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Will you be hiring a college student intern for the summer semester? If so, you will want it to be a productive and rewarding experience for both parties. It is important that you select the right internal employee who will be the liaison between the student, their school, and you, the employer. The designated person should have both the time, interest and temperament to serve as a mentor to the student.

Before you interview student candidates, be sure that you understand the school's expectations and requirements, and select your intern with similar due diligence that you would hire an entry level employee. Interview with an understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, skill offerings, and most important, their motivations and values. Do make them feel welcome: create an opportunity for them to get to know their co-workers and the expectations for the internship.

Plan to invest the first week or two with appropriate orientation. The clearer the knowledge of the business and your expectations, the better the intern will perform for you, and the better will be their experience. If the organization has an orientation program for new employees, see that the intern has an opportunity to attend relevant segments.

Once your intern is on board, keep an open mind, and seek opportunities to learn from this individual as well. There is a lot that you can gain from someone who is in the current learning mode, and perhaps is more familiar with innovative technology applications. Do keep an open mind to the suggestions of your interns about new ways of doing things – they may offer a fresh and unencumbered perspective.

Avoid treating the internship as a “go-fer” position or one relegated to clerical duties. Be sure to include challenging aspects to the work or build a special project of their own into the mix. This will keep the student more motivated and focused. It will also allow you to get a better evaluation of their real talents and skills.

Where appropriate, invite the intern into planning or client meetings to be able to get a deeper level of understanding about “real world” issues of your business. To avoid misunderstandings, be clear with them ahead of time as to whether their presence is strictly for observation purposes, or whether their input and participation would be welcomed.

Don't fall into the trap of unintentionally ignoring a competent, self-directed student who seems to be doing well with minimal supervision. Taking this person for granted can set the stage for their missing appropriate guidance or prioritization, or worse - making assumptions and taking inappropriate initiative.

Remember to check in periodically and inquire about what they have learned, the value they have received, and how you can enhance the experience or support their success. If the student is not meeting your expectations, address this immediately. Invite the intervention of the college liaison, if necessary.

Today's students are much more sophisticated and capable than in previous years. They are ready to take on challenges with substance that will help them prepare to launch their careers. In many cases, there may be a future employee at hand for you to recruit, and the internship can allow both parties to “test drive” the relationship before considering an employment commitment.

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