

Supervising an Intern

Internships are a key way high school seniors can learn about the adult world of work – the rules and expectations, the experience of contributing to the achievement of a common goal, and to begin to think about their own future in the world of work. As an intern site supervisor, you will use all the skills that are part of supervision:

- Providing leadership
- Motivating
- Delegating
- Communicating
- Developing and Training
- Evaluating

Interns will also look to you as a mentor who will help them in transitioning from the classroom to the world of work. Some of this guidance will be practical – how to dress, how to answer the phone, when to take a break, etc. Other guidance falls into the category of coaching a student through difficult moments, serving as a resource as students complete their goals and objectives and academic requirements, listening and responding to their concerns, and showing interest in their progress. Finally, you are responsible for assessing the intern's performance and giving feedback about their accomplishments and suggestions for improvement. Many site supervisors find that regular weekly meetings with their intern help to keep the intern focused on what is required of him/her.

In addition to your supervision on site, each intern also has a faculty advisor at Chelmsford High School with whom they meet weekly and to whom they submit their academic requirements for the program. You evaluate the performance of the intern on site, and their faculty advisor evaluates their daily journals, assignments, final paper, presentation, and exhibition. Finally, the Senior Capstone Coordinators, Josh Blagg (Blaggj@chelmsford.k12.ma.us), Alex Cunningham (Cunninghamalex@chelmsford.k12.ma.us) and Tammy Leary (Learyt@chelmsford.k12.ma.us), are available to answer your questions and will help to resolve difficulties during the course of the internship.

Handling Conflict

It is possible that conflict will arise at some point in the Internship. Many interns may be uncomfortable with conflict and many may not have the skills needed to work through the conflict situation.

Conflicts are a natural part of human relationships. Adults know that it is better to deal with conflict rather than ignoring it. We cannot assume that the intern will know this. It will likely fall to you as their site supervisor to initiate the resolution process. Interns will

respond best if they are able to understand how their behavior is impacting you or your business.

For example, a statement such as “I’m feeling uncomfortable about the way you respond when asked to finish the work before you start another task. I think it makes us look unprofessional to our co-workers. What do you think about this? Is there a way we can change this?” This opens the door to a discussion about the Intern’s self-perception, and allows the intern to enter the conversation and discuss why he or she may be responding in a certain manner.

Four areas that can be problematic are handling phone calls professionally, business dress, performance, and cell phone use. Following are some ideas you may want to try if you encounter these problems.

Handling the Phone

Problem: “Interns don’t really know how to talk to customers. They often sound bored and uninterested in finding out what the customer wants.”

Solution:

1. Write a script. Start with “Hello, the ABC Company. May I help you?” Include a number of responses to different types of requests. Role-play with the student. Many of our students have not had any experience with a public phone, as they usually rely on texting as a primary form of communication.
2. Show the student how to write down the name of the caller. “Could you spell that for me please?” Show the student if there is an office procedure, specific form or software for telephone messages, or if there is a specific place they should be placed and by when.
3. Stress that in answering a phone, the student represents the organization and should sound polite, friendly, and willing to listen and help.
4. Give tips on how best to accommodate the caller and how to seek help if he or she does not have the information needed.

Business Attire

Problem: “The intern’s attire is really inappropriate for the workplace. Some customers have already commented on how he or she looks.”

Solution:

1. Be clear about the dress code from hair down to shoes.
2. As an example, point out someone whom you think understands business attire.
3. Remember that many young people have limited clothing budgets.
4. Compliment them when they dress appropriately.
5. Give recognition for their attempts to change.
6. Talk with the student in private.

Slow Performance

Problem: "The intern can't seem to finish his or her work. Some tasks are just not done at all."

Solution:

1. Find out where the problem lies. Is the task unclear or too difficult?
2. Go over the instructions again and see if there is an improvement.
3. Change the task, giving alternative responsibilities.
4. If you see that a student cannot meet your schedule, assign some work that is less crucial.

Personal Calls

Problem: "The intern is always on the phone making personal calls, texting, or online. She or he is constantly on his/her phone when the priority should be concentrating on work."

Solution:

1. State that there are strict limits on personal phone usage.
2. State that constantly texting and being on his/her phone is a distraction to the work environment.
3. Make sure the student has enough to do at all times, thereby lessening their temptation to be on the phone with friends.

4. Ask interns to turn off their cell phones during working hours. If this is your policy, please be sure that the student has given a parent/guardian a different number where they can be reached.

5. It may be helpful to ask them to keep his/her phone in a desk or in a bag on silent. They are used to these rules in the high school so translating those expectations to the work force won't be a novel concept.

As always, the Capstone Coordinators and Faculty Advisors are available for consultation should you have any concerns.