

Small businesses can benefit from internship programs

One of the most valuable and expensive investments a growing organization can make is in its human capital. Hiring the right people at the right time and with the right skills is critical to keeping your business operational and profitable. Identifying and securing the right individual requires a strategic approach that may include a trial position.

The "try-them-before-hiring" process is often associated with temporary employment agencies that can be a great resource for organizations who are looking to fill positions quickly. But the cost and technical skill level of the employment pool may not match your



TERRY BLOM

Assistant vice president for Student Services at College of Western Idaho

company's needs. Large organizations are accustomed to strategic hiring processes and have taken advantage of working with colleges to secure internship positions. Internships are not a new concept, but this strategy is often overlooked by small businesses.

Many employers in small

businesses think of interns' primary value as cheap or free labor for low-skilled positions. In reality, interns can be more valuable to your organization than just affordable help.

Research indicates that businesses with internship programs have recognized a substantial return on investing in these industry up-and-comers. According to a study conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the one-year employee retention rate of former interns was 75.8 percent, compared with 60.7 percent for employees who did not start with their companies as interns. Long-term numbers follow the same trend, with

55 percent of former interns being retained after five years, while only 44 percent of noninterns remained.

The numbers certainly indicate that internships can be a smart recruitment strategy in addition to providing a mutually beneficial opportunity for the student and business. For students, internships allow the chance to gain valuable hands-on experience, develop skills, make connections and build resumes that align with their area of study. For your business, interns can help increase productivity, free full-time employees to focus more on high-level tasks, provide fresh perspective and give you a great opportunity to find fu-

ture employees.

The skill level and diversity of talents an intern can provide has expanded with the advent of access to a community college experience. Locally, at the College of Western Idaho, the need for internships among small businesses has not gone unnoticed. Community colleges offer general-education studies and professional-technical programs that align with diverse local business and industry needs. From dental assisting, biology, business, information technology and small-engine repair to a variety of other professions, a local community college is often a small business's best resource for a skilled employ-

ment pool.

Consider a couple of guiding principles as you develop a successful internship program. Determine the scope of the internship and the tasks you want to accomplish for your business and the intern. When selecting an intern, don't be afraid to hire someone exceptional, someone you would want to see as part of your team.

And most importantly, make the experience valuable for you and the student by striving to be a positive mentor and spending adequate time managing your interns. Working closely with a local college, you can be on your way to improving your company's talent pool.

terryblom@cwidaho.cc