

Creating a Winning Formula for A Successful Internship



At any given time across Canada there are 100's of thousands of students, apprentices, new Canadians and others participating in Internship programs. Whether the internship is paid or unpaid it can be a beneficial experience for the intern and for the organization. For many it may be their first real experience in a professional work setting and, as such, it may require additional steps in management compared to hiring a new employee. Interns and the organization benefit best when the intern role has clarity and provides meaningful working opportunities.

Encourage An Interns Self-Awareness From Day One

The tone of the first week is very important. Engage the intern in a self-evaluation process on day one and ask them to continue this throughout. Ask them to write down or video journal their progress on weekly goals in five areas: 1) job skills 2) Industry/career awareness 3) workplace relationship skills 4) self-management and 4) intern project goals. Maintaining a journal of their learning experiences and questions can be a useful tool.

Structuring a Successful Internship

For an internship to have an opportunity to succeed there are a few things an organization should put in place:

- 1) **Have a job description and clearly defined goal(s).** Treat an internship as a temporary job with a job description and onboarding process that includes orientation, training and performance goals and expectations.
- 2) **Build structure into the role.** Although the internship should have flexibility the overall structure should be well organized. A checklist with weekly activities and tasks, supervision meetings and a plan for ongoing workplace supervision is a must.
- 3) **Discuss policies and procedures.** Frequently interns are provided with a document or link to policies yet often interns have little context for the nuances of these policies. Assign a staff including a supervisor, junior employees or other colleagues to help with clarify.
- 4) **Introduce the Intern.** Let the organization know the intern is onboard. The intern role should be easily identified as an intern especially in the presence of

customers, clients and the public. Use a nametag that indicates 'trainee' and introduce the Intern as such.

5) **Connect the Intern to people.** Interns are there for a short time, not usually enough time to find and form many relationships, unless you help facilitate this. Consider assigning a mentor. This mentor need not be the most senior of employees, but someone who likes to teach or coach others. A mentor can be an informal coach who answers questions, provides job shadow opportunity and sets an example with or without any formal supervision or reporting relationship.

6) **Offer Clear Work Culture Expectations:** Include interns in workplace community events but do not expect them to contribute financially or participate outside of internship hours. Take financial and additional time commitments off the table.

7) **Assign real work.** Internships should involve observation and learning but also the completion of work that will benefit a team and the organization. Eager interns may want additional projects. Have a pool of projects an intern could identify to show initiative but that will not require much time or supervision on the part of your staff

8) **Offer frequent feedback.** Interns are there to learn. It is imperative to the process that feedback is regular and tangible. While corrective feedback is important do not forget to provide feedback on what is going well.

Interns can offer benefit to both the intern and the organization and are usually well worth the time and energy to manage, as long as they are well considered and managed.