

To Hire an Intern or Not to Hire an Intern, That is the Question!

by Michelle Farmerie, GLA Water Consultants



One of the biggest questions employers face when they are looking for extra help is whether or not to look for that help in the form of an intern. There are several pros and cons when considering hiring interns, many of which we have experienced firsthand at GLA Water Consultants, as we have chosen to take a chance on interns by hiring 5 in the past 6 years. As with hiring any employee, hiring an intern is the same thing—taking a chance that sometimes works out and sometimes doesn't.

Before getting into the pros and cons of having an intern work for your company, I'd first like to cover some of the basics that are important when considering hiring an intern.

The most important thing you have to determine is if you are going to have enough work to consistently keep them busy. An intern is not just meant to be a pack mule who will do all of your grunt labor for you. Rather, an internship is supposed to be a learning opportunity for a student to get experience in a field they are interested in and where they are able to apply knowledge they have

learned in the classroom to their internship and, vice versa, apply knowledge they learn at their internship to concepts being taught in the classroom. Not only is an internship meant to be a learning opportunity for the student, the energy, and new knowledge that a student can bring to your company can also be a learning opportunity for you, as well.

Once your company has decided to hire an intern, the next thing to do is begin reaching out to local colleges and universities in your area. It is best to begin by speaking with an employee at the school's Career Development Center (CDC), as there is likely a contract or agreement that you will have to fill out listing information about your company and assuring the school that your company will provide a safe, as well as educational, environment for the student. The other vital part about speaking to a CDC staff member is that, they will help you to determine what type of internship is best for your company, as well as what fits in with their school. Some schools offer internship credit, while others do not. Some schools insist on an intern being paid, while others do

not. These types of things are best to find out before any contact is made with students. Depending on the school's set up, the next step may be for you to provide an internship job description to the CDC staff member to post on the school's student job portal. Once listed, all that is left to do is sit and wait for the next phase—the interview process.

Interviewing an intern is no different than any other interview process, as you are attempting to find the person with the right fit. But you must remember that these students may have no experience and may have never interviewed before, therefore the best approach is to ask them about themselves. Have an easy set of questions, such as:

- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- Tell me about the most recent book you read and how did it excite you?
- What is the worst grade you received and how did it impact you?

- Tell me about a time you were criticized and how did you handle it?

By asking these types of questions, you can use their answers to determine which one has the best type of personality fit to work with your company.


When it comes to interns, everyone has different opinions. Some see them as a waste, while some see them as a blessing. In some instances, an intern can be great, but many times, that depends on the student themselves and what type of drive they have, as well as their goals for the future. Some students just see an internship as a resume booster, another job that gets them credit, in addition to some extra income. Many times, they have no intention of making a career with your company. These types of students represent the cons to internships. You spend time training them to do various tasks, only to have them do the bare minimum in your office or lab and never really show any initiative. Then they leave after one, maybe two semesters, at which point,

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you are left having to start all over again, spending more time finding a new intern and training them. As several AWT members are smaller companies, the time you lose having to train and retrain is valuable time that could be better spent focusing on your customers.

Not all student interns are like that, however, as some prove to be an asset to your company for many years. Some students have more drive and ambition than others. When you find an intern with initiative, they are a benefit to your company, since they don't hesitate to dive right in, finish a project, and then look for the next way they can help. These types of interns are eager to learn, and that eagerness, in turn, transfers over to helping your everyday business. How is that, you may ask. Well, let me share with you, an example. One of our most successful interns took charge at the office, going above and beyond what was asked of him. He would spend time in our lab, our storage facility and even out in the field. By taking the initiative to continually learn the business, he was able to allow our service technicians to service more clients in a day, and even have extra time to reach out to new prospective clients, as they would no longer have to do the smaller, more menial tasks. They

also would have to spend less time prepping, as he was there to help prepare the test kits and chemicals, as well as help to load the trucks. Lastly, he developed a new inventory protocol, that we continue to use today, to more efficiently manage our supplies. I wanted to share this example with you, to help prove my point that, not all interns are a waste. If an intern can help you improve your bottom line, like the one I mentioned above, they are a valuable asset. They become even more valuable when they spend continuous semesters and summers with your company, eventually growing and being groomed to the point that they could become a full time member of your staff.

To be completely honest though, of all that I have said, one of the most vital things to remember about interns is that, you are taking a chance on them, just like any other employee. If the intern works out, we have a good full time employee. (Note: The fact that they are cheaper than a full time employee, both in pay and benefits, is a perk to having an intern). They are not always going to work out, and more often than not, they won't. Of the 5 interns GLA has hired over the past 6 years, only 2 have been valuable assets. One was helpful, but not close

to the point of the others, and the last 2 were examples of the "cons" of having an intern. Some would think that, with only having about fifty percent good luck with interns, we would be inclined to move away from hiring interns and instead look to hire from the job pool, but that is not the case. The positive effect that those 2 successful interns have had, not only on our company's operational success but also on our employees, will lead GLA to continue to hire interns. And truthfully, we will continue to hire interns because it is a way we can find a new employee that we can train from the ground up. ☺

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