

12 Rules for Conducting a Successful Internship or Graduate Assistantship

1. Function in the role of mentor.

All internships should include positive learning opportunities. You must be intentional about providing these otherwise they won't happen.

2. Facilitate the success of your intern or graduate assistant.

This person is a new entrant into the field we value. Help to cultivate new professionals through facilitation of their early professional experience.

3. Be direct.

Make your assignments succinct and avoid ambiguity. Check in to assure you have a shared understanding of the task and how it is to be completed

4. Establish and maintain strict professional boundaries.

An upbeat social environment in the office might be fine according to your organization's culture. Attempting to socialize outside of work, one-on-one lunches, happy hour and hanging out on weekends is not okay. There is a power differential that makes it impossible to have a fair social relationship.

5. Provide two forms of feedback – one for the performance improvement of the intern or GA and one designed to facilitate the successful completion of the internship.

These might be similar but there are two distinctly separate outcomes from each. One is to communicate the progress made toward successfully completing the internship and one is to contribute to work place habits that will serve the intern in her career.

6. Lead by example.

Your interns and grad assistants will learn from your example.

7. Do not coddle.

People know when they are being coddled and they don't like it. Coddling gives the intern or grad assistant the sense you believe him incompetent and it robs the intern/grad assistant of the opportunity to perform and impress.

8. Include interns and grad assistants in high level planning and decisions making in meaningful ways that are appropriate and well communicated.

This could range from observer to researcher to presenter. Don't suggest that interns and grad assistants will be making big decisions if, in fact, they are not. Grad assistants and interns are short term employees and should not be tasked with decision making that has long term implications.

9. Develop "back-up" activities so that your people have something productive to do between assignments.

10. Don't place interns or grad assistants in charge of regular or seasonal employees.

This is bad for moral and will have long term deleterious effects your on regular staff.

11. Don't assign interns and grad assistant's responsibility for critical, broad business functions.

This is just bad business because of the low investment on the part of short term employees.

12. Be intentional about making the best of every day.