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Team Case Study: Hiring and Training Interns

Interviewing and Selecting Interns

Beyond the technical expertise, it is most important to know how well each candidate will fit in with the company and how much of an impact they will make on the culture of both the team they are a part of and the company as a whole. More specifically, we would hope to gain some insight into their needs and wants in a work environment, whether they tend towards task or relational behaviors, their preferred communication styles, what roles they generally fill in a team, and their general hobbies. Another important factor would be to gauge how reliable the candidate would be in tough situations.

The idea for these priorities is to form a prediction on how the candidates will behave in a team and whether each individual is more oriented towards work completion or relationship building. In this way, we would be able to get an idea of what types of roles the person will be best assigned to and how they will naturally fall into during the team operations. Knowing the general role makeup of the team will allow for the maximization of beneficial teamwork outputs and help to create more natural cohesion. In turn, making it easier for everyone to collaborate, discuss ideas, and deal with disagreements gracefully.

One of the main ways we intend to structure interview questions is to set up a hypothetical or actual scenario and have the candidate give some options on how the situation would be handled. These questions would focus mainly on what behavior the candidate would display, though the circumstances would vary from normal work behavior to stressed moments. The goal would be to tease out how they would act when all the chips were on the table, and the stakes were high. The other main line of questioning would be focused on working out the preferred communication style of the individual. Many of these questions would be focused on what the candidate had done in the past in various work fields. Finally, to discover the reliability of a candidate, some items would be centered around situations where work events challenge their priorities.

Pre-Summer Training

The first three days of orientation and training are crucial times to establish a proper culture and work habits, and as such, activities will all be focused on that end. The top three priorities are to communicate the general company expectations on work tasks, company culture, and the appropriate

communication climate. The secondary objective of these three initial days is to assess the candidates beyond what was learned during the interview and selection process.

Much of the first day of orientation would be focused on breaking the ice between the interns and helping them to get a solid footing on the understanding of the company. We imagine it would start with icebreakers and get-to-know-you activities between the intern group members. Following that, we would proceed into a quick breakdown of how ALL of the company divisions operate together, combined with an emphasis on the pieces all working synergistically as opposed to separate pieces put together at the end.

This breakdown would be complemented with a tour of the available facilities with introductions to as many staff members as possible, both regular and management. After the tour, the floor would best be opened to some Q and A. Then, any more general company guidelines would be discussed, before finally playing some more games and a possible scavenger hunt to get to know the place and people. The first day would be capped off by an inspirational welcome speech, to build a sense of belonging and worthiness in the team, delivered from the highest-ranking manager possible (preferably C level).

The second day would open with some food and chat time so the interns can get some social building. After some review of the company structure, operations flow, and culture, the interns would be split into small workgroups to work on some team-building exercises. They would be introduced to the Tuckman-Jensen model of team building and spend some time exploring how a team would move from one stage to the next. Towards the end of the day, ideally, we would brief the interns on the specifics of each department and then assign them to their respective positions.

On the final day, the group would open again with some more Q and A. This would be followed by breaking into department-specific groups and having an acting employee from the relevant position to give a brief to the interns. One big piece on this third day would be a company-wide meet and greet lunch so that the new interns would have a chance to meet a lot of people they will be working beside at the company. After the lunch, the interns would regroup and go through a mock process of taking the company's product from start to finish so that they can fully understand how all the pieces of what they are helping to create fit together. This would conclude the training, save for any issues that may arise, and then need to be addressed.

Mid-Way Evaluations

For the informal mid-way evaluation, we would ask the following guiding questions in a relaxed setting. We will let interns know that their answers are not going to affect their jobs, and they are free to elaborate on any of these following questions in-depth:

1. How do you think you are doing so far with your responsibilities?
2. What are some aspects of yourself/your personality that you know you need to work on more right now?

3. Tell me one thing that made you happy during your experience so far.
4. Was there anything that made you upset? Explain the situation.
5. How was your relationship with your peers?
6. If you were given the opportunity, what is one social event you would host to bond with your team?
7. How was this job different than what you've imagined?
8. What was one communication method you find useful?
9. What was one conflict management method you've utilized?
10. What would you change if you could change anything about your group or your job?
11. What do you think is my (the supervisor's) main weakness?
12. How many thank you's did you say yesterday?

These questions focus on social sensitivity, relationship role development, conflict approaches, and Coyle's culture building. Social sensitivity is measured through questions 1, 2, 3, and 6. It is harder to create questions for this construct without hinting at what is being measured or sounding insensitive. For example, if the intern was asked, "Would you be concerned about a team member going through a tough time in his/her personal life?", usually nobody would answer no. Social sensitivity can be better evaluated through in-person interactions, looking at how team members communicate with each other.

Relationship role development is measured through questions 5, 8, and 11. This is important to gauge whether the team has a sense of community and what areas the team can work on for better interpersonal relationships.

Conflict approaches are measured through questions 4, 9, and potentially 10 as well. These are useful for understanding how each team member will act if conflict does arise. For example, if there are only competing and accommodating styles, conflicts would not be a huge issue. However, if there are a lot of avoidance styles, there could be a lot of tension between team members when conflict comes up.

Coyle's culture building is measured through questions 12 and potentially 1, 2, 7, and 11. In order to build a strong team culture, members should overcommunicate their listening, spotlight their fallibilities, preview the future, overdue thank you's, and be clear, among other traits.

Supervising Leadership Reflection

In the review of our behavior in training, there are various factors to consider when evaluating our impact on the interns. All of these areas are important in that they lay out the crucial elements to bring about motivated and productive interns, some of whom can then be hired to work long term for the company. The best questions to ask are how well did we:

1. Create a positive communication climate: People must feel their ideas are being heard, and that they can express opinions freely.

2. Manage the Tuckman stages (storming specifically): As a supervisor, we must understand that they will be conflicts. Coming up with a plan or guidance during those conflicting times promotes team dynamics.
3. Make decisions + Decision Style: Supervisors must be decisive and make decisions that benefit the most for the group while making sure that interns have the freedom to make decisions as well.
4. Apply Coyle's culture-building: having a strong culture helps interns understand their objectives more clearly and be more goal-oriented at work.
5. Build cohesion: are we bonding?
6. Balance of cooperation and competition: create small competitions to motivate all to work a little harder.
7. Encourage turn-taking: everyone's the same, am I making sure all voices are heard?
8. Social sensitivity: are we keeping other people's beliefs in mind when we speak and making decisions?
9. Promoting empathy within the group: without empathy, we allow more conflict to arise in groups and neglect team dynamics.

Considering the aforementioned aspects above, we think that we wish to ultimately assess how well we succeeded in helping the interns 1) feel a sense of comfort and belonging in their work environment, and 2) acknowledge that they are learning something valuable 3) feel as if they are an important part of their teams.