

Getting internships right



By [Claire Jackson-Bernardo](#)

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The definition of an internship is quite clear amongst many sources that can be quickly googled.



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The problem is that many people and organisations don't know what an internship actually is and recent graduates or students in their final year of study end up disappointing not only the people they have worked for, but themselves as well.

In essence, an internship is an opportunity for on-the-job training in a specific field. Whilst the student or graduate may have the relevant degree or diploma to theoretically do the job, they still may require many hours of dedication from those around them in an organisation, in order to learn and perfect the skill that goes with doing the job.

When you take on an intern, you take on a responsibility to pass on your skills and knowledge to a young person who wishes to enter the industry. It is your responsibility to teach, guide, mentor and encourage.

Sadly, in many instances this is not the case.

Employing an intern is not an opportunity to get cheap labour (or free labour) and an intern should not be the person doing the jobs and tasks that no one in the organisation has the time and energy for. Having an intern takes up a lot of time initially as you explain, critique and teach. As time goes by, and skills are learned, an intern will be able to do tasks alone or

with your guidance. But if you don't have time to dedicate to an intern, you shouldn't have one.

Communication is also important. Just because the intern is young and inexperienced doesn't mean they should be spoken down to or disrespected. Constructive criticism with an end-goal to helping someone better themselves should be the norm. If your intern is bugging you or not doing things the way you want them to do them, it's probably because you haven't taken the time to explain and teach properly.

As the Public Relations lecturer at Boston Media House in Sandton, I always tell my students that it's not what you can earn, but what you can learn. Sadly, however, there are costs involved for a student doing an internship. Many organisations pay interns and pay them well but some have no understanding that it costs money for an intern to get to the job, whether it involves public transport or petrol costs. This should be taken into consideration when you want an intern and you should be prepared to pay for transport costs, at the very least.

Having an intern can, and should be, exceptionally rewarding. Watching someone learn and grow because of what you have taught them is what an internship is all about. It is also a fantastic opportunity to learn from your intern. Young people have a unique insight into media, social media, brands and trends. If you make the time to sit with your intern and learn, you may find new ways of reaching their target market and get valuable insight on what you are doing right and, quite possibly, what you are doing wrong.

Basically an internship should be a win-win situation but if you don't dedicate the time and energy to properly teach someone, then you will both lose out in the end.

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