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Bulletin

How to Find, Hire, and Manage Student Interns

Introduction

Finding good help these days is tougher than ever, especially for companies in the specialty construction business. Companies that are recruiting for professional positions (i.e., project managers, estimators) are challenged by unfavorable demographics; the “baby boomers” (those born between 1945 and 1965) with experience are reaching retirement age and recent college graduates with technical degrees are declining in number each year.

Companies are finding that one way to ensure that their recruiting goals are achieved is to plan and act ahead by hiring summer interns. Companies in our industry (and others) are hiring college students majoring in relevant academic programs for summer or temporary jobs to fill a short-term personnel need now AND a possible full-time professional need in the future.

This bulletin is designed for those companies interested in hiring student interns either as a part of a recruiting strategy for full-time professional employees or as a way to fill a temporary shortfall in project staffing. Either way, this guide will acquaint you with the concept of a student intern, help you plan a successful strategy to recruit an intern for your company, and suggest

an approach to managing the intern to ensure the experience benefits and fulfills everyone involved.

What is a Student Intern?

Student interns are professionals in training. They are college students majoring in the academic disciplines that apply to the careers or professions that they wish to pursue. An internship provides the student with practical experience working in the profession that they hope to enter after finishing their education. The internship should augment the student’s book learning, the practical application of theory. An internship also provides the employer with the opportunity to evaluate the student as a potential future candidate for full-time employment.

For the mechanical construction industry, interns may be majoring in construction management, mechanical engineering, mechanical-electrical engineering, or architectural engineering. Colleges and universities structure their academic programs differently, so be sure to ask about the courses that the intern candidate has taken that pertain to the position that he/she is competing for. Student internships typically occur during the summer months (May through August) when regular classes at

colleges and universities are in recess. However, some internships occur during the entire year; in those situations, students work out a part-time arrangement with their employer and arrange their class schedule around their internship schedule.

When considering several applicants for an intern position, it is recommended that the students have at least one year of college behind them and that they are in good academic standing. You should feel confident that the student can meet the challenges of the position and its responsibilities.

Also, be aware that some academic programs require students to complete an internship as part of their education. In some situations, the student earns academic credits for successful completion of an internship.

In some professions, interns are not paid. Students work for the experience, the exposure to a potential employer, and to build their resume. The interns that are associated with MCAA members, however, are paid. The association also provides a program to help its members cover the cost of an intern. (See section IV).

Paying interns will help your company stay in compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). (See section IV).

I. Recruiting

An intern program should be designed to be an important part of a company's overall recruiting strategy. The recruitment of interns should be treated as the first step in recruiting well-qualified professionals.

The Search Begins . . .

The process involved in recruiting interns is not much different than it is for recruiting full-time employees. You may

want to prepare a brief description of the position, its responsibilities, skills requirements, and compensation, if appropriate, evaluation, and follow-up. If you are the primary contact for intern candidates, be sure your name, address, telephone, and e-mail address are included with the position information.

Start Early

Students often begin searching for intern positions as soon as the fall term begins, so plan your search accordingly. If you wait until the first of the year or the spring to begin your intern search, you may miss the best candidates.

Target Relevant Schools

Begin your search by targeting colleges, universities, and community colleges offering academic programs that are relevant to your business and, if possible, that are close to where your business is located.

MCAA Can Help

MCAA is as anxious as you to bring well-educated young college students into our industry. The following provides resources and tips to help you find the right person for the job.

1. MCAAGreatFutures.org

MCAA has available a website designed for students who are seeking employment as an intern, coop or full-time position. The website, www.MCAAGreatFutures.org, allows students to post their photos, profiles with contact information, skills listings and previous relevant experience along with a resume and a brief video highlighting their knowledge and skills.

MCAA members are encouraged to begin their search for a temporary intern or coop or full-time entry-level professional by scanning this site for possible recruits. The site is searchable by location, school or key words.

2. MCAA's Careers website

Go to (www.mcaa.org/careers) and you will find a link to a list of current MCAA student chapters. The list also provides the name, address, phone, fax, and e-mail address of the current faculty advisor for each chapter. Faculty advisors are usually very willing to recommend students for internships and to help you connect with potential candidates. If your local association sponsors a student chapter, be sure to contact the chapter's faculty advisor recommendations. For a more expanded list, check the website for the Associated Schools of Construction (<http://www.ascweb.org/>).

3. Go Back to School

Once you have identified the schools you want to target for intern candidates, you may consider planning a visit to the campuses as a key element of your search. The visit puts a face and a name behind a corporate image and personalizes the recruiting process.

4. Contact Career Centers

Make the most of the campus visit by contacting the careers center first. Ask about registering your company with the center, which usually involves providing promotional literature and other information. Be sure to schedule a visit to the career office and meet the counselors. They may be more inclined to steer good candidates to a company that's taken the time and effort to establish a relationship with the college or university.

If a visit to campus is not possible,

- 1) Call the school's career center to request resumes from interested applicants;
- 2) Search online for the school's career center and request resumes by e-mail.

Career centers are motivated to cooperate with prospective employers

because their success in placing graduates reflects well on the school and helps attract well-qualified new students.

5. Career Fairs

When you contact and/or visit the career center, inquire about the next career fair and how to participate. Students like career fairs as a first step in their career development because the atmosphere is casual and less intimidating than a formal interview. Schools often schedule career fairs in the fall and the spring, and individual disciplines or colleges often have their own career fairs.

6. Recruit From Within . . .

If time and resources are limited, organize your search from within your company and among family and friends.

Post a notice on the company bulletin board that lists the requirements of the position, the term of employment, contact information, and other details as you consider pertinent. Advertise the opportunity with your church, synagogue, or membership organization to which you belong. And, if you know of a promising candidate from among your circle of friends, advise them of the position opening.

It is suggested, however, that should a candidate emerge from this in-house recruiting effort, the interview with that person should be conducted by someone other than yourself to keep the recruiting process objective.

The Interview

If your search began on campus with a career fair, you may wish to return to campus for more formal interviews with promising candidates. The career office can help schedule the interviews and may have facilities especially intended for that purpose. Be aware of the

school's schedule before you make appointments; holidays, breaks, exam periods are times to avoid.

Alternatively, consider scheduling the interview at your office when the school is out of session for a recess, holiday, or break. This is a more personal approach that enables the students to focus on your company and get a feel for its work environment. Again, the career office may help you arrange the visit with selected students. If you choose this approach, be prepared to cover the student(s)' travel costs.

During the interview, be sure to:

- Acquaint the student with the company's history and the services it provides;
- Explain the position requirements, responsibilities, goal, and objectives;
- Clarify the term of the internship;
- Explain who will supervise the intern and make sure the intern meets his or her prospective supervisors; and
- Explain the intern's prospective salary.

Even though an intern position is temporary, you are still obligated to conduct the interview in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws. When interviewing female applicants, do not ask questions that are gender-biased. Do not ask questions of either sex when they are irrelevant to an applicant's ability to perform the duties required of the job.

Allow some time for the student(s) to ask questions. Conclude by informing the student about the follow-up process, when you will contact them about the results of the interview.

At the conclusion of each interview, jot down some notes and your impressions. If you let too much time go by, you may forget important points that could sway your decision regarding a candidate.

II. Hiring

Once you have selected a student for an intern position, get in touch with him or her as soon as possible. Students often consider several internship offers, and you will want to be sure your offer is considered. You may also want to choose an alternative, in case your first choice takes another offer.

Be sure to follow-up the offer with a written proposal that outlines the intern's responsibilities and requirements, beginning and ending dates, and salary. Also be sure the intern knows when and who to report to on his/her first day. Finally, be sure to contact the career office about your hiring decision and the student(s)' response. Career offices keep track of where students land jobs, whether they are internships or full-time positions. That information helps the school recruit new students.

III. Managing

Student interns are temporary employees, but they are also professionals in training. Their experience with your company may influence their long-term career development choices. Therefore, their work assignments should be meaningful, contribute to the accomplishment of a project or task, and ultimately benefit your company.

Before the intern arrives, plan an assignment schedule that spans the intern's term of employment. It is suggested that the intern be assigned to a project that will expose him or her to the tasks and activities that are typically undertaken by either a project manager and/or an estimator. The tasks assigned should be appropriate for the intern's knowledge and skill level. A rising senior will be able handle more responsibility and more complex assignments than a rising sophomore.

Orientation

In planning the intern's schedule, be sure to set aside time for the intern to become acquainted with your company, the staff, and the protocols and procedures that are necessary for him or her to perform the tasks assigned. On the intern's first day:

- Show the intern his or her work space, including a safe place for storage of personal items.
- Review the operation of basic office equipment, such as the phone system, the copier, the fax machine, and most important, the computer system. Make sure the intern has an e-mail address, voice mail greeting, and knows the standard telephone greeting for the company.
- Go over your company's personnel policies, rules and procedures, and prohibitions as appropriate. Be sure to cover rules about unacceptable behavior, attire, and other related matters.
- Introduce the intern to your staff members and set aside some time for he/she to meet with the person(s) assigned as his/her supervisor(s).
- Take the student out to lunch with a couple of staff members with whom he/she will be working most closely, including his/her supervisor(s).
- Make sure the intern knows where the staff eats lunch and takes breaks and include him/her in those activities.

If the intern is expected to use special computer software or other tools to perform the assigned tasks, assign a staff person to teach him/her the proper operation of those tools.

During the first few days of the internship, set aside a few minutes each day (if possible) to meet with the intern and discuss any issues or questions.

The Project

Interns want to work and to learn while

they work. As their employer, you need to assess the tasks that need accomplishing and whether the intern is capable of accomplishing them, based on his or her skill and knowledge level. Also, keep in mind that the intern will only be on the job for a few weeks. The intern should be able to complete the project before his/her internship ends.

As you consider possible projects, keep in mind:

- Interns are using new technologies (i.e., the latest computers, tablets and software, Smartphones, etc.) and are learning new techniques to tackle common challenges of this industry.
- Interns can take on tasks that will allow full-time professionals to tackle other challenges.
- Interns may view a task or challenge from a different, fresh perspective and, therefore, may come up with a different, workable, possibly more efficient solution than would have occurred to you or other staff.
- Interns have very few, if any, preconceived notions about how to accomplish tasks, making them easier to train and teach.

Once you settle on a project for the intern, meet with the intern and his/her supervisor to go over:

- The tasks involved
- Deadlines and deliverables
- Other staff assigned to the project
- Who to ask questions (other than the intern's supervisor)

Be clear about what the project is and what is expected of the intern. Be sure the intern understands and encourage him/her to ask questions.

Meetings

Staff meetings, project meetings, customer meetings are also excellent opportunities for interns to learn and make a valuable contribution to your

company.

Invite your intern to participate in meetings, as appropriate, but take a couple of minutes to brief the intern on the meeting's purpose and agenda. If you expect the intern to actively participate in the meeting discussion, make sure he/she knows of your expectations. If you expect him/her to listen and observe only, make that clear as well.

Feedback

An internship is a learning experience for a professional in the making. Feedback on the work performed by an intern – positive and negative – is, therefore, welcome and encouraged. That's how the intern learns and develops his/her professional skills. How the intern responds to feedback provides you with insight on his/her character and potential as a professional you may want to hire.

When the work performed is incorrect or not up to expectations, advise the intern of the shortcoming and instruct them on the proper procedure.

When the intern performs good or excellent work, be sure to tell them so. Reassurance from the boss or the supervisor helps relieve the intern's anxiety and builds their confidence.

IV. Distinguishing Interns from Employees

Internship programs are very beneficial to student interns and the companies that employ them. An internship is not a job per se and, therefore, interns work under a different set of rules governing their compensation and entitlements.

Compensation

First, companies are not required to pay their interns. In those situations, employers must be aware that under the terms of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) (which applies to companies

with at least two employees that are directly engaged in interstate commerce and that earn annual sales of at least \$500,000), companies that do not pay interns must structure their programs to be essentially educational in nature. Otherwise, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) would consider your interns to be employees who are entitled to the federal minimum wage. To be legal, your unpaid intern(s) must meet the DOL's criteria for a leader/trainee:

1. Interns may be trained using equipment and procedures that are commonly used within the industry.
2. The training is for the benefit of the trainees or students.
3. The trainees or students do not displace regular employees, but work under close supervision
4. Interns are not guaranteed jobs at the completion of their internship.
5. Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship.
6. The company should derive no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern.

It is recommended that employers pay their interns, if possible. A paid internship formalizes a professional relationship between the employer and the intern and it assigns a tangible value to the work performed by the intern. Paying interns also increases the employer's chances of recruiting good candidates for internships in the future.

A suggested average salary for interns is \$15 - \$20 per hour. This is a range based on salaries paid interns by recipients of MCAA student chapter grants.

If your company pays its interns, be sure to determine any federal and state income tax requirements affecting intern compensation.

MCERF Internship Grants

MCAA members that employ interns do pay them. MCAA has also established a

program through the Mechanical Contracting Education & Research Foundation (MCERF) that offers grants to members who employ interns to help cover their salary. The foundation determines the amount of the grant each year, which is announced in January. For more information, visit www.mcaa.org/careers or www.mcerf.org.

Rights and Benefits

Employers should also be aware that interns, whether paid or unpaid, are entitled to the same legal protections against discrimination and harassment as full-time employees. Interns are not, however, entitled to the same benefits as full-time employees (such as unemployment compensation, medical insurance, and termination procedures), but employers may consider seriously covering interns for workers' compensation to protect the intern and the company should the intern incur an accident or injury while on the job.

V. Evaluation

An evaluation process provides valuable feedback to the intern and to the employer. Throughout the intern's employment, the intern should have received feedback on his/her performance to be sure the experience is positive, meaningful, and that the project outcome is acceptable. T

At the conclusion of the internship, the employer should provide an opportunity for a final evaluation of the intern's experience. The evaluation may be in the form of a written survey and/or a formal exit meeting. The information resulting from the evaluation may help the company to improve its internship program for future interns, and the intern will, hopefully, have learned new technical and professional skills that will aid his/her professional development.

At a minimum, the intern should complete a brief written form that allows him/her to evaluate the experience. The form should be added to his/her file and a copy provided to the intern. The school's career office may require a copy or a separate evaluation that should be completed before the intern departs. Always secure the intern's permission to disclose an evaluation.

Conclusion

Internship programs can be highly beneficial to students and their employers. Each should be motivated to gain as much as possible from the experience; students enhance their knowledge and skills about the profession and industry which they have chosen for a career and the employer gets the opportunity to preview a potential future employee.

Remember, the intern can help promote your company back at school. If his/her experience is positive and constructive, future prospective candidates will hear the good feedback and seek out your company for future internships or full-time employment opportunities.

Resources

The following resources were used to develop this bulletin:

Fair Labor Standards Act Advisor, U.S. Department of Labor, (<http://www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/scop/e/er15.asp>)

Intern Guidebook: An Easy-to-Follow Guide to Hiring Interns, Mechanical Contractors Association (Chicago, IL)

Other sources:

Recruiting and Managing Student Interns, Center for Leadership and Service,

http://www.leadershipandservice.ufl.edu/community/tips/managing_student_interns/

Ten Tips to Effectively Manage Interns, LookSharp™,
<https://www.internmatch.com/guides/ten-tips-to-effectively-manage-interns>.

How to Manage Interns, Inc.
<http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/04/managing-interns.html>

Managing Interns-How to Find and Manage Yours, Mind Tools,
http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_48.htm

Model Internship Program

The following *suggests* a program for a 12-week student internship. It is designed to provide the student with an overview of how a mechanical contracting firm operates and a meaningful experience in performing the work of a mechanical contracting firm. Every firm is unique in terms of its operations, policies, procedures, and management approach to projects and administrative processes. Therefore, employers are expected to adjust this model program to the specifics of their operations, project procedures, and needs for a professional-in-training.

Day 1

Human Resources:

- Meeting with Human Resources Director
- Sign-up procedures
 - Employee information forms
 - Tax forms
- Corporate overview
- Policies/procedures orientation
- Office assignment/equipment orientation
 - voice mail
 - computer passwords and access
 - computer use guidelines, instructions
- Office equipment use orientation
- Staff introductions

Supervisor/Mentor

- Introductions
- Internship schedule
- Projects orientation
- Skills orientation
- Team introductions/orientation

Safety Orientation

- Policy orientation
- Equipment demonstration
- Hazard abatement procedures
- Emergency procedures

Days 2 – 10

Estimating Process

- Analysis of project:
 - bid specifications
 - CAD drawings
 - equipment requirements
 - code requirements
 - labor loading
 - general conditions
 - other
- Estimating software orientation and use
- Assist with development of estimates for
 - Design-Build projects
 - Plan and spec
 - Replacement projects

Days 11 – 17

Fabrication Shop Processes

- Process orientation
- Safety procedures
- Process management instruction
- Assignment

Days 18 – End

Project Assignment

- Purchasing procedures
- Daily logs
- Subcontracts
- Job tracking procedures
- Tool inventory
- Equipment approvals
- Invoicing
- Accounting

Commissioning and Testing

- Commissioning and testing orientation
- Equipment testing
- Balancing
- Punch list

Last Day

Human Resources

- Exit interview