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Susan Rebstock Williams

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Arrange internships that work

Have you ever thought about hiring a college student as an intern but backed off because of concerns about the quality of the student you would be getting?



Susan Williams

Perhaps you've heard stories where hiring an intern turned out to be a waste of everyone's time. Or perhaps you just weren't sure about the process of hiring an intern. If so, then read on and put your fears to rest.

Properly constructed, an internship is not just a part-time job for a college student but a cooperative opportunity that provides your business with the help you need and allows the student to earn academic credit for the work experience.

Internships offer many benefits to an employer — not the least of which is the ability to “try out” a potential future employee. In fact, using internships to feed full-time hiring programs is cited by the National Association of Colleges and Employers as the primary focus of internship programs nationwide.

Additionally, internships supply a source of inexpensive labor, offer a mechanism for completing projects that you just can't get to otherwise and build partnerships with universities that generate ongoing value to your organization.

The benefits to interns are also huge. In addition to “real world” experience, interns gain a level of professional maturity — particularly with respect to the “soft skills” — that many entry-level employees do not have.

Not surprisingly, the NACE

study shows that new graduates who completed internships are more likely to receive job offers and command a higher starting salary than their non-intern counterparts.

But not all internships are created equally. There are two basic kinds — those for which the student earns college credit and those for which he/she does not.

“For credit” internships are coordinated and monitored by a faculty member and are the subject of this column.

To be worthy of college credit, the work experience must engage the intern in essential business functions appropriate to his/her major. Successful internships usually involve a clearly defined, manageable project with access to a mentor within the sponsoring organization and ongoing communication with the faculty coordinator.

More often than not, internships lead to permanent job offers. According to NACE, 53.3 percent of eligible interns (those graduating) were converted to full-time hires last year. And why not? Interns are introduced to the nature of your business, your industry and your company culture.

If you are still not convinced, consider this: Internships also have a positive impact on employee turnover. The NACE study reports that nearly 86 percent of new hires who completed internships at the hiring organization are still on the job one year later (compared to 81 percent of those who did not do an internship).

The process of hiring an intern is easy. Working with the faculty sponsor, you set the qualifications and job duties. You interview candidates and make the hiring decision.

Done!

The faculty sponsor follows up with you (and the intern) regularly to make sure things are going well and attends to any questions or problems that may arise.

The College of Business Administration at Georgia Southern has placed interns in different parts of the country and across a multitude of industries — health care, financial services, manufacturing, logistics, IT, retail, public utilities and government, to name a few.

Our students have interned at small and large companies alike — from local accounting firms, paper mills and sole proprietorships to PriceWaterhouseCoopers in New York City, BMW-Spartanburg and Coca-Cola Enterprises in Atlanta.

No business is too small or too large to benefit from an internship program.

Internships that work revolve around a three-way commitment from the employer, the university and the student intern.

In the College of Business Administration, “for credit” internships require documentation to specify expectations and responsibilities for all three parties. With expectations clearly defined and a faculty internship coordinator managing the process, finding and hiring an intern for your business is a win-win-win proposition.

Susan Williams is associate dean and professor of information systems in the College of Business Administration at Georgia Southern University. Contact her at rebstock@georgiasouthern.edu for information on its internship program.



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