

## Basic Guidelines for Employers in Offering Teacher Externships

### What is an Externship?

An externship is a real-world learning experience whereby an educator spends a set number of hours inside a company to gain information on current industry practices. The educator is then charged with developing lesson plans for the classroom. An externship can also be appropriate for a school counselor as they are in a key position to advise students and parents on the scope of jobs/careers available in manufacturing, the potential salaries to be made and the availability of jobs due to the high number of retiring baby boomers.

Inviting an educator into your company for approximately 40 hours during the summer connects them to the specific work of your company as well as provides them with information on the contemporary skill sets desired of new hires for your segment of the industry. The information gleaned by the educator gets translated into curriculum, potentially reaching hundreds of students --your potential employees – who will be prepared with the basic skills and understanding to enter the workforce.

### What is My Role as a Business Partner?

Your role is to find out what the teacher would like to learn and provide that experience where possible. If they are open to learning anything, then show them what you do and how you do it. Take them from the warehouse, through the office, to the job site to show how the jobs and processes are interrelated. Have them participate in a specific project. Apprise them of new machine and software technologies with demos or training and discuss which might be addressed in their classroom or shown through company videos.

Because many schools are now developing cross-curricula programs, you might encounter interest from educators in areas other than construction, woodworking and drafting. For example, a math teacher who collaborates with a wood technology instructor at their school might be interested in how to develop lessons involving project dimensions, calculations, costing, profit, etc.; an IT teacher might want to gain knowledge of product design or manufacturing software; an English or design teacher who assigns projects on architectural history, designing interiors or furnishings might be enthusiastic about such a program to develop the parameters of research reports.

#### **Business Partners can:**

- Provide “hands-on” learning experiences (usually a one-week, 40-hour commitment) for the teacher/counselor, who in turn can develop content for lesson plans as well as become advocates in promoting the industry to students and parents.
- Bring greater understanding to teachers about the business environment which can be passed on to students.

## 1. Preparing Internally

Take the time needed for the planning stages before you actually begin offering externships. Create an employee task force of interested individuals who are willing to commit and work with teachers/counselors. Define criteria for the employees who will act as mentors. Identify those employees that exhibit expertise, patience and a willingness to participate as it will likely add to their workload. Choose individuals that can put a solid learning experience together and who are good communicators.

### *Tasks for the staff team might be to:*

- Identify all high schools, technical schools, community colleges and universities in your immediate area that have related coursework/programs from which likely candidates would come. Find out if the school has a formal externship program defining such things as will the teacher receive a stipend, is a timesheet required, who has liability responsibility, etc. Information and advice can be sought from local community college career services or job placement offices, from a human resource manager or from a legal advisor.
- Create the externship experience description and schedule
- Develop any necessary documents such as application and evaluation forms customized to your company
- Conduct interviews
- Act as the mentor, trainer
- Oversee an evaluation process

## 2. Structuring the Externship

- Have a description that will clearly define the experience. This can grow out of the interview when staff have a chance to learn about the educator's objectives.
- Determine with the educator what aspect(s) of the business they will be involved in (e.g. design, software or computer-related; front office; machinery; warehousing/ or inventory; manufacturing or production, marketing, etc.) and who they will be working with. Make sure all staff is informed as well.
- Provide a realistic work space as needed for the extern.
- Arrange a staff welcome and orient them to staff, office locations, restrooms, lunchroom, postal and copy machines, etc. Include them in staff meetings and lunches.
- Consider a job shadowing component that places them with multiple staff for at least a glimpse of the various roles within a department or within the company as a whole.
- Ensure that the teacher/counselor is provided a safe working environment.

### 3. Conduct an Interview

- Take this opportunity to learn about their intent and curriculum development interests so you can make the best match of their expectations with what your company can offer. Ask about the technology they have available in their classroom such as machinery and design software. Utilize this information to Jointly agree on the scope of the externship.
- Find out what the teacher knows about industry. He/she may have come from a work environment.
- Determine if this must be conducted in summer or if it can be incorporated into weekends and/or evenings.
- Discuss with them how you can best contribute to a valuable lesson plan for the classroom.

### 4. Evaluations

Having an evaluation process will aid in improving the externship program over time. It will be most effective if the evaluation process goes in both directions.

- Create a customized evaluation for the extern to fill out addressing what they learned, what was most effective for incorporation into curriculum and lesson plans, were they comfortable with the approach and the mentors, etc.
- Have the supervising employee/mentors develop an internal evaluation of the externship from the staff perspective, rating the program on such things as the implementation, the participation by staff members, level of knowledge that was imparted, the relationship with the school that was developed, etc.

***Providing an externship experience in your company can increase your chances of finding new employees who will come with comprehension about the industry and basic skills. You can increase the visibility and knowledge of both your company and the industry with teachers, administrators and counselors within the school community. Addressing the skilled labor shortage is a challenge that demands outreach, action and commitment from industry. Don't wait for an invitation—extend one!***



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