

THE BASICS OF A GOOD INTERNSHIP

By Deborah Brewster,
Business Manager of Maisonneuve, 2006

Industry internships are still one of the best ways for eager students to start their careers. Here are some ideas for how to treat your interns like the gold that they are.

LIKE MANY OTHER PEOPLE IN publishing I started out as a hard-working, eager-to-impress business intern who was up for any challenge.

My first job as an intern was at a magazine with a full-time staff of two that boasted a national circulation of 30,000 and a solid brand. Running the subscription fulfillment in-house and taking care of advertiser relationships with no administrative staff, it was a very busy operation. There was a lot of work for me to do.

I had two goals as an intern: to get a start in the business, and to learn everything I could. For that I traded free labour. Industry internships are still one of the best ways for eager students to start their careers. Though there are a number of magazines in Canada that pay interns a small salary or honorarium, the majority of internships, especially offered by small magazines, are unpaid.

The industry has always worked with this model. It's a trade-off: interns offer inexpensive (or free) labour, and magazines provide an educational work experience. But since magazines accept interns' goodwill, they are responsible for creating a meaningful experience in an internship. Our task as industry professionals is to direct interns' eager energy in a direction that benefits everyone. How are we to do this? Here are some basic principles to start with in managing interns.

Structure an Internship Program

Running an internship program can allow your magazine to achieve more of its goals. Think throughout the year about what projects would be appropriate and fun for interns, and write them down. An internship is a chance to accomplish a project that's been on hold. Plan seriously for staff to be available to offer on-the-job training to interns.

Create a Job Description

Be sure to outline a specific role or project for your intern—don't just give them the tasks that no one else wants to do. An intern will know if he or she is being given a "make-work" project, and won't be motivated to come to work and perform well. Sit down with your interns and go over their scope of work. Explain their role, the chain of command and the benefits to which they are entitled. Outline what projects they will work

on and to what these will contribute. In other words, treat them as you would a regular employee.

Provide Resources

If possible, put together a collection of materials relating to the job and to the magazine in general that the intern can rely on at the beginning of their internship and refer to while moving forward. This way, interns will see how they fit into the greater whole of the workplace.

Open Communication

Make sure an intern knows who to talk to when they want to express an idea. This includes opening communication to management to discuss problems, to allowing interns to contribute insights and suggestions that might improve your magazine. Interns can bring new energy to the workplace—let them have a say! They often have ideas that you may not have considered for the magazine. Having open communication gives interns a more meaningful experience, and lets you find out who they really are.

Give Feedback

Take time to review interns' performance during the internship. Respecting their lack of experience and limitations, address any issues that may have arisen in the work completed and ask questions about their job and how things are going. This provides a good opportunity to give feedback, pointers and to learn how to improve an intern's experience and performance. During the review, highlight what is going well—internships are over so quickly that we often don't have enough time to fully express our thanks to interns.

Include Interns on the Team

Make the interns feel like they are a part of the team, because for the duration of the internship, they are. If your office has the capabilities, set them up on email at their own desk. This can make a world of difference in the quality of work they present to you. Include them in meetings when appropriate, rather than just handing them a number of orders. Make them part of the magazine's process, if only for a little while.

Our task is to direct interns' eager energy in a direction that benefits everyone.

The Hotsheet Series provides tips and advice to small magazines from people working in the field. The series is produced by Magazines Canada and is funded by the Canada Council and the Canada Magazine Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Canada



THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS
SINCE 1957

LE CONSEIL DES ARTS DU CANADA
DEPUIS 1957

Magazines
Canada