

THE VALUE OF IMPLEMENTING AN INTERNSHIP AT YOUR FACILITY

MANY STMA MEMBERS employ summer interns. If you do not have an internship program at your facility, consider developing one. It is an excellent way to give back to the industry, have fresh, energetic help during a busy season, and legally review the work performance before hiring an employee. Helping students develop their potential through an internship makes the industry stronger.

RECRUIT AN INTERN AT CONFERENCE

The STMA Annual Conference in Long Beach in January offers an excellent opportunity to recruit staff or hire a summer intern. More than 150 students attend the conference including scholarship winners and student challenge competitors. These highly engaged students are interested in learning about internship and employment opportunities in the industry.

Start by placing a listing of your opening on the STMA Employment Board. Email it to STMA before the conference, or bring it with you. STMA will have a job board for displaying openings. Students will also be bringing their résumés to post on the board. If you are not able to attend the conference, STMA will post your opening at the conference. Students also post résumés in STMA's online career center, so if you are not at the conference, you will have an opportunity to see résumés.

Provide enough detail in your internship listing so that those who apply know the salary range and internship requirements. Consider offering housing or a housing allowance, meals, and a bonus structure. These are strong recruiting tools. Students also like to know about the learning opportunities they will have by interning at your facility. Be sure you do not view your intern as seasonal help. As the manager of your facility, you know that you have some repetitive and routine tasks that must be accomplished. If you have an intern working for you, be sure to expose him or her to a variety of activities designed for the learning experience. The internship must allow the student to build skills and apply them to problem solving situations. This

of course includes repetitive tasks, like mowing, but it should also include so much more.

Note on the internship listing if you are available during the conference to meet prospective candidates. Offer your cell phone number, or information on how you can be contacted. The STMA host hotels and the Long Beach Convention Center offer many places for you to meet candidates and start the interviewing process. Even if you choose not to officially begin interviewing, you can judge quite a bit about a person by observing their behavior in an informal setting.

SET EXPECTATIONS

From your job description, create a well-defined plan of activities and job tasks for the intern. The intern should be put in a position that requires long hours and an "on-call" status so that there is a good understanding that sports turf management is not a typical 40-hour-a-week job. When interns experience true-to-life working conditions, they have fewer surprises early in their careers.

Once you have the detailed plan, sit down with your intern and go over the plan. Each intern will possess different capabilities and bring a different level of experience. Find out what the student knows, wishes to learn, and needs to learn. Be sure to include appropriate training and build in exposure to management duties, such as attending meetings, interaction with coaches, budgeting, human resource items, etc. Set up a review process after the first few weeks to be certain your expectations and that of your intern are being met. Savvy students are asking employers for the opportunity to learn a wide range of skills so that they will be better prepared to transition from the classroom to the workplace.

Courtesy of Raechal Volkening, CSFM, STMA offers the internship handbook she authored on our website, www.STMA.org (Get Involved/Students). This 246-page book introduces students to the many different aspects of internships, helping them to set their expectations and make the most of their experience. The concepts outlined in the handbook may also be helpful to STMA members who are developing internship programs. ■

Why participate in an internship program?

INTERNSHIPS can be vital in helping determine career goals. Most students don't know what they want to do after graduation, and an internship can be an ideal way to remove some of the mystery of the "real world."

Working as an intern can help you determine if turf management is the proper career path for you. It may even help you decide which area of turfgrass management best matches your personal and career goals.

Valuable hands-on experience is an important reason to consider an internship. While your college education is highly important in becoming a productive turf manager, you will need more than just a college degree to be successful. Hands-on experience will help you know how to deal with real world situations and management issues. You will also be exposed to the work schedule of the turf industry, which is in dramatic contrast to that of college.

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This work history can also be showcased in your resume. In order to obtain that dream job after graduation, employers will be looking for real world experience in addition to your formal education. A quality internship is a very efficient way to obtain the practical experience employers are looking for.

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For these reasons and many more, you are strongly urged to read this guidebook in its entirety and participate in a minimum of one internship during your college career. ■