

Speaker 1 00:00:05 Welcome to the Clear Impact Podcast brought to you by PGTI University. Thanks for joining us today. My name is Sherri Connor, and I am your host.

Speaker 1 00:00:19 Now you've heard some of the benefits of having an internship program. But then, how do you actually make it effective for your business? What's the best way to interact with your intern? Today we are speaking with Stephanie Cz, who has worked with several interns during her career here at PGT Innovations. Stephanie shares some tips to make the experience great for both of you. We also hear from two more of our summer interns, Austin Ham and Alexander Loutchenok.

So we're on the Clear Impact podcast and we are talking to our interns today and today we have Austin Ham. Welcome Austin. Thank you for having me. I'm glad you could make it. Um, so Austin, tell us a little bit about yourself,

Speaker 2 00:00:54 I'll be entering my senior year of college in the fall at the University of Florida as an industrial engineer.

Speaker 1 00:01:01 Is this your first internship?

Speaker 2 00:01:03 The first paid internship. I had an unpaid internship with a civil engineering firm, my senior year of high school.

Speaker 1 00:01:08 And how does it rate other than the paycheck, like, between that and this?

Speaker 2 00:01:12 Oh, this is a much better experience, I would say. With that one, I was pretty much just like scanning and plans into a database, like all day.

Speaker 1 00:01:19 Um, so you weren't necessarily learning anything.

Speaker 2 00:01:23 It was kind of monotonous.

Speaker 1 00:01:24 Yeah. Almost like fetching coffee. Well, we don't want to do that. That's that doesn't benefit anybody really. Right. Um, so why did you choose an internship in general?

Speaker 2 00:01:35 So I was looking to kind of kickstart my career as a future industrial engineer, and I had never had any experience within my current major. So I really had no idea like what someone who was an industrial engineer would do, or like with someone with my background or education would, would do like in the workforce.

Speaker 1 00:01:55 And so how does the reality of what you've done this summer lineup with the expectation that you had in mind?

Speaker 2 00:02:03 Uh, I've been able to interview with quite a few different people here with different job titles, like the manufacturing engineers, code compliance engineers, um, other quality engineers, to kind of get a better feel for, uh, how everyone's role intertwines with each other's and what everyone like does for the company. And it's been pretty eye opening to like, understand what, not only the quality engineers do, but like, how what they do, like interacts with what the other engineers do like manufacturing engineers.

Speaker 1 00:02:32 So today on the Clear Impact podcast, we are talking about an internship program for our dealers who might want to consider having something similar for themselves. And we are talking with Stephanie CZ, who is our corporate communications director. Is that your title?

Corporate Communications and Public Relations Manager, it's a mouthful. Yes, it is a mouthful. Welcome, Stephanie. This is your first time on our podcast. We're so glad to have you.

Thank you for having me.

I know that you have been responsible for overseeing a couple of interns, so it seemed appropriate to have you in for this conversation. And I'm wondering if you could share, I don't know, maybe two or three guiding principles for someone who might be responsible for overseeing a summer intern.

Sure. I would love to. So first of all, I would say plan ahead. It's not a great idea to just have your interns show up and you don't know what you're going to do with them for the next six to eight weeks.

Speaker 1 00:03:24 So planning ahead and having several projects for them to potentially work on. And it's always a great idea to have more projects than you're going to need, because the next thing I would suggest is actually asking your intern, what kind of things that they're interested in, what are their goals for their internship? They might be coming in with a goal that you're not aware of, that might not have come up in, you know, your pre internship interview. So definitely asking them what their goals are for the internship, what they want to get out of it. If there's anything in particular they'd like to learn. For example, marketing is a broad field, there are a lot of different parts to it. And so, you know, we can't just assume that every intern who's interested in interning in marketing, would want to do email blast or communications.

Speaker 1 00:04:03 They might be interested in digital work or, you know, brand work, product work. So asking them, you know, if there's a specific area that they're interested in is, is a good thing to do, and what kind of projects in interest them, if they have any skills that they're strong in that or ones that they'd like to develop. And then from there you can talk about some of the different projects that you've lined up, you know, and together come to a conclusion about, well, maybe let's try having you work on this one and this one. So, and with regard to those projects, assign meaningful projects, and ones that will actually make an impact. Not just, I like my coffee, black, what do you mean? That's not the goal of an intern is just to fetch coffee and you know, not in this day and age. No.

Speaker 1 00:04:43 No. Okay. So yeah, but meaningful projects are, are really important, especially with the generation that's doing internships right now. They really like to know the why behind the project that they're doing. So relating it back to the company's strategic goals is always a great thing. And talking about how this project will move the needle toward that goal. Just a little anecdote. We had an intern, I think it was last year who was doing data entry into our customer relationship management system. And he was like, yeah, I'm just doing data entry. And I was like, wait a minute. You're entering all that data into our new CRM. And he said, well, yeah. And I was like, you don't even understand how big this is for me. I do communications. And a lot of times we have to send out messages to our dealers. This information is exactly what I need to make my job more effective.

Speaker 1 00:05:28 So for him, he was in the sales department. And so for him to see the connection between a sales internship, with a marketing role, I think kind of helped him feel a little bit more proud about the work that he was doing. And not that it was quote unquote, just data entry, that kind of bolstered him a little bit. So that was nice. And let's see, I would say this kind of seems obvious, but actively mentor and coach people, you know, you don't ever want to, you know, if they're doing a job you don't want ever want to be like, no, that's not great. And then take the job back from them and

doing that yourself. But you know, definitely give constructive feedback during the project. Don't just give them the project and disappear because that is a great way to make someone panic.

Speaker 1 00:06:06 Right. And, uh, be available for them to ask questions. I know that someone who's working on a bunch of projects in your day to day, it's kind of hard to fit an intern into your whole calendar, but it's really important. You've got to be available for them. And that also seems like a pretty obvious one, but it's very easy to get caught up in your own stuff.

The idea is that it's a win-win that they're going to learn something and that you're going to learn something and then also benefit from having an extra body. But the idea is that they will help accomplish something that you need done, but also you're going to be pouring into them and they'll walk away hopefully with a meaningful experience that will be like, okay, I don't like that kind of company. I don't like that kind of task.

Speaker 1 00:06:44 I don't like that kind of work. I don't want that field. I can now pivot my whole trajectory because I've had a little dose of real life in that space and I don't like it. Or I love it, now I want to continue on.

Yeah, absolutely. I've actually had interns, um, where both of those things have happened. One has been like, yes, this is a confirmation that this is the field that I want to work in. And the other one wasn't really decided about whether she wanted to be in marketing. So she figured she would do an internship and she realized, you know, I really liked that, but it's not really my niche. Uh, she went to, I believe she's in an HR firm now. So, um, or an HR role, you know, not that she had a bad experience, actually. She has told me that she really enjoyed her experience.

Speaker 1 00:07:23 She just found that marketing is not really her sweet spot. So that's awesome. So what are some things maybe just to completely avoid when you have an intern, you already said like, they're not going to fetch coffee, although I will say that is a complicated task these days, when you do a vanilla chai latte with soy and whatever, blah, blah, blah. And you know, you have 16 different parameters, like that takes some skill to bring back a coffee.

No, I would say if you're making the coffee, it's probably more difficult than ordering it. True. Yeah. So no coffee, I think I mentioned this, but don't just, you know, give them the project and then leave them to fly solo. Right? Chances are, you know, chances are, they're putting on a brave face.

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Speaker 3 00:08:23 Well, I'm Alex Loutchenok . I go to school in Canada actually, and I'm doing a double degree program. So I'm part of two different schools and at one school I do computer science and at another school I do business administration. I don't know. I love it. I have so much autonomy to kind of carry on projects. For example, we had a referral program that was fully manual. So I brought it online. It auto generates an Excel file. It compares two names and then it automatically uploads into our system. So I was kind of given authority to build that whole project out and code it all out and kind of integrate it into our system.

Oh, wow. That's impressive.

Yeah. For, because you're not able to prove to yourself, but to future employers, you know what you bring to the table, especially when you're, you're finishing college and you're going to work, employers are looking for people that have proven themselves and, and getting an internship, it kind of proves to them that, you know, look, I'm reliable. I can work. I know what I'm doing in my field. And I think it's a great opportunity, especially during college.

Speaker 1 00:09:15 And they're going to say, yes, I can do this. Yes. I can absolutely handle this. And there's a good chance that they might have no idea and they might be figuring it out as they go, which is kind of what you do in an internship.

Wait, I do that for my job. I know. Right. It's like every daily life that's daily life, right? Yeah.

Not checking in on them on a regular basis. That's probably not great for anybody. I mean, they're going to feel abandoned, which is never great. And the project that you get is probably going to be completely off base, unless they've already done this in previous internships, right. Not showing interest in them, you know, just as a interpersonal relationship kind of thing, you should really just get to know who they are on a, on a regular person to person basis, because that helps people with their engagement, with the work that they're doing.

Speaker 1 00:10:00 Right. And it kind of makes it like, I'm happy to go to this internship because the people that I work with and my leader, you know, my mentor actually knows who I am and cares who I am about a person, as opposed to just going to a job and sitting at your desk and not talking to people for eight hours. So that's just a nice connection that you want to have.

I guess I would say on the positive side, you should assign projects that can be completed in the time in the internship timeframe, because, um, one of the great things about internships is that the intern can complete a project and use that in their portfolio. And that's really what interns are, one of the big things that interns are looking for. Right. So that they can go on and get a job and be part of the workforce assign projects that are timely.

Speaker 1 00:10:43 Right. Cause that would be pretty terrible to be like halfway through a project and then, oh, sorry, school's starting, I'm out. Yeah. And then they never know like how it finished or if it finished. And from your perspective, then you have to pick up a project that's halfway completed, you know, versus guiding it through the entire process and through completion and just, you know, giving advice and pointers on how to get it completed. So it's a, it's a win-win for everyone, if they can complete it during the internship program. And also say assuming that they understand all the different parts of the project, most of the time, you know, if this is the first internship that someone has had, they might not think about all the steps that go into a certain project. So I would say one of the ways that you can guide an intern is when you do give them the project, ask for a project plan so that they can actually think through all of the steps and then go through that with you and you can affirm, or, you know, kind of tweak here and there about, you know, oh, let's, you need to add this step in.

Speaker 1 00:11:36 And you know, you might not know this, but you also can do blah, blah, blah. The last couple of things are, don't expect perfection, you know, cause they don't do this professionally. And so you can't really expect a level of professionalism, you know, as if somebody has been working in the workforce for a while doing this. And then give honest feedback. Okay. So, you know, don't just say, oh yeah, it looks good when really there's, you know, changes that need to be made and that kind of thing.

Cause that's not really going to help anybody. You know, they're not going to grow from that kind of feedback. And you're going to get a product that is, you know, not good. And they won't know unless you tell them and it doesn't help them to think. It's great if it's not correct. I mean, that's true with any of us.

Speaker 1 00:12:20 And so just having good evaluation, like reasonable expectations and then honest feedback. That's awesome. Thanks.

I'm hoping for an intern this summer. We'll see what happens. There are a lot of fun.

I have projects. I have a lot of projects and it doesn't involve getting my coffee. I can do that by myself.

Yeah. Well, and what's nice is you can get coffee together and then it's a bonding experience. There we go. Okay.

How do you determine if the internship was a success? I would always say, ask the intern, and ask for their honest feedback and be prepared if they said, you know, if they give you feedback, that's not so great because that's what feedback is all about, right? As long as it's constructive and they're not telling you that you suck as a mentor, they'll learn from your lead. So as long as you're giving them constructive feedback, they will learn to give you constructive feedback as well.

Speaker 1 00:13:09 So that your next intern, you can do even better on. And obviously, you know, you can review the projects. So if a project is completed, that's a great way to see if the internship was a success. Um, and if it was completed into a level that you're satisfied with, you know, maybe it's not perfect or exactly what you were expecting or done exactly the right way that you, quote unquote right way, that you would have done it. But if it's completed and it serves the purpose that you wanted it to, then I would count that as a success. And I would also see if you learned anything from your intern. Um, I've learned a couple things, because the generation that's doing internships now are so tech savvy and, you know, as professionals, you try to keep up with all the, all things technology, but it's really hard because you're working a full-time job, but we had a couple interns come in.

Speaker 1 00:13:57 Um, one of our last interns came in and taught myself and my counterpart in corporate marketing, uh, about this program online, that's free and it's called Canva. And basically you can be a graphic designer without being a graphic designer, or without knowing how to use Photoshop or something like that. And it has been tremendously helpful for our designs and everything that you know, that we make for corporate communications. So that's wonderful.

Oh, nice.

And then I would, the last thing I would say is if the intern applies for an internship again, that's probably a good indicator that it was a successful internship, or if they apply for a job, also a great way, or if they refer people, all of those things.

That's awesome. Do you have any stories or maybe a memorable moment of working with an intern?

I have a really terrible memory, which is why I use post-it notes for everything and you know, my phone to make notes.

Speaker 1 00:14:45 But I would say that some of the things that, um, have made me most proud are seeing my past interns succeed. When a one of my first interns went on to be in marketing for another

manufacturer, not a competitor, but, um, you know, a different industry. But it, that made me kind of proud. I was like, oh man, she must've been, I dunno, excited about like working in manufacturing or even, even just understanding that, uh, manufacturing actually does have a marketing department and she enjoyed working in a manufacturing marketing department. So she went on to a role in that. So that was nice. Another one of my interns, the one who went into the HR field reached out to me recently because she's doing her masters, and she asked if she could interview me and my team for some feedback, for a project that she's doing for her master's.

Speaker 1 00:15:31 So I was really honored. I was like, oh, she could have, she knew a lot of people, like she was involved in a lot of extracurricular things. So I was like, but she chose me. So I must've had a good impact on her to make her reach back out to me. So that was great. And then two of my past interns are now team members here at PGT Innovations.

Oh, that's awesome.

Yeah. So seeing that come full circle has been, has been really awesome. So you didn't scare them off? No. Yeah. I know. Thank goodness. I'm not a terribly scary person to begin with now.

No, you're definitely not, but that's awesome because you never know, like, I mean, I've talked to a lot of the interns that we had over the summer and they were all so excited and very positive about their experience. There were nine.

Speaker 1 00:16:11 Yeah. And all nine of them definitely spoke to exactly what you're saying. They had meaningful projects, they had real work. They weren't just making copies and running coffee. And so I think that speaks highly to our internship program and you know, no matter what an internship program looks like, because it will vary, obviously we're a huge company, but a dealership is going to be able to benefit from having an intern, provided that they have a project-based mindset, and that they take their time and choose the intern wisely, that they plan ahead, that they can give and receive good feedback and, and just communicate well. So I think that's a recipe for success.

Absolutely. That's awesome.

Stephanie, I'm so grateful that we finally got a chance to talk about something together in here and that you could make some time for this conversation today. Thank you.

Speaker 1 00:16:57 Of course. Thanks for having me. All right. Have a good day. You too.

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