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# The Benefits of Giving Interns Impactful Projects

And How to Setup an Appropriate Environment

Sterling Violette, Levi Allen, Desiree Forster, and Connor Temple



# Overview

- The presenter's bios
- Introduction
- How to give and setup meaningful work for interns
- Substantial benefits of giving interns these types of responsibilities
- Approaching risks and uncertainty
- Insight from an intern turned staff member



## Sterling Violette's Bio

Passionate and aspiring software developer

BBA in Management Information Systems – University of New Mexico 2022

BS in Computer Science – Oregon State 2023

First information technology job was with Bernalillo County

Joined Sandia in 2021 on the Business Development side

- Transitioned to an R&D position where I currently am after only a few months

Has a “pet” deer named Brown

Favorite hobbies:

- Backpacking, snowboarding and working out

Aspiring Mount Everest climber



## Desiree Forster's Bio

BS in Computer Science – New Mexico Highlands University 2023

Interested in studying Computer Engineering

Recently joined Sandia as a summer intern

- Year-Round Technical Undergrad
- Integrated Solutions and Production Tools

Former collegiate athlete

- Travel and explore new hobbies

Has only ever had Labrador Retrievers

- Melo



## Connor Temple's Bio

BS in Computer Science – University of New Mexico December 2022

Interested in studying Machine Learning & AI

Joined Sandia July 2022 as a Year-Round Technical Intern

- Integrated Solutions, Production Tools, and CapAx Program Management

### Hobbies:

- Playing Pool
- Working out
- Building Computers

### Two families of pets:

- Chips & Bennet
- Bo, Luke, & Daisy



# Why Internships Matter

"Interns are like not-cut diamonds; They have flaws, some of them are totally worthless, but once you cut them well, they can become something great one day, And that's what I'm doing, I'm cutting diamonds..."

-Barney Baszuro

- Two way benefits
- Get your organization heard
- Bring new ideas
- Garner future employees



# How to Give Interns Meaningful Work

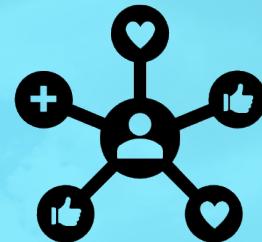
- Productivity is important, but so is impact
- Projects and work should reach out to external areas
- Mix it up
- Mimic to a degree staff members duties
- Ask the individual areas they would like to explore
- Spread the intern across multiple disciplines, areas, and groups
- Give an intern work they can “own”
- Assign them something they have very little experience with
- Always give them enough to do

Avoid the real and theoretical “coffee internship”



# How the Intern Benefits

- Real work experience with less pressure
  - Get acclimated with a corporate work environment
  - Build confidence in areas of work
  - Learn from mistakes early
- Opportunity to apply existing knowledge
- Make valuable connections
  - Network with other groups through a matrixed position
  - Build a reputation, increase current and future opportunities
- Add value where they see value
  - Can take pride in their work, improving quality
- Results are tangible and make an impact
  - Great for resumes





# How the Organization Benefits

- Boosts department productivity
  - Increase intern responsibilities over time
  - More important work gets done for the department
- Help for multiple departments with Matrixed Positions
  - Multiple groups get help when they need it
  - Establish connections with other departments/organizations
- Keeps good Interns at Sandia
  - Allows Interns to continually make an impact
- Conversion to staff is less painful
  - Basic responsibilities are understood
  - Less initial training needed



## Risks

- Mistakes and failures are inevitable.
- Costly mistakes:
  - Hurt reputation
  - Disclosure of sensitive data
  - Possible health and safety hazards
- Bring down production.
- Loss of valuable time:
  - Will most likely require more training, supervision, mentoring, etc.
  - Intern dissatisfaction
- More stress for both parties.



# How to Approach the Risks

- Act as both a mentor and a manager:
  - Provide supportive and constructive feedback
  - Patience, awareness, and recognition
  - Flexibility
  - Consistent guidance
- Close supervision and frequent check-ins (avoid micromanaging).
- Scoping projects to ensure suitable conditions.
- Time management:
  - Plan and prepare
  - Delegate
- Create a safe and “safe” environment.
- ASK questions!!!





# Intern that Converted to Staff

What was your work environment like as an intern:

- Strong support from mentor
- School was a priority
- Encouraged to speak up when feeling over allocated
- Ability to pair with other interns
- Given assignments with little background
- Attend intern events, networking events, and learn about Sandia overall

What did you dislike about the work environment:

- No clearance meant disconnection from team
- Mundane tasks were assigned
- Worrying about being ready for full time position

What could have enhanced the experience:

- More meaningful tasks involving programming
- Customer service work to gather requirements
- Completing a task from start to finish

What benefits did you notice from a structured environment:

- Project team member



# Intern that Converted to Staff

Were you given impactful work:

- Building an earned value calculator
- Mentor padded the task
- Indirectly impactful

Did the work you completed as an intern translate to your staff position:

- Gaps as a 1<sup>st</sup> year staff employee
- Supporting a different business function entirely

Were there risks involved with you being given a task:

- Lack of understanding
- Time required to train me
- Making mistakes

Do you think being given impactful work as an intern is important:

- Confidence
- Intern retention
- Resume strength
- Set up for success

# Questions?

Thank you!