

Selecting your intern

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Internship

As we know, people come in all shapes and sizes. Everyone has a different personality and is interested in different things.

If the internship intervention is going to be successful, it is essential that time must be invested to ensure that the intern is a good 'fit' for the organisation and the department to which he or she will be allocated.

Once you have structured the internship and decided upon the skills and tasks that will be offered to the intern, then you need to determine the following:

- What academic background is required? I.e. matric with appropriate subjects or a relevant qualification?
- What competencies need to be in place? I.e. should the applicant be computer literate or should they be able to drive. Do they need to have a good command of English or another language?
- What type of personality should they have? For example, if you are going to place the intern in a marketing, sales or customer care position, they should have the ability to interact with other people. If you wish to place the intern in an admin or finance position, are they able to show attention to detail.

Sourcing the intern

There are several avenues that can be followed when sourcing an intern.

You may:

- Advertise the opportunity through the Internet
- Use a placement agency
- Contact the Department of Labour, the National Youth Agency or a graduate placement agency
- Contact tertiary institutions or SETAs that offer courses that are of interest to your organisation

Irrespective of which route you take it is important to have a clear guideline as to the nature of the internship and the intern specification.

Many organisations that we have worked with, tell us that they receive thousands of applications for internships every year. It is therefore important to be able to sort through the applications and narrow it down to a realistic number which can be interviewed.

Interviewing the applicant

The intern is going to be part of your organisation for the duration of the intervention, therefore it is important that you select a young person who really wants the opportunity and is committed to maximising his/her time with you.

Recently, I had the opportunity of speaking to a young man who was completing his internship. He started off by stating that he really did not want to work in that industry but took the internship as he felt he did not have a choice.

Further questioning revealed that he had had three other chances to study and on each occasion had dropped out. The company told me that this intern had been problematic. The reality was that this young man had wasted the opportunity he had been given.

So that you do not make a mistake when interviewing a possible intern, ensure that you plan your questions so that you can find out if the intern is a good fit.

On a more positive note, I was able to interview another young man who had just completed his internship and had been offered a permanent job by the host organisation.

When asked why he thought that he had secured a post, he said that he realised that he had been given a fantastic opportunity and that no matter what he was asked to do during his internship, he did it willingly. He said that if they needed him to stay late or to work over the weekends, he was prepared to do it.

This young man had acquired valuable work related skills, competencies and attitudes and there is no doubt that he will grow significantly in his career.

Nurturing your intern

Just as a plant needs water and sunshine to thrive, your intern also needs regular input, support and encouragement.

Be prepared for your intern to make mistakes. Making mistakes is essential to learning. Take time to explain to the intern what has gone wrong and why and guide him/her to try again.