

Building Careers Through Internships

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Preparing the next generation of construction leaders

Every year, the construction industry is growing with **new talent** — many of whom begin their career as interns. Thus, internships play a crucial role when it comes to building industries. Not only do they benefit the students that participate, but they also benefit the companies that host them.

For participants, internships introduce them to possible career paths, provide them with real-world experience and create a pipeline of future leaders.

For employers, internships are more than just a recruiting tool. They are an investment in the future of their workforce and the long-term success of their industry.

Creating a Strong Program

A strong internship program should be more than just a “summer job.” It must be structured, intentional and supported at every level of an organization. The most successful programs center the following:

- **Meaningful work** — Busywork does not make an internship program. Programs should give interns the chance to apply classroom knowledge in real-life

situations and contribute to projects that matter. In doing so, interns will feel like the work they have done will make a difference in the company and was worth doing.

- ***Hands-on experience*** — Interns should see firsthand how teams respond to challenges. The best internship programs don't shield interns from problems: They invite them to help solve them in real time. Internships are successful when students are exposed to the same situations full-time employees face. Transparency is key. Whatever a company's team sees, interns should see as well. By observing how professionals tackle real-world challenges, interns learn problem-solving skills and see how theory translates into practice. My workplace, **McCarthy**, implements this approach by putting interns directly in front of challenges rather than shielding them. "Whatever we see, they see," is the philosophy. This gives interns firsthand experience in solving problems, working with teams and understanding the realities of a complex industry.
- ***Structured learning and support*** — Clear agendas, onboarding tools and development resources help interns hit the ground running. By providing interns with the tools needed to be successful, program leaders can help set interns up for success. At McCarthy, interns have access to online learning modules, productivity trainings and regional/national boot camps.
- ***Mentorship*** — Each intern should have a dedicated mentor or supervisor, often matched to their project or business unit to guide them, provide feedback and answer questions. The mentor ensures the intern is welcomed, integrated and has a go-to resource for guidance and support. The **mentorship** structure is intentional: Mentors are expected to provide regular feedback, answer questions and aid skill development. Some locations pair interns with "peer partners" as additional resources for day-to-day acclimation. Many projects have 1:1 check-ins (formally and informally) between interns and managers at set intervals (weekly or biweekly). The emphasis is on consistent, ongoing feedback and meaningful connection.
- ***Leadership involvement*** — For a program to truly succeed, support must come from all levels of the organization. When leadership values interns and invests in

them, the entire program gains credibility, and critical resources needed for the program to be successful.

- **Relationship building** — Emphasis on developing professional relationships with fellow peers, partners and leaders helps interns build a professional brand that they can take with them throughout their entire career.
- **Exposure to career pathways** — Internships exist in nearly every industry and — within each — there are more roles than many people realize. With so many different areas of focus, it's important to expose interns to various pathways that are available to them. In the construction industry, there are jobs on-site working as project engineers or safety interns supporting field operations, in the office supporting estimating and preconstruction, supporting our virtual design and construction teams through 2D and 3D models, and more. My company provides career pathway seminars that dive into the different roles in construction such as project engineers, estimators, virtual design and construction mechanical electrical plumbing scopes and superintendents.

Leaving With Actionable Learnings

At their core, internships should give students real-world experience. But the best programs go beyond that, helping interns grow both personally and professionally.

Companies that invest in internships should want their interns to walk away with:

- **Industry knowledge** — Interns should leave with a better understanding of the industry and the career opportunities that exist.
- **Professional growth and exposure** — Programs should provide interns with opportunities to step outside their comfort zone and take on new responsibilities with the encouragement and support of their mentors.
- **Collaborative skills** — Stronger teamwork and communication skills should be developed through peer and leadership connections.
- **Company values** — Interns should have a deeper understanding of the company values and what it means to be all in.

- **Holistic growth** — Interns shouldn't only take part in project work but also in team-building activities, career pathway seminars and leadership boot camps that expand their perspectives and reinforce professional development.

The Long-Term Impact of Internships

The benefits of a strong internship program extend far beyond a single summer and goes both ways. For employers, hosting interns creates a pipeline of talent that strengthens the workforce for years to come as many interns go on to accept full-time roles after graduation. Benefits include:

- **Early access to talent** — Companies get to know students before they enter the job market, creating opportunities to recruit top performers early.
- **High retention rates** — Interns who transition into full-time roles already understand the company culture, making them more likely to stay long term.
- **Fresh ideas** — Interns bring creativity, technological savvy and new perspectives to the workplace. They often introduce different ways of thinking and challenge the status quo.
- **Enhanced brand presence** — A strong internship program builds visibility on college campuses and within professional communities, reinforcing the company's reputation.

For McCarthy, interns are one of the biggest source of early-career talent. Over time, many of these individuals rise into leadership positions such as managers, directors, vice presidents and even regional CEOs.

This cycle reinforces the long-term value of investing in internships: Today's interns become tomorrow's leaders, who then turn around and mentor the next generation.

The Next Generation of the Workforce

Internships also provide a window into the up-and-coming workforce. Today's interns are technologically savvy, value diversity and seek meaningful work with real

responsibility. They are motivated by professional development opportunities and strong mentoring relationships. They expect feedback, inclusion and clear pathways for advancement.

For companies, this means that investing in internships is not only about filling immediate needs; it's about aligning with the values and expectations of the next generation of talent.

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