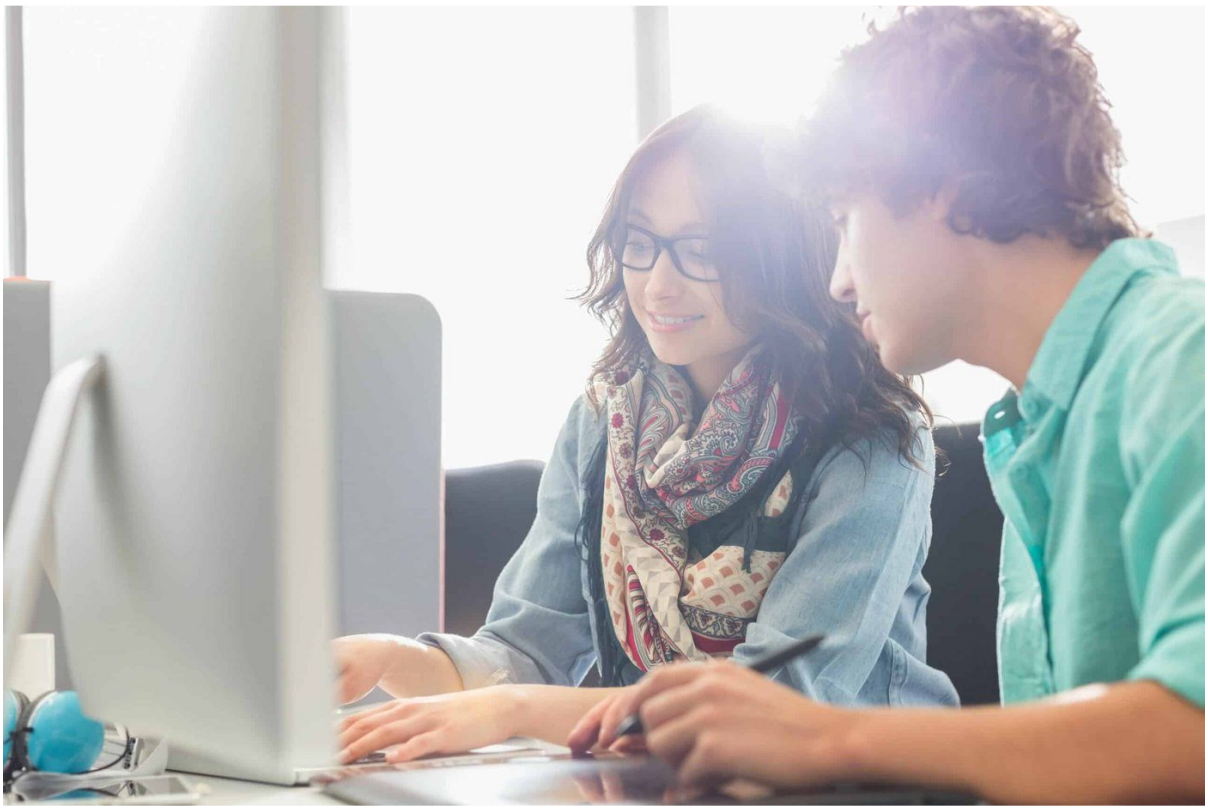
5 Ways HR Can Help Their Summer Interns (From Someone Who Used to Be One)

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Published May 25, 2017



HR professionals, it's that time of year again - you're getting ready to open your doors and welcome summer interns into your organization. They may only be there for a few months, or they may turn into your next new full-time employee. Either way, trust me when I tell you how excited these interns are to be there, to contribute to your organization and to gain some real-world experience. As someone who made the jump from intern to full-time fairly recently, I remember the good, the bad, and the ugly experiences and stories when it came to interning. And while every situation is different, I have to admit that the level of involvement of the HR department had quite an impact on my experience. It's also highly probable that a lot of your company's interns won't really know what HR even is when they start - if anything, their impression of HR might be shaped by references to Toby Flenderson from The Office. Luckily, you have a chance right off the bat to change the way the next generation of

the workforce perceives HR - and you can build a great internship program at the same time! What a win-win.

Sit the interns down for job orientation and training

Nothing is scarier than being thrown into an internship headfirst with minimal direction and no training. In fact, according to a 2014 Universum survey of students and graduates, 42 percent of interns want to be in a learning environment where they can really grow and contribute - and figure out if this career path is even what they want to do! How do they even begin to figure that out? Simple, really: HR should institute an orientation that all new interns must undergo upon their arrival (even just one day will make a difference), and you should also require all managers to deliver some sort of official training to their new interns. Not only will it make your interns feel included, but it will also help them acclimate to a corporate environment and set expectations for their experience.

Establish a mentor program

Obviously, this one is dependent on the structure of your company and the availability of other employees - but I've found that a mentorship program is a great way to help your interns grow. The idea is to assign each intern a mentor who is not his manager, but rather another senior employee in the same department. Mentor programs give interns a safe way to ask questions they wouldn't ask their manager (no one wants to admit to not understanding a key aspect of their job), to discuss their career goals, and to talk through struggles they may be experiencing with their internship. Plus, successful programs will give your interns a mentor for life. You can't put a price on the value of a good mentor when you're just getting started in your career.

Set up internal networking opportunities

While this one partially falls on the shoulders of (good) managers, where possible HR should organize opportunities for your interns to network with employees across the company, both in the intern's department and beyond. Interns want to understand the full scope of your business, not just the small piece of the puzzle they might see through their own role. And what better way to understand the big picture than to talk to employees in other roles? Plus, as I said before, while they're sure to put in the work, some interns really are trying to figure out if this is the career path they want to pursue. Gaining exposure to other roles within your organization can help them make that decision - and may even lead to the intern's return in another role!

Keep in touch with your interns throughout their internships, not just at the beginning and the end

To truly evaluate an internship's success - whether or not it leads to a full-time hire aside - you need feedback from both the manager and the intern. But by waiting until the end of the internship to hear presentations and evaluations, HR is missing out on key opportunities to understand and improve your program. Check in with your company's interns multiple times throughout their internships - even monthly would be a good cadence. Continuous feedback will help you make improvements to every aspect of the internship program, and your interns will be able to share their feedback as things happen, rather than forgetting important information by the end of the experience.

Learn how to work with millennials

If you haven't had the opportunity yet to watch Simon Sinek's discussion on managing millennials in the workplace, take a couple of minutes to absorb what he has to say. He makes some insightful points about the impact that environment has on millennial work performance. And if you're curious about how you can start to build a work environment that will help your millennial employees – full-time or interns! – check out our unofficial guide. Bottom line here - HR has the opportunity to make their interns' experiences remarkable. Don't miss out on yours.

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