



Exceptional service in the national interest

The Benefits of Giving Interns Impactful Projects

And How to Setup an Appropriate Environment

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

Sandia National Laboratories is a multitenant laboratory managed and operated by National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Honeywell International Inc. for the U.S.

Sandia National Laboratories is a multitenant laboratory managed and operated by National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Honeywell International Inc., for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration under contract DE-NA0003525.





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 1st 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!

