

Need Help? Consider an Intern

By June Campbell

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Could you use an extra set of hands around your workplace?

If you could make do with some help (and who couldn't), but hiring an extra employee isn't a viable solution, then you might consider offering an internship.

Q: What is an internship?

A: An internship is an arrangement in which a student works for an employer temporarily in order to gain experience or to get school credits. The arrangement is usually short term. You could offer full-time or part-time work, depending on the terms you negotiate with the school.

Q: I don't have to pay wages?

A: You will have to find some way to compensate the intern. You might pay minimum wage (or higher) or work with a local educational facility to ensure your interns get school credits while working for you. If you are paying wages, you will need to pay enough to cover their work-related expenses (transportation, meals while at work, etc.)

Q: What's in it for the intern?

A: The intern will gain practical, "hands-on" experience in the field he or she is studying. He or she will also gain industry contacts, networking links and a work reference to add to the resume. If arranged, school credits are an additional bonus.

Q: What's in it for the company?

A: You get an extra set of hands to help out on a temporary basis, but you do not have the same obligations that you have to a regular employee. You pay lower wages, if any at all, you do not pay a benefit package, and you are not obligated to hire the intern at any point in the arrangement.

However, if you are looking for permanent employees down the road, internships give you a good understanding of a person's skills and their fit for your workplace before you hire. Additionally, if you set up a good internship program, the school is likely to introduce you to recent grads if you indicate your interest in acquiring employees.

Q: What will be expected of the company?

A: You will be expected to provide the intern with a legitimate work experience. You will be expected to provide orientation and training for the tasks he or she will perform. You will be expected also to supervise and provide pertinent feedback to both the intern and the school that is offering the internship.

Naturally, you will be expected to provide the intern with a safe and respectful work environment.

Q: What should I expect from the school?

A: Look for a well-organized internship program. You should be assigned to a contact person who will oversee the internship placement. This person should be available to you (within reason) in event of problems or situations that require discussion.. The school should also provide you with an internship contract and clear information regarding their requirements and expectations.

Q: How can I make the internship a good experience for the intern?

A. Be sure that you have work available for the intern, and be sure that the work is pertinent to her program of studies. If an intern is studying multimedia production, for example, and you put him to work answering the phone and filing paper, the intern will have no opportunity to hone the skills he is studying and frustration will most certainly be the result. Naturally, a certain amount of "grunt work" is acceptable, as most jobs have their boring elements.

Be sure, also, to include your intern in meetings and planning sessions whenever possible.

Q: How do I go about finding an intern?

A: Identify the nature of the tasks you want the intern to perform, then contact the recruitment officer at a school, college or university offering appropriate programs. Find out how their internships work, and how the two of you might work together.

Schools and various non-profit organizations sometimes seek internship placements for students who are facing barriers to employment due to physical, psychological or social conditions. Engaging such a person in an internship gives you the added satisfaction of knowing that you have the potential to alter the course of someone's life in a positive way.

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