



INTERNING – IT’S A TWO-WAY STREET

Tips for successful internship programs

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Jane has worked with interns in a variety of different capacities for many years. During that time she realized that the key to successful internship programs for everyone involved was organization. Following is a three part series on how to make internships a win-win for everyone.

Part One

How to make internships a win-win for everyone

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An employer’s perspective – A practical guide to developing and achieving best results from intern programs

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For interns - How to get the most from your internship

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS by Jane Baxter Lynn – Part One

How to make internships a win-win for everyone

Whether internships are a nightmare or a positive experience depends on the approach taken to hiring and managing interns. If you're considering hiring interns; already have interns, or have managed them in the past and sworn you'll never do it again, this series of articles may be helpful. If you're considering doing an internship this is for you too.



U.S. Green Building Council Central Texas–Balcones (USGBC CT-B) Chapter's first interns with author Jane Baxter Lynn, who was the Chapter's Executive Director at the time.

THE TOP LINE

Interns have saved me many times and once I figured out how to work with them it became a win-win for everyone. The value for both interns and their employers can be enormous.

Interns can significantly impact an organization's ability to develop. Equally, an internship can help students gain real life experience and networking opportunities in a nurturing environment that can potentially lead to jobs. When done right, the rewards far outweigh the downsides; the key is developing a clear, consistent project driven system that benefits both parties.

Over the years, many friends and colleagues have said they won't use interns or don't enjoy doing so because it's too stressful. Many have said it's a constantly revolving door and that it requires too much time to seek, train and manage them. It seems quicker and easier to do it oneself. Engaging interns so they actually show up can also be difficult, more so since the COVID pandemic and the need to work remotely. And, for those of us who are out of the office a lot, keeping interns occupied and motivated when one is not around is also a challenge.

I felt the same way until I figured out how to work with them. Like anything in life, if one plans ahead; has clear objectives; assigns roles upfront, and goes into it with the right mind-set a great deal can be achieved with less time involved. Even in the last year when we've had to do everything remotely, my system has worked and our interns have seemed to value the involvement in something different from their school curricula.

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In hind-sight, not having a system originally, probably wasn't productive for the interns either. They likely felt they were in the way and weren't learning or achieving much. While there are undoubtedly some wonderful intern programs available to students, feedback I have heard from many interns highlights how often they feel that their value is not appreciated and how little they learn from their internships.

THE KEY COMPONENTS

A two-way street – This is the number one key to a successful intern program. It comes down to these fundamentals: a mentoring approach; providing mutual benefits; encouraging open communication; clearly defining roles, responsibilities, goals, timelines and expectations early in the process; empowerment, trust and flexibility.

Project driven – Providing interns with projects or assignments that they can own gives them something to do even when you are unavailable. No need to ask: "What would you like me to do today?" It will also challenge them to use their initiative and creativity and focus on how to build their portfolios. It's been uplifting sometimes to have my interns come to me with ways we can enhance a program or generate a different, more positive outcome.

Relationship building – A well-developed intern program includes reaching out and participating with career services departments at universities and colleges. This, along with internship information on your online properties, will eventually have interns applying for positions instead of you having to spend time searching for them. Some professors actually promote our internships as ones that a student should have if they can due to building that trust, commitment and honest communication with them.

Sufficient time committed – From experience, I would also recommend that you don't take on an intern unless they can commit to at least 12 hours a week. Less than that, it generally becomes more trouble than it is worth for everyone. Work doesn't get completed and you have to pick up the slack and the intern doesn't get to finish anything that they can own.

More is better – Having more than one intern with clearly defined roles is actually easier on the employer and gives the interns someone with whom to work and share. I used to only have one intern at a time for JBL Strategies and found that I had to spend a lot more time with them. Once I moved to hiring two at a time, more got done and it was so rewarding to see them work together before coming to me with final drafts or to ask questions.

THE REWARDS

The obvious benefit from an internship program is readily-available labor at minimal cost. However, there are many other rewards as well.

Fresh contribution – Employers gain contribution from fresh thinkers who are mostly willing to work hard and to learn with relatively limited commitment on their part. Having an intern, means that you can focus on the strategic tasks, while getting the necessary day-to-day work completed. Additionally, an intern program gives you first pick from a talented pool of potential employees who already know your business.

Two-way learning – If you're new to managing staff, you can gain valuable management skills through the development of interns. At the same time, learning new skills and behavior from upcoming generations can be highly rewarding and may help you get your job done more easily and effectively. For me a large part of my passion for working with interns is the personal satisfaction of mentoring someone at the beginning of their career.

Emphasizing the benefits – These may include working for school credit; learning workplace behavior; training opportunities for career growth, and gaining from a mentor's experience and network. Importantly, don't lose sight of why they are doing the internship. After all, interns are hoping to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to get a "real job" when school is over.

THE MOTIVATION

Mentoring – Motivating your interns to give you desired results, first and foremost requires you to be a mentor, understanding that for many this is their first experience working in an office environment. I've seen some significant changes in interns as they gain confidence and take ownership of their work. The reward is engagement and a willingness to achieve results beyond your expectations.

Identify learning goals – Early on, establish what the intern would like to gain from the internship and what he or she would like to do career-wise. It will enable you to provide activities that will assist them in future.

Also ask the intern to identify any weaknesses that he or she would like help to address – this can be as basic as learning how to make phone calls on behalf of an organization; developing technical computer skills, managing up, working as part of a team, or understanding how to present themselves in a professional manner.

Other actions include:

- Being clear about your needs, expectations, job requirements, and the resources available to help them to be successful
- Listening to their needs
- Allowing flexibility to accommodate school schedules
- Explaining how their contributions are important to the organization, no matter how menial the task
- Giving them credit where credit is due
- Working with them to develop a plan of action for their next steps – next internship, job after degree completion or deciding on what to study.

EXPECTATIONS

Not simply a lackey – As one of my ex-interns put it, employers should: "Be prepared to get their own coffee"! She wasn't saying that interns shouldn't make coffee ... what she meant was that you should expect more from them than just being your lackey.

Treat like employees – Having said that, remember that it's a two-way street! Interns need to understand that they are expected to behave like employees. This might entail adhering to committed schedules, meeting agreed deadlines or dressing appropriately for the office. Even when

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our interns were working out of my home office, we had formal office hours, dressed as if we were in an office environment and learned to work together as a team by having regular 'staff' meetings to review progress, check in with how they were doing, and share any lessons learned. We've done the same in the remote working environment with regularly scheduled check-ins on zoom.

Be clear – Make it clear from the start that if they don't do what is expected, you may end the internship and please don't give a positive reference when it is undeserved as you will not be doing them a favor in the long term. On the upside, they can expect your support if they do a good job. Be proud of the work they are doing, and give them credit for their contributions.

Part Two in the series provides employers with a quick tips checklist, along with some useful reference links. Part Three looks at internships from the students' perspective.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS by Jane Baxter Lynn – Part Two

An employer's perspective – A practical guide to developing and achieving best results from intern programs

Following on from Part One of my Tips for Successful Internship Programs, I thought it would be useful for you as an employer to have a check list and some references to use when developing your intern program.



Summer interns working together on their clearly defined projects with the USGBC CT-B Chapter

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Just to reiterate, the key to a successful intern program is ensuring it is a two-way street - a win-win for both parties. It comes down to these fundamentals: being a mentor; providing mutual benefits; encouraging open communication; early in the process clearly defining roles, responsibilities, goals, timelines and expectations; empowerment, trust and flexibility.

QUICK TIPS

1. **Have a plan** - clearly define needs, roles, responsibilities, goals and related tasks.
2. **Are you legal?** Decide whether the internship is paid or unpaid and check that you aren't violating The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)^{*(1)}.
3. **Identify benefits** - Consider if you have sufficient benefits to offer the intern to make it worth their while.
4. **Formalize hiring process** - Have a formal hiring process that includes an application with cover letter explaining why they are suitable for your position, and hold at least one interview, either in-person, via zoom or skype or by phone. Like hiring any employee, you need to be sure that he or she will be the right fit. It also gives the intern a real-life interview experience.
5. **Provide orientation** – Use the first day to introduce them to the organization and their role. Have them read marketing materials and guidelines/handbooks, as well as your social media and websites. Simple as it sounds, don't forget if you're working in-person to show them where the facilities are and introduce them to other people in your office. It will help them to understand how their work fits into the overall organization's success. It will also show that you value their involvement. If you're not in-person, organize a zoom call to introduce them to the key players.

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6. **Involve them** – For example, ask them to contribute to enhancing the orientation process. A group of my interns at the U.S. Green Building Council Central Texas-Balcones Chapter took the initiative to create an Intern Handbook, designed to bring new interns up to speed quickly without my having to spend too much time with them. Others prepare a transition document specifically for their area of work for the next intern to come.
7. **Protect your organization** - Have interns sign confidentiality and conflict of interest agreements, if you have them, not only to protect your organization but also to introduce them to the legalities of a professional workplace. It is fascinating to see how many of them willingly sign these documents without finding out first what the implications might be. This always serves as a great learning lesson moment.
8. **Confirm timeline** – Find out the intern’s end date upfront so you can work backwards from there to determine appropriate goals and timelines for their work. Consider an ongoing program that doesn’t restrict yourself or the intern to semesters etc.
9. **Set measurable goals** – Identify tasks and projects that will result in the intern owning their work for their portfolios. It will also make managing them less time consuming and enable them to work on projects without constant supervision. They will be more efficient if a vested interest exists.
10. **Don’t micro-manage them** - Particularly today’s generation does not like being micro-managed as they are so used to multi-tasking and getting ‘stuff’ done. Many young people have the ability to learn fast. Give them clearly defined projects and encourage them to use their initiative and you’ll be amazed at what they can produce for you, above and beyond your expectations. Having said that, do have checks and balances to ensure positive outcomes. I usually require them to prepare drafts of everything that will be communicated externally so that I can check that they are correct.
11. **Trust them** to produce results as they’ll feel a commitment to produce for you. Equally important explain how their contribution matters to the organization’s success.
12. **Encourage open communication** – If they are having issues with balancing school, with second jobs and their internship, encourage them to talk to you about it. If they don’t, you’ll get frustrated because they will become unreliable and work will be left incomplete. They need to learn that more often than not there is a solution to a problem that works well for everyone. Only by letting you know is problem solving possible. I use the regular weekly check-ins to encourage them to speak up.
13. **Be flexible** – Understand and make it clear to them that you understand that their first priority is passing school so work with them to ensure that they achieve that result. By doing so, you’ll generally find that they’ll make up the time and more to get your work done.
14. **Check-in** – Check in regularly with the interns to see if they are on track or have any questions.
15. **Evaluate performance** – Do this on a regular basis and guide them (constructively) on ways to enhance their performance. Also highlight their accomplishments regularly. Students undertaking internships for credit usually require at least two evaluations during the semester with you.

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Please take the evaluations seriously, as what you say in them can impact on their success both in school and beyond. Ideally involve the student in your evaluation and ask them to give you feedback on how you can help them more. Be honest in a positive way.

16. **Help them create a network** – Introduce them to other professionals and be proud of the work they are doing, giving them credit for their contributions to your organization, particularly with your leadership group or peers.
17. **Don't keep an intern if it's not working out** - Let the intern go if his or her contribution or reliability is being counterproductive to your organization's operations. Be clear that this will happen during the hiring process.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

Hiring and managing interns requires pre-planning and a structured approach. To help manage your interns with limited stress and great results here are some tools and resources to develop:

- General Intern Program outline for use on your website and when publicizing opportunities to college career services and other outlets, incorporating organization background, purpose of program, location, whether paid or unpaid^{*(2)} organization, dates positions open, overall role, benefits, and job requirements.
- A page on your website dedicated to your Internship program so students looking for intern opportunities will find it when searching.
- Job descriptions and requirements for each role (if you have more than one).
- A spreadsheet of universities and college career services departments; related college advisors; college job fairs, and other online outlets such as job boards on professional association and company sites; related sites like indeed.com, USAjobs.com^{*(6)} for submission of intern opportunities to them. Don't forget to encourage your existing interns to spread the word to their peers about the opportunities.
- A tracking spreadsheet for your interns, particularly if you employ multiple interns at one time to include name, contacts, days of the week work, hours/times, school name, discipline/college, degree, starting date, end date, whether for credit or not.
- Task list spreadsheet to assist both of you with tracking activities and prioritizing.
- Performance review process.
- An intern handbook/orientation so that they can get themselves up to speed on the organization and how your operation works without needing a major time commitment by you.

REFERENCES

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/03/business/03intern.html>
- ^{*(3)} Five Reasons to Hire an Intern & Three Reasons Not To by Heather R. Huhman @YECWomen, founder and President of Come Recommended - in *Forbes* online 12/6/2011 [5 Reasons You Should Hire an Intern -- and 3 ... - Forbes](#) - Great piece on reasons for and against taking on interns
- ^{*(4)} ["Ripping off young interns is routine, but it's still wrong"](#) - an opinion piece on unpaid internships by Zoe Williams @zoesqwilliams of *The Guardian* online 3/21/2012 - from a UK perspective.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS by Jane Baxter Lynn – Part Three

For interns - How to get the most from your internship

Students are often required to undertake an internship or may choose to do so to build their resumes. Either way, working as an intern can provide a tremendous opportunity to gain real life experience and build networks potentially leading to jobs. Making the most out of an internship will depend a lot on your approach and how much you capitalize on the opportunity.

Part Three of my series on tips for successful internship programs looks at how to be successful as an intern. My sincere thanks to the many amazing interns who assisted me with this article and in so many other ways.



Interns focused on their clearly defined projects with USGBC CT-B Chapter

What to look for when applying for an internship

There's nothing worse than turning up for an internship and realizing that the person for whom you are going to work does not really know what they want you to do. When seeking an internship, here are a few pointers to consider:

- Look for companies or organizations that have a formal intern program. If they don't, be sure to ask questions in your interview to find out whether the potential employer has a clear idea of the job scope or roles available and the expectations of you.
- Know what you would like to get out of the internship, from both a professional and personal development perspective. What learning?
- Find out what the benefits are, whether it is a paid or unpaid internship.
- Ask if the employer is willing to be your mentor and ensure that you gain experience relevant to your future career.
- Decide if the person is someone with whom you will be able to communicate as you attempt to juggle school schedules, second jobs, your home life and the internship.
- Do you feel that you will learn something and, ideally, add value to the organization?

In a PR News Week Career Guide article on internships, the writer Lisa LaMotte emphasized that finding the right fit within a program is just as important for an intern as it is for the organization.

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Discuss with your potential employer how you can work together to identify projects and tasks that will teach you, either career specific skills or general business acumen. Be open to new ideas.

As one of my interns said: "I enjoyed having a choice as to where I could use my talents, and I wound up working on something I would never have thought of doing. The benefit to me working as an intern was the access to people in the organization and their knowledge. I also enjoyed having a lot of autonomy, with clear responsibilities and deadlines."

The Benefits

There are many benefits to doing an internship. I have had some amazing interns work with me. They all 'got' that the more they put into it, the more they would get out. Those that didn't, either didn't work out or didn't really gain much from the experience.

Some of the benefits include:

- Earning school credit.
- A salary, if it is a paid internship.
- Opportunity to experience an office situation and how a business is run before formally heading into the job market.
- Job prospects, either within the organization or through the employer's network and clients, if you do a good job.
- On the job training opportunities for career growth.
- Expanding your knowledge of organizational programs, such as HootSuite, Microsoft Office or a web design platform.
- Possibility of gaining a mentor who will use his or her network to facilitate your career decisions, help you develop your resume and may be with you throughout your career.
- Working with your peers, if there are other interns working at the same time, and potentially making life-long friends.
- Teaching an older generation person new skills such as how to be tech-savvy.

The Challenges

There are challenges involved in undertaking an internship. Finding a position with the right balance of opportunity and time commitment to fit your degree plan and income is the most common. Once you start, managing the internship and a full course load and paid jobs and relationships can be extremely stressful. Also, staying motivated and on task when your employer doesn't make the time to clearly define your role and goals can be very difficult, particularly if you end up doing only menial tasks like getting the coffee. Not feeling like your contributions matter in the organization as a whole can also be challenging.

"I feel the word "intern" has taken on a somewhat negative connotation that leads some people to believe the position isn't important, so the intern needs to know that what they're doing is impactful. If you give the intern a meaningful role and explain how their contributions are important to the organization (present and future), you will have an intern who is excited to contribute." - Brad

Some suggested Dos

Make the most of your internship – Help your new employer to identify your strengths and weaknesses so the internship can be tailored to helping you grow.

Set yourself some objectives – Triston had three objectives when he joined our intern team:

1. Learn more about the green/sustainability industry
2. Cultivate a network capable of advising me on entrepreneurial projects
3. Meet my degree internship requirement

“All three objectives were met with added benefits. As a result of participating in the USGBC CT-B internship program, I am better able to determine angle of approach, whether corporate or government, to achieve favorable feedback or support for my projects.”

Behave like an employee – It is your choice whether you take on an internship, whether paid, unpaid or for credits; once you’ve made that choice you must treat it like a real job and commit to it as such. Above all be reliable. This might entail adhering to agreed schedules, letting your employer know in advance if there is a problem, meeting agreed deadlines or dressing appropriately for the office. If you do a good job, you can expect support from your employer in your job search.

Be Honest – Tell your employer exactly what your availability and goals are upfront so that you can design a timetable that fits both of your expectations.

Communicate - If you are having issues with balancing school, with second jobs and your internship, talk to your employer about it. Being unreliable and not communicating leads to an untenable situation for you both. More often than not, if you let him or her know you have a problem, you can work out a solution that works well for everyone.

Be Flexible - Working for someone who only gives you dull or skivvy jobs to do is totally unrewarding. However, you need to be prepared to do both innovative and mundane tasks, which may include making coffee and doing photocopies. Realize that all tasks are essential and no job is too small or insignificant. As one of my interns Aubri said: “Having a variety of tasks/projects/assignments on which I could work during my internship made things exciting and gave me more experience with different types of events and administrative functions”.

Listen – At the risk of sounding like your lecturer, the best way to learn is to listen! Don’t assume you know it all. Sometimes listening to someone else’s perspective on a situation can show you that there is more than one way to do something. While you’re listening look at the person speaking and please don’t text, tweet or message while you’re being spoken to. Even in the 21st century it is still considered inappropriate to do so!

Get them teaching - Ask thoughtful questions of your employer or peers. Demonstrate how teaching you to do something will directly benefit them and/or make you more efficient. Spending time getting to know your employer and the path they took to their present role will help you develop a better relationship with them, and it will also give you valuable insight to the process of professional development.

Capitalize on constructive criticism – When given corrections embrace them as a way to better yourself. Learn not to be over-sensitive.

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Be Proactive – If your employer doesn't seem to be clear on what needs to be done, prepare a draft timeline and project outline based on what you know and the length of time you'll be there; see if there is a task or project that you can own for your portfolio. It also enables you to get on with work without requiring constant input. If it doesn't already happen, request a regular check-in with your employer to ensure you're on course in achieving your goals.

Don't be afraid to ask – An employer should never be too busy to respond to a carefully thought-out question that could enhance your work. Before you ask, do as much research as you can unless you know it is something your employer already knows, in which case don't waste time, ask. Always check if it is convenient to discuss this matter now or if you can arrange a time to review?"

Get involved – Think creatively about how the job could be done differently and propose possible alternative solutions (when presenting your thoughts do so in a positive manner, using the word 'enhance' rather than 'improve' when recommending a change to something that already exists so it doesn't imply that it isn't good!). Do not go ahead and make changes before you have discussed it.

Keep a log – Make notes of outcomes of conversations about schedules and other important decisions you and your employer make. Many employers are so busy they forget some of the details of those conversations, so an intern following up afterwards to confirm the details helps to ensure a clear understanding of what needs to be done, by whom and by when.

Manage expectations – Don't forget you are a student first. Explain to your employer what your priorities are, and how your schoolwork might interfere with your ability to meet their expectations. Be open and honest about what your school obligations look like; your employer will likely be more flexible if there is a conflict.

Take Evaluations Seriously – If you are undertaking internships for credit, you will be required to complete at least two evaluations with your employer. It is really important to take these evaluations seriously, as they can impact your future job opportunities. Give your employer plenty of notice to complete the form and outline clearly what needs to be done. It's also a good time to give your employer feedback about what you would like to achieve before the end of the internship.

Be engaged in today's remote internships – it's really up to you to make the most of a remote internship. If you turn up and show self-motivation and self-discipline, you will make it easier for your employer and he or she will be more inclined to ensure you achieve your goals. So, prepare for zoom meetings, have questions ready, do a brief update report on the work you're doing, share any challenges you're having and, above all, don't turn your camera off during the conversation unless there is a technical issue. Take notes and send an e-mail to your supervisor afterwards with any actions that you or they agreed to do.

Above all, have fun!

REFERENCES

*(1) Lauren Berger's InternQueen.com <http://internqueen.com/> - wide range of tips, thoughts and connections for students looking to intern. (2) For interns, ten helpful tips at <http://the99percent.com/tips/5786/Insights-For-The-Interns-Among-Us>