

W rkshop

Internships

Making the Most Of a Good Opportunity

An internship can be a situation where expectation collides with reality. At best, it's an opportunity to apply classroom learning in a "real world" setting under the guidance of a workplace mentor/supervisor interested in nurturing the next generation of nonprofit leaders. At worst, it's free labor for an overworked, understaffed office.

Like many other situations, you get out of it what you put into it. An industrious, highly motivated student can come away with valuable experience and, sometimes, even a promise of a job after graduation. An organization or company that has a carefully supervised intern program can benefit from the energy and productivity of youth. "Interns often bring a fresh perspective to the job as well as an enthusiasm that can be infectious in the office," according to Jeff Hoffman, writing about Walt Disney's VolunTEARS program.

Successful internships grow out of careful planning. If your main reason for wanting an intern is low-paid or free labor, perhaps you should rethink whether or not you should have an intern program. Mona Yep, who manages the University of California's Washington Semester Program, cautions that it's important that intern supervisors have the "time to mentor and guide them. They [interns] need the commitment of the full staff to provide an open environment with opportunities to learn and grow."

Andy Grimm, a former intern and now an employee of DePauw University's Hartman Center, urges organizations to set high standards. The expectation that interns do professional-quality work was invaluable to him. "Looking back, I'm often stunned at the quality of all the work that my fellow interns did." He says that expectation of excellence has made Hartman Center internships highly sought after by students.

In the following articles, our guest editors offer their experiences in the world of internships. You'll find do's and don'ts from a variety of viewpoints: a corporation, a university intern placement program, an intern supervisor and a former intern. We hope their insights will be useful to you.

Workshop, a standing feature of Volunteer Leadership, offers how-to tips and valuable insights on selected topics that are of interest to our readers. To suggest topics or to request permission to reprint Workshop articles, contact Jane Harvey, Volunteer Leadership editor, e-mail: janehar@aol.com.

Resources

● *The Internship Bible*: 1999 by Mark Oldman and Samer Hamadeh (Princeton Review Publishing; \$25) offers a comprehensive overview, with funny sidebars, cartoons and interviews with famous former interns. Covers 100,000 programs, with descriptions of positions, compensation, etc.; available at traditional and cyber bookstores.

● The National Association of Colleges and Employers (www.jobweb.org) offers "The Employer's Guide to College Recruiting and Hiring," including a section on setting up and managing a successful internship program (non-member price is \$125). The association's web site also offers discussion forums and a job database. Information: 800-544-5272 or 610-868-1421.

● Internships Unlimited (www.internshipsunlimited.com) offers training programs and course materials and suggestions for goal-oriented intern tasks.

● *Back Door Guide to Short-Term Adventures* by Michael Landes (Ten Speed Press, 1997; \$21.95) is an intern's eye-view work. This 486-page paperback got spectacular reader reviews at the www.amazon.com web site.

● The Idealist (www.Idealist.org) is an electronic publication of Action Without Borders, connecting "16,000 organizations under one roof." You'll find it easy to post and update information here, at no charge and even without an Internet address. This is a well-trafficked site, with links to other online resources.

● International Quality & Productivity Center (www.iqpc.com) specializes in internship programs for corporations. IQPC hosts conferences about effective internship programming with guest speakers from other organizations and lots of good links to other conferences.

Cathleen O'Connor Schoultz

Internships Can Benefit Everyone

By Jeff Hoffman

Setting up an internship at your company or organization can have many benefits for both your program and for the intern. Most interns are students who often get credit for the work they perform. In today's climate of having to do more with less staff, an intern can be a valuable asset to help get through that "crunch" or to work on an added special project without overtaxing your regular staff. Interns often bring a fresh perspective to the job as well as an enthusiasm that can be infectious in the office.

At The Walt Disney Co., we use student interns to assist with our employee volunteer program called Disney VolunteARS. The structure of the program varies, depending on location and type of operation (ABC, Inc. in New York, Walt Disney World Resort in Florida and Disneyland Resort in Anaheim have different needs) but all sites find interns very beneficial.

One former Disney VolunteARS intern at The Walt Disney Studios, Carrie Larson, got a job with Disney Online after graduation. Her passion for volunteering gained during the internship has now progressed into a position on the VolunteARS Steering Committee in Burbank. A current intern, Blair Escherich, is majoring in communications and feels that she has learned a lot about working in an office environment as well as how to develop a time line and take a project from start to finish. "I'm helping our employees get connected to organizations that need the help. I feel like I am doing something good," says Blair.

Successful intern programs start with planning:

- Determine what tasks and projects that you will assign.
- Define the length of the internship; the time frame is often tied into the semester schedule.
- Find a location for the intern to work with adequate resources such as a phone and computer.
- Determine who will supervise the interns' work and set up regular meetings to assess work and answer questions.

Once the intern is on board, it is up to you to make the time worthwhile. The more time you invest from the start, the better the results.

- Meet with a representative from Human Resources to determine what if any guidelines exist regarding the hiring of interns. Issues that you will want to discuss include paid versus non paid, number of hours that can be worked in a week, appropriate duties, union regulations (if applicable), length of service and participation in new-hire orientation.

Now that you have the groundwork laid, you can start recruitment. Most colleges and universities have internship offices. Usually there is an application that the company must fill out describing the details of the internship.

Larger institutions often have internship offices connected to specific disciplines. If so, you may need to submit separately to those areas of interest such as business, communications or social services.

Sometimes the school will screen candidates for you and other times will have the students contact you directly. If the student is to get credit for the class, often the instructor or an advisor will call to check on the progress of the student.

Handle the interview the same as if you are hiring a regular position. Go over the job duties, review the applicant's resumé and determine if the candidate is a good fit for both parties.

Once the intern is on board, it is up to you to make the time worthwhile. The more time you invest from the start familiarizing the person with the office, job duties and expectations, the better the results.

An intern can prove to be a very valuable member of the team. Give him or her responsibility. In most cases the student will want to learn and achieve. Give him or her constructive criticism.

Often, this is the intern's first experience in an office setting. He or she probably will walk in the door feeling uncomfortable, and you need to put him or her at ease.

You are giving the student a very valuable education on the real world and an opportunity to see and learn first hand about careers that make a positive impact on society. ♦



Jeff Hoffman is the director of employee services and corporate volunteerism for The Walt Disney Company. He is the immediate

past chair of the National Council on Workplace Volunteerism.

Take Good Care of Your Intern

By Sam Matlick

I take my responsibility as an intern supervisor very seriously. For most interns, an internship requires a substantial financial commitment, and while my organization often provides a stipend, most internships don't. My organization also contributes a great deal in terms of staff time, equipment and space. The Foundation offers a formal summer internship program, although departments retain interns throughout the year, as I do, matching internship opportunities to projects. From my recent experience, most of our interns learn about the Foundation from our Web site and postings on other Web sites. I treat possible interns as job applicants and ask many interview questions, but question them more about their goals. I often refer applicants to other departments or organizations, if our needs do not correspond.

In the Beginning

On the first day, I share information about the Foundation and its culture to help an intern avoid obvious pitfalls. This is as simple as explaining our dress policy or as complicated as outlining office politics. To introduce the intern, I send a staffwide e-mail, providing a short background as well as what projects the intern will be working on. And I make sure the intern's name is clearly visible outside his or her cubicle.

As a director in a busy department, I always have a variety of ongoing projects. During the interview process we discuss possible projects, but once the intern starts work, I go over opportunities again. Together, we identify mutual goals and select the intern's projects. This gives the intern more control over the work

and encourages personal investment. Projects are also placed in a framework, so that the intern can see how the work benefits the organization.

I offer the intern a variety of projects. Having an initial success encourages the intern to continue working hard, while long-term projects offer more of an opportunity to contribute. When possible, I allow the intern to "sign" their work—a byline on an article, recognition in editing a newsletter, acknowledgement in a book or report. This gives the intern something tangible to take away from the internship. Giving the intern mundane "grunt work" is inevitable, but it's important to mix it with more meaningful projects and also to show how the work fits into the big picture.

Pay Attention

Interns vary greatly in their ability, and early in the internship I watch carefully to identify both skills and weaknesses. I may have projects that need completions, but asking an intern without good computer skills to create a complicated spreadsheet inevitably will fail. Instead I match projects to the proficiency of the intern, which gives them the opportunity to shine while moving the project forward.

I also look for opportunities to improve weak areas. For example, I may invite shy interns to more meetings, encourage their comments or have them work with other staff on joint projects. When working on a project that needs more guidance, I allow extra time to complete the project so the intern can focus on the project and improve his or her skills.

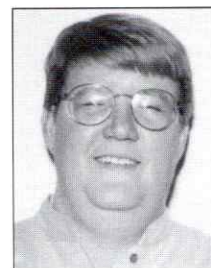
I check in with my intern often. If the pace of the organization is fast, it

can be daunting and inhibit willingness to ask for help. Having a designated time for discussion reinforces the intern's value and will increase their productivity. In these meetings, we discuss whether the internship is meeting his or her goals as well as the status of ongoing projects. This is another chance to offer criticism and appreciation. Even when unpleasant, helping the intern recognize professional behavior and practices in the workplace is one of my responsibilities as a supervisor.

And Finally

At the end of their internship, I write a letter of recommendation and thanks to the intern, outlining accomplishments and strengths. I also talk with the intern, to reiterate strengths and to address areas for improvement. Because I've talked with the intern on a regular basis about his or her progress, this conversation usually revolves around progress. Constructive criticism in tandem with thoughtful praise serves the intern well.

I enjoy working with interns and find their enthusiasm, creativity and joy of learning reinvigorates me and brings fresh ideas to my department. For me, they underscore the team in team work. ♦



Sam Matlick is director of membership outreach for The Points of Light Foundation, in Washington, D.C., and engages interns on an ongoing basis.

Make Your Organization 'Intern Friendly'

By Mona Yep

I place students in a variety of internships with varying workloads, a wide range of responsibilities and levels of supervision. The definition of what constitutes a "successful internship" differs from organization to organization, and I find the task of setting "universal standards" to be difficult indeed. While there are no magic formulas, I find that students are most satisfied in organizations that meet certain standards:

Good Environment

In placing interns, I look for answers to these questions: How much stability does the organization offer a prospective intern? Is something disruptive, like a move, being planned during the internship? Will someone have the time and energy to be a good supervisor for the student? Has there been a lot of staff turnover? Is there adequate work space for an intern?

I recall a student who worked for a subcommittee on Capitol Hill. The office was so overcrowded that the student was forced to do her work in the staff conference room. Every time there was a meeting, she was asked to pick up her things and leave and often wandered aimlessly about the office until the meeting was completed. She felt unappreciated and demeaned.

While interns provide a valuable service, they also have needs. They need a supervisor who can take the time to mentor and guide them. They need a designated work space appropriate for the job to be done. They need the commitment of the full staff to provide an open environment with opportunities

to learn and grow. While it is always tempting to take the offer of free or inexpensive help, organizations should regularly assess their "intern-readiness" first.

Screening

Organizations need to take the time to screen prospective interns. An internship is often a student's first introduction to the professional work world. They are excited and overwhelmed by the number of choices available, but often are clueless as to where their interests and abilities will best be served. You can help them in this process.

Prepare a brief, written summary of the internship position and share it with prospective candidates. It should include information about the organization and an accurate list of job responsibilities.

Interview the student either in person or by telephone if distance is a factor. The interview is a two-way street and gives both the supervisor and the student the opportunity to ask questions.

If possible, have the student speak with current interns. Students are less intimidated and appreciate the candid insights of their peers. If the fit doesn't seem right, don't accept the student. Likewise, respect a student's decision not to accept your offer. Careful screening means both you and your intern will be happier.

On the Job

I fax, I make copies, and I answer telephones. But I wouldn't want to do those tasks all day long and neither will your intern. I find that interns are most satisfied when they can spend at least 60% of their day

on assignments of a more substantive nature. The specific assignments will vary depending on the work of the organization and the abilities of the intern. Many include opportunities to write, research, work on short-term projects, attend meetings and plan special events. Interns also appreciate the opportunity to observe or shadow professionals in their daily routines. They enjoy being included in any activity that will provide them with insight into the work world they will soon be entering.

An "intern friendly" organization is one that offers constructive evaluations. If the intern has performed well, be sure to recognize his or her accomplishments.

At a minimum, provide a successful intern with a strong letter of recommendation and a promise to serve as a reference in the future. And consider interns if full-time openings in your organization become available or if you hear of suitable job openings elsewhere.

A full-time job offer is the highest praise interns can hope for, even if circumstances prevent them from accepting. ♦



Mona Sutton Yep is the director of the University of Southern California's Washington Semester Program and has placed

hundreds of undergraduates in Washington, D.C., internships over the past 14 years.

The Inside Story from an Ex-Intern

By Andy Grimm

I have to admit that my internship has had something of a negative effect on my professional life. I get surly in poorly run meetings. I seethe if I'm working on a disorganized project. It's fair to say that my two years as a Civic Intern at DePauw's Hartman Center has spoiled me for working with those who haven't had the experience of breathing the rarified air of high expectations.

It's hard to imagine the Hartman Center, the hub of De Pauw's nationally recognized community service programs, without the impact of student interns. Director Dr. Stuart C. Lord freely admits that the Center could never accomplish its goals with only its four full-time staff members. Hartman Center Civic Interns have served with distinction, if not pay, for several years now. Interns coordinated this year's Make a Difference Week, which involved more than 9,000 student and community volunteers.

The key to a successful internship experience is to have high expectations—by the intern and the organization. Competition for the 17 Civic Internships is fierce and involves a lengthy interview process. The word is out at DePauw: Civic Interns expect experience as leaders, learning how to manage large projects.

Hartman Center staff expects interns to do professional quality work. (On my first assignment, I had to re-type, re-copy, and re-address 250 fundraising letters twice because of a single typo.)

The overall atmosphere at Hartman Center is one of professionalism. The staff treated me as a co-worker, not free help. It might seem a little unconventional, but interns are

truly in charge of important initiatives. I was made aware of goals and expectations, and I was given the freedom to work on projects with little supervision. Hartman Center staff encouraged me to find solutions to problems as often as they offered advice. Looking back, I'm often stunned at the quality of all the work that my fellow interns did and still do produce relative to "professional" standards.

Using my internship experience as a guide, I would like to offer the following tips to help an organization maximize their internship program:

Expect excellence. If you cultivate an atmosphere of quality performance and communicate your goals and expectations clearly interns can make big contributions. Students have unlimited energy and even more talent; encourage them to use it.

Give important work. Once you have developed interns' commitment to excellence, it seems a shame to put tomorrow's captains of industry to work stuffing envelopes or running copies. You have skilled students willing to give you their best work; let them help you to expand your programming to a larger scale or in new directions.

Have answers. Interns always will have questions. Put the answers where they can find them. All Civic Interns receive an official binder that serves as a manual of office protocols and other important information. We also saved everyone's time lines, correspondence, evaluations, and other project materials for future interns to use. If your interns are coming to your desk every 10 minutes, refer them to the binder.

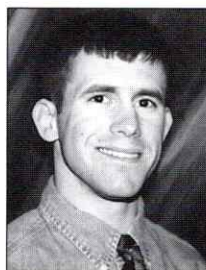
Provide training and support. A

binder can't explain everything, especially when your interns all are involved with different types of projects. A weekly staff meeting followed by a workshop on specific skills such as time-management or delegation will help your interns meet the challenges they face with their projects and let you reinforce your expectations and standards.

Be firm. Build accountability into the program. Communicate deadlines and enforce them. Not every intern will work out, and it is important that you maintain your professional standards, even for volunteers. Be supportive and let interns learn from their mistakes, but an intern who consistently fails to meet expectations can cause poor morale for the group.

A quality internship program can have a tremendous impact on your organization and on the students involved. If you have a program that lets students excel as leaders, your organization will have an unlimited pool of talented students clamoring for the chance to help you do bigger and better things.

I'm living proof that the skills and attitudes you gain from a quality internship experience can prepare you for the most demanding employers. After working in Chicago for a year, I was hired by the Hartman Center. ♦



Andy Grimm served two years as a Civic Intern and works as a program coordinator at the Hartman Center and as a freelance writer.

Disarm the D-Word

In an ideal world, disabilities wouldn't hinder any of us from full participation in work or play. And people with any of the wide range of identifiable "disabilities" would never feel marginalized. In many settings, it seems we're practically there. From other perspectives, there's work to be done.

Oracle, the world's second largest software company, headquartered in Redwood Shores, Calif., sounds like it's well into the 21st century ergonomically speaking. Adapting chairs, desks and tables to suit the individual is simply a matter of course at the firm, according to diversity officer Sondra Rodriguez.

"Take me," she says. "I'm short, and my desk needed to be adjusted for that." While not so short that she'd be classified as disabled, Rodriguez is small enough to realize that one size doesn't fit all when it comes to desks, chairs or other office equipment. Oracle also has special vans to transport employees with mobility difficulties.

Carole Lam-Chin, manager of community relations, says that before working with nonprofits, she visits sites and talks with volunteer coordinators about wheelchair accessibility, etc., but because of Oracle's general inclusiveness, she says she doesn't feel a need to tag volunteer programs as being open to people with disabilities.

Lam-Chin says the variety of programs at Oracle means there's something for everyone. This sentiment was echoed by other large companies, such as Washington, D.C.-based Freddie Mac, with scores of activities from tree planting to a massive tutor-



Oracle employee Marco Sorani, center, with other participants and volunteers in San Francisco's Walk-n-Roll 5K race last year.

ing program, and Seattle's Eddie Bauer, where volunteers may help with anything from mentoring kids to planting seedlings on the shores of the nearby Sammamishi River.

Oracle employee Marco Sorani, who uses a wheelchair, is co-leader of the Bay Area Chapter of the Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis, a Miami-based organization founded by injured football player Marc Buoniconti and his parents. Sorani is a major fundraiser and, through Oracle's annual volunteer fair, he's enlisted other employees. The chapter hosts many special events, including a Marin County Chili Cook-off and a glamorous gala and silent auction, which raised more than \$40,000. In addition, Oracle donated \$20,000 to the cause as a result of Sorani's advocacy.

Disability is a big word. Executive director Chuck Greene of the Volunteer Center of San Francisco says much of what he's learned

through his center's Transitional Volunteer Program highlights the beauty of volunteering in general. One of seven programs at the center, TVP successfully placed about 430 individuals in 1998, most with significant mental challenges from retardation to schizophrenia to a traumatic brain injury caused by a skiing accident.

Greene says observing the astounding accomplishments of TVP in developing clients' employability—while also providing excellent volunteer support for a variety of nonprofits over the past seven years of his directorship—has turned some of his assumptions on their ear.

"At the beginning, I just didn't think there could be much growth with a program like this," he said. "But it's increased tenfold. Agencies start out thinking they're doing our clients a good deed and find out it's reciprocal," he says. Last year, the program placed 91% of people