

## ***Highly Motivated Employees at No Cost?***

# It's Not an Impossible Dream

*Interns are an under-used resource. Here are 10 steps to success.*

BY JOHN T. BYRD & ROB POOLE

**“T**he practice of gaining supervised practical experience is nothing new. In fact, it's ancient: references are found to apprenticeships thousands of years ago. Known as internships today, it is a rite of passage for students in recent years,” according to Malcolm Coco.

Today, many colleges and universities encourage students to apply for internships as part of the curriculum. Using interns is a great way for your organization to gain meaningful assistance without paying a salary. Interns are highly motivated, performing their work as well as or better than the average new employee.

### Benefits for Students

If you worry about taking advantage of students who could be working part time, consider how helpful internships are for students. Those who intern with organizations before graduation have higher starting salaries, more job offers, a shorter time to obtain their first position, faster movement into jobs with more prestige, greater challenges and financial rewards, and faster promotion. They are better prepared for the world of work and have learned such skills as communication, problem solving, analytical skills, computer applications, leadership and teamwork—the very skills employers are seeking.

### Benefits for Schools

Internships help colleges get in touch with the marketplace. As students succeed in the workplace, student recruitment improves. Strong internship programs increase the retention of students and their placement after graduation.

Indeed, this relationship with the market defines what constitutes a quality education. Colleges are constantly changing their curricula to provide potential employers with students who have the most up-to-date knowledge, skills, and aptitudes.

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Nearly every department has some sort of internship program. Even if there is no formal program, teachers and students are almost always happy to work with interested organizations.

### Benefits for Your Organization

Interns can provide your organization with competent assistance without a large financial outlay. Even if the intern receives a stipend, it is far less than it would cost you to hire someone full-time.

But cutting costs is only one of many benefits interns can provide your organization. Internships let you evaluate a prospective employee nearly risk-free. At the end of the internship, you aren't obligated to continue the relationship, but if it's a good match you have a leg-up on hiring the person. Interns are typically the best students and make the most

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highly motivated and productive employees. Further, if the internship works out and you hire the intern as a permanent employee, you eliminate recruitment expenses and greatly reduce the cost-per-hire.

Internships also help your organization maintain a long-term presence on campus. Not only does this give you access to good employees, but it allows you to partner with colleges in other ways. Colleges are looking for ways to team up with nonprofits to create services and programs that support the community.

Your existing employees benefit, too, when you bring interns on board. Supervising interns gives them leadership experience. They gain new perspectives of their work and ways to make it more efficient.

## How to Increase the Value of Your Interns

You can increase the internal value of your internship program by taking the following steps:

- 1. Assign the intern to projects** that are accomplishable, and provide training as required.
- 2. Involve the intern** in the project planning process.
- 3. Appoint a mentor** or supervisor to guide the intern.

**4. Invite project suggestions** from other staff members.

**5. Ask interns to keep a journal** of their work activities.

**6. Rotate interns** throughout the organization.

**7. Explain the rationale** behind work assignments.

**8. Hold interns accountable** for projects and deadlines.

**9. Treat interns as part of the organizational staff**, and invite them to staff meetings.

**10. Establish a process** for considering interns for permanent hire. ■

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\*Starred resources are available from the Society's Resource Center, 608-274-9777, Ext. 221, [www.danenet.org/snpo](http://www.danenet.org/snpo).

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