcome kit can be a nice way to communicate company culture. These kits can include anything from a handwritten card welcoming them to the company, promotional gear, a plant at their desk, or clever ideas like an invitation to a ping pong tournament over lunch.

AS THINGS PROGRESS

Ensure supervision. The most effective way to get the most from your interns and support their professional development is to provide consistent and regular feedback on their work. Supervisors should meet weekly with their interns to get project updates, answer questions, provide context, and offer feedback and mentorship. Use real-time examples of how they might better approach their work, improve communication with colleagues, or meet increasing professional expectations. Highlight their work that produced the ideal kind of processes and outcomes. Address unexpected issues that surface and revisit timelines to reprioritize project goals.

Mentor the transition from student to employee. Students come from an increasingly wide range of backgrounds and with various levels of professional experience. It is likely that your intern may need to be explicitly coached on professional norms that you might have previously assumed every young professional knew. Today's 18-to 22-year-olds have come of age in a time when workplace norms are vastly different from company to company, and where their relationship to technology growing up isn't something that even slightly-older generations experienced. Helping them to know when to be off their devices, or how to appropriately share their ideas with the boss and when to just listen, or how to be proactive and resourceful versus when to ask questions, will be enormously helpful to their professional development. They're incredible fast learners, but they may need a level-set on workplace best practices.

Expand their network and context. In addition to the formal job description, often a major source of learning comes from attending certain meetings, going to conferences or local industry meet-ups, sitting in on webinars, or requesting brief information interviews with colleagues across departments. By helping your interns gain exposure to issues influencing the company, market, and/or industry they will more fully understand the context of the work and be better informed to offer more to their projects. Additionally, encouraging their outreach to others throughout the organization, can help them build their network of professionals in the field.

Contact us. Your experience with your interns is likely to go great. However, if an issue arises that you can't seem to solve on your own, feel free to contact Kenyon's Career Development Office (CDO). One of our career advisors can help problem solve with you and arrive at some next steps aimed at ameliorating the issue. Contact us at cdo@kenyon.edu or at 740-427-5165.

FINISHING UP

Assign a final project or presentation. If the work lends itself to a final project that would require interns to utilize various tools, knowledge, resources, or processes acquired over the course of the internship, this will help to integrate the experience and highlight the complexity of what they've learned and contributed. Additionally, the opportunity to present their final work to different stakeholders and/or leadership members at various levels throughout the company, will allow interns to further build professional presentation skills while reminding company personnel of the benefits of hosting interns.

Assess and review their performance. Before the internship wraps up, be sure to complete some kind of evaluation of each intern's work and schedule a time to review their performance together with their supervisors. By allowing time for discussion and questions, interns have the opportunity to practice receiving and responding to summative evaluations and can be more aware of their strengths and areas for future improvement.