

Getting Started

This is the easy part: Once you've hired a worker, you have him or her work, right? **The beginning days of the internship program are often its defining days.** When you give them their first tasks, you're signaling what can be expected in the future. If you give them nothing or very little to do, it sends a message that this job will be easy — and boring. Interns don't want that, and of course, neither do employers. The organization of your internship program will probably be the single most important influence on an intern's impression of your company, and thus the chances that he or she will come back.

So how do you “plan for success”? Consider the goals of your program. The nature of the program and the activities that you choose to undertake should directly relate to your program goals

Orientation

Orient your intern to his or her new workplace. This might take the form of a conventional orientation program or merely a walk around the office, depending on the size of your company. After all, even though they may not be permanent employees, they'll be spending a great deal of time in your workplace. Give interns an overview of your organization; some companies give talks or hand out information about the company's history, vision and services. Explain who does what and what the intern's duties will be. Introduce him or her to co-workers and point out the kitchen and bathroom. Making your intern at home in the office is your first step to bringing him or her back.

Resources

Give your intern the resources he or she needs to do the job. That may sound obvious, but you'd be surprised at how many companies stick their interns out in the hallway or transfer them from desk to desk. That sends a potent message you don't want to send: Interns aren't important; we don't want you here. Give the intern a desk, point out the supply room, and introduce the technical support people. If you intimidate your interns into silence, you could miss out on valuable contributions to your projects—or warnings about impending problems.

“I imagined grabbing coffee for higher-ups, making copies and not much else; I could not have been more mistaken. This internship allowed me to gain skills such as public speaking, research, writing, and patience.” – NAU student intern

Observation

Keep an eye on the intern. This doesn't mean to watch his or her every move, but do make sure you know what's happening with daily tasks. Watch for signs that the intern is confused or bored. As often as silence means that an intern is busy, it also could mean that he or she is confused and shy about telling you so. It's easy to be shy in a workplace full of older strangers who all know each other. See whether the intern is trying to do anything that requires someone else's input. Make sure that work is taking precedence over web browsing. Paying attention early helps you head off problems and bad habits early on.

Feedback

It's important to give interns lots of feedback! Especially if your interns have never done this kind of work before, they'll want to know if their work is measuring up to your expectations. No matter what the level of experience, they need you, as a more experienced worker, to let them know if their work is officially “okay”. Periodically, examine what your intern has produced and make suggestions.

Informal feedback is sometimes not perceived by the student as feedback. Informal feedback shows up as comments or a light hearted nudge. When using informal feedback be clear with your intent. The more direct, the more likely the student will perceive this to be an area of focus. Positive feedback should be given freely. Areas of growth

should be presented in a private setting where the student is not embarrassed. Feedback should be delivered as often as possible to encourage the student to continue to develop.

Formal feedback should be prepared and delivered in a private meeting with the supervisor to discuss student's strengths and areas for growth. It should be designed so the supervisor achieves his/her desired objective. Students should have clear objectives of what areas of growth need to be addressed. Use specific examples of behavior whenever possible so students have clear ideas of what areas need improvement.

Evaluation

Remember those goals you outlined before? A few weeks after the internship begins, it's time to see how well you and your intern are meeting those goals.

Evaluation processes differ. Yours might be as formal as written evaluations every three weeks or as informal as occasional lunches with the internship coordinator and/or the intern's mentor. Some companies have the intern evaluate the experience and the company as well. Again, your structure is largely up to your corporate culture and needs. As an added bonus, these evaluations will be handy later if you decide to interview a former intern for full-time work, or to publicize how successful your program has been.

Maintaining program popularity will require hard evidence that your company is getting a return on its investment. Some companies have adopted a process of formal exit interviews. Through this process they can determine if interns are leaving the company having had a good experience and provide valuable feedback to managers and for program planning in the following year.

In addition to qualitative measures, a number of quantitative measures have also been adopted. Some common measures include the number of interns that

become full-time employees; repeat requests for interns from managers; and growing numbers of intern applicants. In order to successfully measure your own program outcome, you should return to the stated program goals, and address those outcomes.

Additional Resources

- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Best Practices <http://www.naceweb.org/talent-acquisition/internships/15-best-practices-for-internship-programs/>
- Michael True Starting An Internship Program, Full Guide <http://www.intrueition.com/about.html>
- InternQube Professional Skills for the Workplace for Students <https://www.internqube.com/>

