How Your Business Can Benefit From a Micro-Internship Program

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Are you still looking for the ideal candidate to join your organization? The one who checks all the boxes and starts making a difference on day one at your company? If you're having trouble finding a candidate that checks all the boxes, you're probably using the wrong boxes.

Managers often get locked into the idea that the best hire will have the *right* credentials, meaning they are looking for candidates with specific work experience and a college degree in the *right* field. But they may be missing the opportunity to hire a loyal and highly productive team member who they would have never considered otherwise, extending the time needed to fill open positions.

Employers who are turning to unusual hiring and retention tactics, such as micro-internships, are having success. A micro-internship is a short-term, professional project-based job experience designed to offer candidates exposure to a specific field or role.

Micro-internships provide benefits to both parties: Companies can engage talent on a short-term, flexible basis, and candidates can gain valuable experience, build their resumes and establish connections in their chosen fields.

Let's take a look at how to use and benefit from a micro-internship program.

Related: 5 Steps to Effectively Assess a Candidate's Skills Before Hiring Them

A smart way to broaden your candidate pool

The problem with the traditional hiring model is that it assumes a steady and logical path from college to a professional job. Most college students must declare a major field of study sometime during their sophomore year. That system works for the colleges and universities that staff their departments to meet demand. However, typical 19- or 20-year-olds have no clue what they want to do when they enter the professional world.

They finish their degrees and then realize how challenging it can be to find a job. Many employers will receive applications from candidates who studied art history in college and now lack the qualifications for entry-level work in the customer service department. Those applications are likely screened out by whatever automation tool the hiring company is using.

Similarly, hiring managers frequently receive applications from candidates seeking a mid-career change. They may scan a resume from a construction worker who wants to get into sales, but lacks job experience and training, and decide to move on.

That attitude is unfortunate. Instead of passing by a candidate who lacks the stated credentials for a position, you should consider offering them a micro-internship. These internships include a short, sometimes intense, training session. In addition, they require the candidate to work on a specific project with stated measurable deliverables. And companies pay the candidate for the work.

Does a micro-internship sound like a paid consultant gig? Yes. It's always a good idea to ask a potential consultant to

deliver a small project before you hand them a large contract. The short-term arrangement allows you to verify the quality of their work. And you get a sense of how well you interact.

Assessing candidate fit

When you're considering a micro-internship arrangement for a candidate, you can ask them to take a psychometric assessment. In reviewing the assessment results, you can determine how well-suited they are for a position.

If their assessments show a natural tendency to be willing to serve others, your candidate may be a great fit for a customer service position, even without official credentials. Similarly, a person with great listening skills could become your next sales rainmaker once they receive official training.

Your candidates may resist the idea of committing themselves to your organization for a two-to-three-week period. After all, they could continue to look for another position during that time. That's why paying the people who participate in your micro-internship program is important. They'll be more likely to do their best work.

Related: Internships 101: Tips on Hiring Interns and Running a Successful Program

What micro-internships can do for you

Bringing a new person into your organization allows you to assess a person's talents, work styles and fit, an aspect we measure on our TeamTrait platform. The micro-internship format also provides a conduit to new thinking and creativity, which can be especially critical if you're trying to expand your scope of work. The best part is you don't have to stop the work and mentoring at the two-to-three-week point. You have

the option of extending projects if the process is going well.

For the candidate whose work experience and/or educational background don't relate directly to the role, a micro-internship is a way for them to say, "Let me prove to you I can do this."

And if you decide to extend a formal offer of employment, you'll be in a credible position with your new team member because they'll realize you value them for their potential. In addition, paying your interns will ensure that you avoid labor law problems.

Micro-internships and promotion potential

Managers need to make it clear to their direct reports they can explore an internal micro-internship without risking their current position. Growing within the company is a positive.

I've had great success in my company by using micro-internships as a promotional tool.

In one case, we hired an excellent researcher who came to us with a college degree in communications. After a couple of years, this team member expressed an interest in IT work. They had already demonstrated some skill in this area by developing complex worksheets. We offered a short training period, followed by an assignment that lasted several weeks. The results were stellar, and that employee is now a key member of our IT team. This strategy is similar to the "quiet hiring" approach used by employers who want to retain and promote their top performers.

Related: Hiring an Intern: 6 Things to Know Before Saying 'You're Hired!'

In your hiring journey, you can find many reasons to avoid

hiring a candidate who falls outside your comfort zone. At the same time, the C-suite is filled with tales of low performers who were hired because they had the advantage of knowing the right person or went to a big-name school.

If you want to hire a person with a history that strays from the norms, consider setting up a micro-internship for them, and give them a try! You might be pleasantly surprised by how motivated they are to learn new things and do their best for your organization.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/why-businesses-should-consider-offering-micro-internships/454118