

Hiring

Hiring an Intern? What to Do Before the Summer Starts

by Jodi Glickman

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Recently, the marketing director for a tech start-up told me that her CEO was furiously drafting job descriptions for a half-dozen summer interns. She was planning to bring a small army of youngsters on board to help push her business into overdrive this summer. As the director of marketing looked at her CEO quizzically, she asked, “you know you need to manage all those interns, right?”

Interns can be a great addition to your team, but beware of the well-meaning twenty-year-old who lands in your lap without any direction or guidance. If you’re planning to hire an intern (or two or three), here are four things to do before they walk through the door to ensure a successful summer for everyone involved:

Choose one or two specific projects. Interns are great for project-based work. Anything with a clear beginning, middle, and end is a good place to start — and if that project lasts between four and eight weeks, even better. Bringing a marketing intern on board to beef up marketing or a sales intern to increase leads is vague and intimidating. Instead, hire a marketing intern to launch a digital marketing campaign for college students or an HR intern to update the employee handbook.

The more discrete and concrete the project, the easier it is to identify objectives, give guidance, and measure results. And the better aligned the project is with the overall mission of your organization, the happier your intern will be — Gen Ys want to know that their work is needed and mission critical, so don't come up with a project just for the sake of keeping someone busy. Mean it.

Put it in writing. Once you know what a prospective intern will actually be doing, craft a job description. Even for those who are hiring a colleague's or client's son or daughter, or others who decide to bring on an intern to meet a motivated and deserving college student (why not?), it's still worthwhile to go through the motions and draft a job description. This will help you identify the goals and objectives of the internship, determine how you'll measure outcomes and success, and communicate the qualifications and skills you're looking for — great information for you to have internally and critical information for you to relay to your intern on day one.

Craft your sales pitch. Even if you think your organization's value proposition is obvious, dig deeper. Think hard about what a twenty-something is going to get out of eight to 10 weeks of working side by side with you or your colleagues.

What will your intern walk away with? What skills and insights will he learn on the job that will help shape his career path, strengthen his network, or help him decide once and for all that advertising is the way to go (or not)? How much fun will it be? (That tech start-up in Chicago I mentioned earlier promised Cubs season tickets along with an office located in the heart of Chicago's nightlife.)

Make sure you communicate your value proposition to potential interns up front and hold yourself to the standards you set as the summer goes on.

Know the difference between being a manager and a mentor. Do you have time to actively manage your intern(s) or are you better suited as a mentor? As a manager, you need to commit to a significant

upfront investment at the start of the summer — showing your intern the ropes, making introductions, finding a physical place for her to sit and work, going for lunch on day one — and providing feedback throughout the summer. Add to that a weekly one-on-one meeting (at least) and suddenly, managing an intern can turn from an exciting prospect to a daunting proposition.

If you don't have the appetite, the capacity, or even the skill set to manage your intern (be honest with yourself), then you've got to find someone else to stand in your stead. Look for a rising star in your organization who is excited about managing someone junior. This can be a great opportunity to give an individual contributor a first taste of the highs and lows of managing others. And commit to serving as a mentor yourself for informal coaching, guidance, and socializing, or tap others on your team for that role, too.

As with anything in life, the more effort you put in, the better results you'll get out. Investing time and energy now will set your intern up for success before she even walks through the door.

See also: [Your Summer Intern Is Here. Now What?](#) and [Help Your Intern Get a Full-Time Job](#)

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