

# EMPLOYER TIPS FOR WORKING REMOTELY WITH STUDENTS

Virtual co-ops, internships, and entry-level jobs allow students the opportunity to use their project management and communication skills towards specific outcomes and goals and also enable organizations such as yours to recruit and retain top talent in today's rapidly evolving workplace, which has experienced an almost overnight shift to the virtual world. This digital disruption, however sudden and unexpected, also opens the door for tried- and-true skills to be applied in innovative ways. For example, our students frequently study and work from a variety of locations and have the resiliency and motivation to get the (remote) job done.

To succeed, students will need access to your organization's managers, team members, files, and collaboration tools. How does your company work remotely? Will you provide the student access to a company laptop with programs and access to your collaboration tools? Are there virtual meeting spaces, and are there formal and informal channels of communication within and across teams? Here are key considerations employers should evaluate when working with remote student employees.

## **Supervision, support, and roles of managers.**

*Setting clear goals.* Students need clear goals to understand their roles, responsibilities, and benchmarks regarding what's expected from them. It's important to note that students are essentially learning three fundamental things: the job itself, how to work well in a virtual space, and how to communicate with their manager and team effectively. In turn, it's important to calibrate expectations.

*Time zones.* Also, it's important to note that students may be working in a different time zone than the company, so expectations regarding work hours should be made clear.

*Training programs.* Companies hiring remote students can prepare by first conducting training programs with managers and mentors to think through questions and concerns from a new hire's point of view, reminding them of what it's like to be a young professional joining an established team. These programs should equip managers and mentors with the tools and insights not only to manage a team in a virtual environment, but support co-ops, interns, and entry-level personnel as they enter not only a new organization, but a new virtual environment.

## **Create a job and/or internship outline that provides structure and sets expectations for the virtual internship.**

Include defined learning goals and a general schedule of tasks and responsibilities. These expectations should be clear before the start of the co-op, internship, or job. Students will need to understand their daily work schedules, technology usage, and preferred modes of communication in addition to how goals will be achieved and evaluated, and the structure of supervision.

## **Test your technology.**

Ask your IT department which platforms or technologies would work best for your students to collaborate with you and your colleagues and if training is available. Please ensure that students have the right equipment or supply them with a company-issued laptop/tablet/webcam. Please note that if technology training isn't part of your orientation, then allow students enough time to get up to speed, test the platforms, and offer a resource to go to with questions. Some of the more common platforms include:

- Face to Face – GoToMeeting, Zoom, FaceTime, WebEx, Zoho Meetings, Google Meet
- Digital communication tools – Slack, Teams, Email, Instant Messenger.
- Free Project Management Tools – Asana, OpenProject, Trello, nTask, Monday
- Online file sharing – DropBox, Box, GoFile, etc.

## **Communicate, communicate, communicate.**

It's especially important to create a "safe" environment where students can ask questions without the comfort that physical proximity provides. Make yourself and other members of your team available to the student regularly.

In private meetings, managers can discuss the student's progress highlighting their strengths and create a plan to help them improve if necessary. If you're working with a group of remote students, these online meetings allow them to interact with each other and share experiences.

To make them even more interactive and engaging, invite remote students to host an online training event. Assign topics and tasks and ask them to create an online presentation. Define expectations in advance, so they know what to include and give them plenty of time to prep.

**Onboarding.**

Onboarding can be one of the most critical parts of any new hire program. Setting an intentional plan of regular check-ins and touch-points over the first week ensures no new hire feels forgotten or overlooked. In a virtual environment with a robust onboarding approach, new hires not only get to know the company, but they also get to know the people - other new hires and other members of the organization. Keeping the onboarding interactive also reinforces engaging ways to connect even remotely.

Consider creating a fun activity as the one at MHS Homes in the U.K.. There, new hires are sent on a scavenger hunt on the company intranet. They're given one clue — “Whose father-in-law was in a band with a No. 1 single?” — and they must locate the new colleague in the company directory. There are a myriad of remote icebreaker, group activities, and team building ideas on the internet.

Other ways to enhance virtual onboarding include:

- *Virtual team lunches.* Invite team members to join a video conference call to meet the student over lunch.
- *Remote student meet-and-greet.*
- *Facilitate virtual introductions* and icebreakers with other students within the organization, division, or team.
- *A welcome from leaders.* Ask your senior executives to record a brief, personalized video welcoming students and offering advice for success as they embark on their career journeys.
- *Consider how your technology can help.* Video conferencing apps have several different styles and platforms which can meet your needs. Throughout the program, hosting weekly sessions and remote check-ins give students, managers, and coordinators a chance to touch base.

**Supervisory roles and students working remotely.**

While the supervisor is responsible for managing the day-to-day tasks and performance of the remote students, consider adding a remote workforce coordinator to your organization. This can be a development opportunity for a rising star within your organization or possibly a current employee who started with your company as a student.

**Another way to support remote student workers is to build virtual programming or create a virtual community.**

Provide the remote students with opportunities for virtual networking and education, such as:

- *Weekly educational webinars.* Invite individuals from a variety of functional areas within your organization to share their expertise with the student(s). Schedule one employee or team to present to all students virtually every week and ask them to share their career paths, information on their specialty or function, and how it connects to other functions or departments within the organization.
- *Coffee and conversations with an executive.* Host a live chat with a senior executive in your organization to share career advice and open the floor for Q&A at the end.
- *Alumni panel.* Host a live video call with employees who started within your organization as students. Invite them to share their lessons learned as a student, and have them talk about the transition from student to post-graduate professional, and encourage current students to bring their questions.
- *Create a virtual book club.* Invite an employee to select a book on leadership, business, or another topic relevant to the remote student experience, provide students with a copy of the book (hardcopy or digital), and then schedule a virtual meeting for the book club host to facilitate discussion and share lessons learned.
- *Online learning .* Provide upskilling opportunities that will benefit the company and the student.

**Feedback.**

Schedule a video conference meeting toward the end of the remote student learning experience to share feedback on the student's performance and to discuss the next steps. If your organization plans to hire full-time graduates, let the student know how they can apply or be considered. If you're interested in considering the student for future job opportunities, make plans to communicate with them regularly after the remote work has concluded. Helping remote students describe their work and connect with a reference for their work in your organization is a crucial part of offboarding.