

## HOW TO HELP INTERNS FIT IN: 6 TIPS FOR MAKING INTERNS PART OF THE TEAM

As an employer, a lot of attention is paid to properly setting up an internship program, selecting the right interns, and making sure they are suitably trained. But one aspect that is often forgotten is ensuring that interns fit in and feel like they're part of the team.

While this might seem like a nonessential, if interns are to function as effectively as possible, they must feel some sense of allegiance to the company. Because if they don't feel accepted, they simply won't want to do their best.

Furthermore, in order to learn, interns must feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification. In order to feel at ease, they must believe they have allies in the rest of the team – or at least the loyalty of certain members.

1. **Set up get-to-know-you strategies.** You should start by introducing interns to the rest of the team, preferably on an individual basis. Then, follow this up with an activity, like a team lunch, to welcome interns.

Or, you might schedule a group get-acquainted session. Here, the interns can ask employees for information on the company and culture, and the interns themselves should be encouraged to contribute by sharing the student perspective on current situations. This helps bridge the gap between interns and older employees by both allowing interns to receive information and feel valued for their own input.

During this session, emphasize that questions are not being critiqued. If interns are still afraid to ask, offer up answers to questions they're likely curious about: How long have most employees been working with the company? Can interns receive letters of recommendation? And, how often do interns get offered fulltime positions?

2. **Tell team members to make the first move.** Some interns are shy about initiating introductions and even reaching out to receive crucial information.

Therefore, encourage employees to make interns feel welcome by smiling and saying hello, offering to answer questions, asking about interns' education and aspirations, and even inviting students to lunch. Explain how simple gestures like these mean a lot to new interns looking to fit in.

3. **Assign non-supervisor mentors.** Interns need an ally they can confide in without worrying about being evaluated. So even though they have supervisors, each should also be assigned a mentor.

Interns may not mention certain issues to a supervisor, because they worry it will negatively impact their assessment. Assigning a mentor — preferably one that's somewhat close in age — assures students there's at least one person on their side, initiating them into the group.

4. **Eliminate a competitive environment.** Sometimes, particularly in start-up internship programs, entry-level employees fear that interns are being brought in to take their jobs. As a result, they are reluctant to help interns succeed or fit in socially.

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Template sources include: Ames Economic Development Corporation's Employer Intern Guide, Internships.com, Technology Council of Central Pennsylvania and LookSharp.com.



The solution is to make it clear to employees ahead of time that interns are being hired to help them do their jobs more efficiently, not to turn their positions into internship roles. Once employees understand the strategy, they'll be much more willing to accept interns into the fold.

5. **Consider a second (or third) intern.** If it's an option, contemplate hiring more than one intern at a time. The reason is similar to the pledge-class structure of sororities and fraternities: people transition more smoothly into a group when they have someone entering alongside them. This ensuing camaraderie is especially helpful if your team is intimidating: if they've been together for a long time or are extremely tight-knit.
6. **Assign more than menial tasks.** Students will likely feel isolated if they are working on only clerical tasks and coffee runs while everyone else is contributing to common, more critical projects. Additionally, being assigned only the duties no one wants to do leads to disgruntled interns. And unhappy interns don't often want to be part of a team that doesn't appreciate them.

This doesn't, however, mean you must give interns only glamour jobs, or totally avoid assigning more menial tasks. Just be sure you balance the mindless work with more educational-based missions. Not only will interns learn more, they'll have shared projects to talk about with the rest of the team.

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