How To Be An Effective Supervisor And Mentor of Student Interns

Health Career Internships

Great River Perkins
Career & Technical Education Partnership
Sartell - St. Stephen
Sauk Rapids - Rice
St. Cloud Area Schools
Cathedral
GETTING ACQUAINTED

After you interview and accept a student intern, you should set up your own one-on-one orientation to familiarize the student intern with the new surroundings and to establish the rules, regulations, and office protocol she/he is expected to follow. At this meeting, you can begin to establish rapport which will help both of you resolve difficult situations if and when they arise.

Use this meeting to paint a realistic picture of your organization, its needs, and where the student intern will fit in. Discuss the student intern's experiential background and expectations for the internship. This will give you a better sense of their strengths and skills. Some student interns may be particularly shy and will need encouragement to open up, ask questions, and participate in office routines. Since you will be the person the student intern looks up to - the model of what she/he can become - you might tell a student intern something about your own work history, where and when you started, where you want to go, what you like about your current job, etc. It will help her/him understand the aspects of your job.

Getting acquainted with teenagers will help you shape realistic expectations for work performance. Here are some questions you might ask in an initial orientation:

• Is this your first internship?
• What kind of work have you done, and what did you like about it?
• Do you prefer to work with others or by yourself?
• Can you take suggestions from others?
• What would be your ideal job?
• Do you have any questions about working here?
PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES
FOR STUDENT INTERNS

Working as a student intern is more than just an information-gathering exercise. Internships emphasize the ability to function effectively as an integral part of an organization. Specifically, your student intern should be able to demonstrate each of the following:

1. Good Work Habits
   • Promptness and regular attendance - arrives at the internship, completes assignments
   • Appearance - appropriate dress and grooming
   • Dependability - meets commitments
   • Discretion - respects and demonstrates confidentiality
   • Sensitivity - relates well to a variety of people
   • Flexibility - reacts effectively to new and unanticipated situations
   • Independence - works without constant supervision
   • Accuracy - follows directions, is attentive to details, obtains information, and conveys it accurately
   • Maturity - takes a serious approach to the internship
   • Creativity - generates alternative solutions to problems
   • Attitude - displays a positive outlook toward the assignment and a willingness to undertake tasks

2. Personal Growth
   • Increases awareness of one’s own skills and abilities in relation to present and future goals
   • Increases self-confidence

3. Communications Skills
   • Increases ability to write fluently and precisely
   • Increases ability to speak with confidence and maturity
TEENAGERS AT WORK

The teenagers you are about to supervise are a very interesting group of people. They bring to the workplace youthful energy and enthusiasm. They are ready to master new skills and apply what they have learned in school. They have great expectations.

They juggle school, work, and family responsibilities. Some have already lived through experiences many adults have never had to face. These young people are often resilient, ambitious, determined, and curious. They know that workplace experience is the crucial survival skill they need if they are to have stable, fulfilling, and productive lives.

As teenagers set off for the world of work, they are full of excitement and anxiety. For many, an internship is their first job. Undoubtedly, there will be people at work whose values and personal styles are quite different from those they have grown up with. Coming from high school where young people are the majority, teens go to a workplace where they are in the minority. No matter how well they prepare, they cannot know what will happen as they change roles from student to student intern. While this transition is very exciting, it is also intimidating.

Naturally, teenagers will look to their supervisors/mentors for help in making a smooth adjustment. They will consider themselves very lucky to find a supervisor/mentor willing to teach them the ropes and make sure they do not get lost or fall through the cracks.

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PREPARING FOR THE STUDENT
INTERN’S ARRIVAL

Supervising student interns can be very satisfying, enjoyable, and challenging. Young people enliven the workplace and have the energy and enthusiasm to learn, to master, and to produce. They look up to their supervisors/mentors and appreciate the attention they receive. It helps to have a colleague as a back-up who wants to work as an alternate supervisor/mentor with your student intern. Also, if you assign teenagers to work in teams with other employees, they will be less dependent on you and will learn about the cooperative, as well as the competitive, aspects of work.

Like any newcomer, your student intern will require and appreciate the structure and support that you provide. To help you launch the placement smoothly, experience has shown that the following preliminary steps are crucial:

NOTE: May not apply to all Internship sites.
1. Compile a "student intern kit" of some of the basic informational materials about your organization:
   • dress code
   • special supplies/equipment needed
   • organizational chart
   • publications
   • training manual
   • daily schedules
   • welcoming note to the student intern
2. Brief your staff about the student intern’s arrival and role in the organization:
   • clarify the role of the internship
   • explain how other staff can provide assistance to the student intern
   • be accessible to the student intern as a supervisor/mentor
HOW TO HELP STUDENT INTERNS SUCCEED AT WORK

Teens try hard to fit into the adult environment of work. When they are successful, we forget that they are not "grown-ups." No matter how sophisticated a young student intern sounds or acts, she/he may be sensitive to criticism, and feel unjustly reprimanded or merely misunderstood. She/he may want to talk it out, apologize, or ask for an explanation, but not feel confident enough to initiate the conversation. When pointing out mistakes to a young person, be as direct and neutral as possible. Avoid condescension and sarcasm. As a supervisor/mentor, your goal is to get work done while teaching student interns the ropes.

1. Set Goals
Formulate goals with student interns by asking them what they would like to accomplish combined with what you think would be reasonable. For the internship to be a learning experience, student interns need to be given tasks that make demands on their intelligence and their skills. Whenever possible, shape the job’s requirement to take advantage of the particular talents of each student intern: organizational, administrative, technical, artistic, communicative, etc.

2. Encourage Involvement (where applicable)
Student interns need to be active participants, not passive observers. Encourage their involvement and give them enough work to test their capacity. When the pace of work changes and there is little for them to do, help them learn another skill.

3. Give Feedback
Like other workers, student interns thrive when they know their efforts are valued, even if they do not succeed at everything they do. That is why it is important to give them feedback, to identify their strengths and talent, to help them accept mistakes as part of the learning process, and to encourage them to persist and master new skills.
Feedback is most useful when it is frequent, honest and constructive. Here are some things you and the classroom teacher can do:
• Meet with the student intern on a regular basis (usually twice; at ten hours and at twenty five hours)
• Review what both of you see as progress
• Define areas that still need improvement
• Make concrete suggestions for improvement
• Focus attention on the positive rather than the negative

4. Set Limits
As a supervisor/mentor, you might encounter some student interns with problematic behaviors, attitudes, or expectations. They may come in late, not listen carefully when you are talking, "forget" what it was they were asked to do, not complete an assignment satisfactorily, use unprofessional language, or ignore a repeated request to change their behavior. Contact the student’s teacher immediately! Here are approaches to setting limits you may want to try:
• Be firm, but friendly
• Resist the temptation to lecture
• Explain appropriate behavior in this situation
• Keep anger and hostility out of the discussion
• Encourage any signs of improvement
• Be willing to go through the process a few times
• Contact the student’s teacher for help and advice

Your role as supervisor/mentor should never become a burden.

If the student intern does not correct inappropriate behavior, or is a drain on the organization in any way, dismissal of the student intern should be considered a viable learning tool—a reality check, a "real life" consequence. This will ultimately help the student intern deal more constructively with future work experiences.
SUPERVISING A STUDENT INTERN

Working with teenagers who are unfamiliar with the workplace combined with the importance of a good supervisor/mentor gives you a chance to re-examine your beliefs about "good" supervision. If you are an experienced supervisor/mentor, you may no longer consciously think about how you do what you do. Supervising the work of others is natural to you by now, and the people who work for you know what to expect. However, student interns need an outline of what they can reasonably expect from a supervisor/mentor and which aspects of this training you personally believe to be most important.

Your views on the mutual responsibilities, obligations, and interactions of supervisor/mentor and student intern make it clear what you will and will not do for the student intern; how you interpret the rules and apply the consequences when they are broken; and when and how you want to be approached for help or advice.

**Student interns should be told that they are expected to act professionally at all times, and that there is a distinct difference between one's professional life and one's personal life. Some student interns may blur this distinction and will need help and guidance in learning professional behavior.**

Student interns should also be told that supervisors/mentors will stand up for them if they are unfairly criticized, harassed, bullied, or discriminated against because of age, race, sex, disability or ethnic origin.

**Death/Critical Injury**

If your student intern should witness a death or critical injury, please report it to their teacher (within 24 hours). It is essential that assistance be provided within 48 hours. A plan of action has been established to assist student interns through traumatic workplace experiences.
CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

One of the goals of student internship program is to teach teenagers how problems are handled in the workplace. As a problem develops, ask the student intern to name it, find its source, and work to solve it. Encourage the student intern to discuss options, take responsibility for solving the dilemma. Creative problem-solving is a skill that can be learned. Such challenges and problem-solving help student interns learn how to think productively.

THE RULES OF THE WORKPLACE

Teenagers often need to be told things about the workplace that you probably assume "everyone knows." Here are some questions you may need to answer – even if student interns do not ask them:
• Who depends on the work I do? What happens if I do not produce?
• What is the value of working quickly but carefully?
• What happens if I have more than one supervisor/mentor or if my supervisor/mentor changes?
• What is the dress code?
• Do I need to sign in or punch in?
• What should I do if I cannot make it to work?

Business Dress

“George has style, but what he wears is just not appropriate in the workplace. He sticks out like a sore thumb and it is really hurting his chances here.”
• Be clear about the dress code and grooming expectations.
• Remember that some young people have limited clothes budgets.
EVALUATING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

When student interns are about to leave your workplace, a formal exit interview can help put this experience in perspective. It can give them a detailed picture of where they have been, what they have accomplished, and where they can expect to go from here. It is also a good way to say thank you and good-bye, and to wish them well in the next round of experiences which will shape them and add to their knowledge of life and the role of work. The classroom teacher might want to give a student intern an opportunity to evaluate her/his own performance as well with a written self-evaluation.

Here are some questions that will make the evaluation meaningful.

• What have you learned?
• What did you find most enjoyable about this job?
• How would you evaluate your own work behavior?
• Where do you need to improve?
• What was the hardest thing for you during the internship?
• How would you grade yourself?
• Do you have any suggestions to make this internship better?

The Supervisor/Mentor will be asked to fill out a brief check list evaluation on the Intern. They will also be asked to evaluate the Health Career Intern Program.

Thanks for your help. You are changing/influencing the lives of your Interns.

Health Careers Internship Coordinators