

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND IDEAS COLLECTION (EPIC)

Unit 7 – Team Operations

Chapter 1 – CEO Evaluation

“Somebody has to take responsibility for being a leader.”

Toni Morrison

The chief executive is the leader of his or her community foundation. The board of directors holds that person responsible for leading effectively. A regular, inclusive, proactive evaluation process will provide not only a means for gauging past performance, but an opportunity to establish clear priorities for the future. The CEO evaluation is no substitute for good board-CEO communication all year long. Still, the link of accountability between board and chief executive would not be complete without the annual review.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

1. There is a written process for the CEO evaluation that clearly defines roles and responsibilities.
2. The evaluation seeks input from key stakeholders (e.g. donors, grantees, staff and volunteers).
3. The CEO works with the board to set goals for the upcoming year, and the accomplishment of those goals is used as part of the evaluation process.
4. The CEO completes an annual self-evaluation that is compared to the board’s evaluation.
5. The CEO is given an opportunity to respond to the board’s evaluation.
6. The CEO signs a written document that indicates he or she has received the evaluation.
7. The evaluation is kept in a permanent personnel file; one copy in the office and one copypassed from board chair to board chair.

Stories

Personality on Trial

In one of my previous non-profit positions, I was unfortunate enough to go through what I call “the evaluation from hell.” The board developed a set of questions with 1-5 ratings and each question had space for an explanation. Sounds good so far. What did not happen was an understanding of the board as to what they were evaluating. What was supposed to be an evaluation of job performance became an invitation to comment on the executive director’s personality.

I remember one question in particular regarding grant writing. I must state here that my overall success average for grant writing over my previous 10-12 years at this non-profit was in the high 90 percentile. Nonetheless, I received an average mark for grant writing. One reason in particular was “She writes a good grant but it appears she writes them at the last minute.” Many other items were completed in a similar fashion, based not on job outcomes but on personal impressions.

What I Learned: A smooth evaluation starts early with a clear understanding between the board and executive director as to what will be evaluated and how the evaluation will be carried out. Set goals early, make sure the board has the goals, and then make sure the evaluation process is based on the attainment of goals. Good communication throughout the year also helps to eliminate misunderstandings.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The executive director (ED) of one budding community foundation went through the good, the bad, and the ugly with evaluations. Her first year in the position, she had to press the board to carry out an evaluation. She felt it was important to get formal feedback as she got established in the position. She had reported to the executive committee on her activities throughout the year, to build trust from the board leadership. As a result, at evaluation time they were reasonably well aware of what she had been up to. The review was quite positive.

After the first year, the ED stopped reporting in such detail. She felt that with a sound basis of trust established, board leadership should focus on broader organizational concerns, lest it devolve into micro-management; this seemed in line with the board’s own attitudes, as they had expressed that they wanted to be a big picture governing board, not a hands-on managing board.

During the next few years, the ED continued to prompt for an evaluation as part of the annual governance activity cycle. The executive committee stopped gathering input from the full board in the evaluation process, did not gather input from anyone outside the foundation, and did not ask for a self-evaluation from the ED or any data about her activities and accomplishments. Officers did not stick with one set of criteria (such as in the forms used the first year), nor did they use the evaluation model that was prescribed within the new

governance model the board had adopted – despite that the ED had provided the reports that matched up with that governance model and evaluation method. The executive committee had repeatedly postponed reading those reports. (They also declined to use the visioning process called for in the newly-adopted governance model, and neither did they want to undertake traditional strategic planning.)

These evaluations were still positive, but identified a few “areas for improvement” as well, several of which reflected a predictable lack of knowledge of what the ED had been doing. After the first such experience, the ED made specific suggestions for how to modify the evaluation process so that it would be more fair and effective in the future. She put it in writing, expecting the outgoing chair would pass it on to the incoming chair along with other materials related to ED evaluation. But the next evaluation followed the same pattern. The ED did not worry too much, because she continued to get an overall positive message verbally. (The chair had once said, after discussing an area for improvement, “overall we’re very pleased with your performance – we just think it’s always good to identify areas for growth.”) The financial message was positive as well – after each review of her tenure, the ED had received the maximum raise or bonus permitted by the budget.

When it came time for the ED evaluation the next year, the ED had just returned from a significant medical leave and was pressed with work to catch up on. Feeling that the review process had not been helpful in the last few years, and that board leaders would need some time and help to change the process – more than a memo with specific suggestions, evidently – the ED indicated that she did not feel a review was necessary for her sake. It had always been done because she asked for it. But now, unless the board had anything new or important that they needed to communicate, she suggested they skip the review that year, and revisit later in the year how this process would be handled in the future. She hoped that if they discussed the process further in advance of implementing it, everyone could agree on an appropriate way to handle the review. The executive committee concurred that everyone’s time was best spent focusing on immediate priorities.

The ED worked to establish clear lines of communication with the new board chair that year, and felt they were speaking openly with each other to solve challenges and advance the foundation’s mission. The executive committee did not meet as much as it had in the past, as the ED was concerned that the group had come to think of itself as the real decision-makers, and felt this was not a healthy board dynamic. Agenda items that she might have suggested for the executive committee in the past she now suggested to the board chair only for the full board agenda. He was a no-nonsense person and shared his preference that the executive committee not meet except when there were specific action items, so many of its meetings were canceled.

Months went by, and the ED was asked to come visit the board chair at his office on “foundation matters.” When she arrived, the vice chair was present also, looking uncomfortable. The ED was informed that she was being released from her position, because the board felt it was no longer the best fit. She asked why. The board chair would not give any specific reason. However he reminded the ED of her suggestion earlier that year that the board skip a year in reviewing her performance.

The ED later learned that when she stopped bringing certain things to the executive committee prior to taking them to the board, and canceling (with the board chair) unnecessary executive committee meetings, the executive committee met without her. Officers discussed their opinions about the foundation and how to move it in the direction they wanted. They approached another board member about taking the ED position – someone who ran in the same business circles as the most vocal officers. The executive committee arranged the new hire, and then presented the change to the full board in a special secret meeting, as a done deal.

Several board members later confided to the ex-ED that they didn't agree with what the officers had done. The other board members had not been part of the ED review process for several years, and had not realized that anyone on the board was dissatisfied with the ED's leadership. (In fact, board members held a variety of divergent viewpoints about where the foundation should be headed and how fast it should get there.) Other board members did not agree with the executive committee's actions, but they didn't feel there was anything they could do about it (or that they were willing to do) so late in the game.

What I Learned: Frustrating reviews may be painful, but secrets are worse. It's better to confront the board sooner than later about performance expectations and the evaluation process. It's also important to make sure, to the extent that you can, that the full board is participating in the ED review process, and in setting the overall direction of the foundation.

What I Wish I Knew

- Each year the evaluation process can change based on the board president.
- The executive director should always be aware of what is expected. To minimize the natural variation in viewpoints among your ever-changing board, get full board agreement in advance on performance expectations and evaluation criteria. Incorporate them into the written document outlining the evaluation process, and use this to orient future board members to the process. Then even if board leaders decide to alter the way they carry out the evaluation, they are on notice that it's not fair to change the evaluation criteria retrospectively.
- It's important to maintain good communication with all board members. Having regular, candid, one-on-one conversation with all board members is a good way for the CEO to become aware of important issues that might not be raised in other settings.

Red Flags

- *Surprise issue.* If an issue arises during your annual evaluation that has never been brought to your attention throughout the year, pay careful attention to it.

- *Board cabals.* Be wary of parking lot conversations and secret sessions of the executive committee. If board members have a concern that they don't feel comfortable discussing with you, or even with the full board in a recognized executive session, it's time to press for frank discussion. You may not enjoy confrontation, but if board members do not surface their concerns with you, you will have no voice in how those concerns are resolved.
- *CEO collection of information.* The board's individual CEO evaluations should go directly to the board chair, not through the CEO. That way no one will doubt the authenticity of the results.

Practical Tips

- It's helpful to have consistent criteria from year to year for evaluations. There are several sources out there from which to glean the criteria, such as BoardSource. (www.boardsource.com)
- Make sure the evaluation is as objective as possible, based on performance and not anyone's personal feelings.
- The executive director or a staff member should be responsible for keeping the evaluation on schedule.
- Consider distributing a yearly board schedule with the CEO evaluation already listed.
- All board members should have the opportunity to provide input for the CEO evaluation.

Chapter 2 – Position Descriptions

“Job descriptions are the basis for so much of what we do in HR, yet—if we're not careful—they can also be the basis for severe and expensive problems.”

HR Daily Advisor

Position descriptions help job candidates understand what you are looking for. They help employees understand how they fit into the organization. They help create clear performance expectations, which set the stage for effective employee evaluation. And they provide one avenue for the foundation to cover its legal bases with employees. When well-written and used, job descriptions help you manage your staff effectively.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

- All positions have clearly-written descriptions.
- Position descriptions list the tasks or functions and responsibilities for a role, and include competencies which are the abilities needed to conduct those tasks or functions.
- The position descriptions include information on the classification of the job (part- or full-time, exempt or non-exempt).
- The description defines who is responsible for hiring and supervising that position, and any staff that directly report to the position.
- Duties of the position are written in a manner clearly understood by the reader, yet flexible enough to allow for some variations as needed. It includes a phrase such as “any other tasks as assigned by the immediate supervisor.”
- Employees sign the position description to affirm that they have read it and understand it.
- Employees review their position description every year to ensure that it is still accurate and captures all current duties of the position.
- Position descriptions and classifications are reviewed regularly to ensure they are in compliance with state and federal regulations.

Stories

A Sweet Swap

Two of my staffers did not fulfill certain job duties. The accountant, an unusually sociable person for such a position, did not want to be the point person on IT, including serving as liaison to the database software company. He was older, technology-shy, and it was simply outside his comfort zone to study up and take leadership in this area. He had a stubborn streak too.

I found workshops to help the accountant learn about this part of foundation administration, and regularly coached him to make the most of the technical assistance available through our database vendor, to help him master this part of his role – but to no avail. He drug his feet, and was sullen when I brought it up. He was much more interested in arranging staff lunches.

Our administrative assistant presented a similar challenge around a different duty. She could never seem to make the goal of running thank you letters at least bi-weekly. She nodded her head in agreement when I expressed how important timely acknowledgment of gifts was to our donor relationships, but the behavior did not change. The next time I'd bring it up, she would just shrug her shoulders.

I couldn't believe the reason she gave, that she had higher priorities to work on, since after all I had indicated the thank you letters were a high priority for her position. And she found time at her own initiative to set up spreadsheets for grant tracking, and research various technology applications for the foundation – she enjoyed that sort of work. Eventually I concluded she found the task of running thank you letters to be uninteresting, or beneath her skills.

One day the light bulb went off in my head. The accountant was as annoyed as I was by the slow thank you letters and cared about relationships; working with technology was like playing for the administrative assistant. Why not switch those duties in their respective job descriptions?

That's just what I did, and everybody was happier for it. The accountant felt proud doing right by our donors, the administrative assistant cheerfully channeled her IT muse, and I was relieved, because all the work was finally getting done in a timely and effective manner.

What I Learned: While it's true that everybody will have to do some tasks in their job that they don't enjoy, it's equally true that you can reduce passive resistance and make everybody happier and more productive by tailoring the jobs to the people. If you can meet the business needs of the organization by doing so, it's a no-brainer.

What I Wish I Knew

- If you have to take action against an employee for an issue, make sure the responsibility in question is addressed in the position description.
- Cite the employee handbook or personnel policies verbatim when you are taking action for an issue. For example: "Per Item 3.1, employees are to be at their station and ready to work at 8:30am, not arriving at any time later without prior notification."
- Position descriptions are not static.

Red Flags

- *Any position without a job description.* You gotta have 'em.
- *Drawing the line.* If someone says, "I'm not going to do this – it's not in my job description," then they are probably not the right fit for a small community foundation staff.
- *Encroachment.* Watch out for staff who insist on doing tasks that are not included in their position description and which a supervisor has not assigned. If there's no clear need for the activity – or worse, if it is someone else's job – this could be a sign that the staffer is not a good fit for their existing position, or is procrastinating.

Practical Tips

- It's a good idea to include language that allows flexibility. This could include the following: "Because the community foundation anticipates maintaining a small core staff for the foreseeable future, the person holding this position must be able to function productively in a non-bureaucratic environment, in which a wide variety of tasks is expected of each employee and the ability to work collegially is important."
- Update position descriptions so that the duties listed align with the elements of your strategic plan.
- Have your legal counsel review your position descriptions to make sure they are not discriminatory.

Chapter 3 – Employee Review

“A lot of people quit looking for work as soon as they find a job.”

Zig Ziglar

Some supervisors find employee reviews to be a challenging part of their role – it can be uncomfortable to sit in judgment of others. But it is essential that workers know what is expected of them and that they get feedback on their performance. Such communication will not only keep the occasional lazy person focused on results, it will help the more numerous motivated employees to stay engaged and keep growing in their jobs – giving the best they have to give for your mission. Where problems exist, they must be addressed, and the sooner, the better. But you can make the review a more productive, dread-free task by communicating frequently throughout the year with employees, and by celebrating and rewarding their abilities and successes.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

- There is a written process for employee reviews that clearly defines roles and responsibilities.
- While continuous and immediate feedback is the preferred method of employee evaluation, all staff are formally evaluated at least annually, with a focus on improvement.
- The employee review is consistent with the requirements of the position description.
- An employee self-evaluation is part of the review process.
- Evaluations are in writing and are signed by the evaluated employee.
- Employees have the opportunity to respond to items in the evaluation.
- Completed and signed evaluations are kept in confidential personnel files.
- Annual individual goal setting consistent with the organization’s strategic plan is a part of the evaluation process.

Stories

A Shared Solution

Like many supervisors, I found writing employee reviews to be a painful process. Not only were they difficult to write, but I had a tendency to lean toward “grade inflation” – i.e., a desire to give everyone generally high marks, using the review as a method to motivate through praise.

Furthermore, the board gave me explicit instructions to get out of the office more to meet with donors and community leaders – which meant I had less opportunity to observe employee performance.

These problems were partially solved by developing employee reviews through team efforts. In other words, when it comes time to write an employee's evaluation, I meet with the other employees who work with that person. Everyone knows these meetings occur, and the atmosphere at the meetings includes a lively and candid discussion. I find that other employees often observe behaviors that I miss.

What I Learned: A team approach can yield better results – not uniformly positive by any means, but a better tool for employee performance improvement.

What I Wish I Knew

- The annual evaluation should be a summary of the communication between supervisor and employee throughout the year.
- Spend at least as much time praising the employee for what they accomplished and are good at, as you spend discussing future goals and identifying areas for improvement. Where improvements are needed, or the employee is breaking new ground, provide training or other support that may help the employee succeed.

Red Flags

- *Surprises.* The review should not be the first time your employee hears about something significant that needs to be corrected.
- *Non-participation.* There's a problem when an employee refuses to do a self-assessment. Dig deeper.
- *Board involvement in staff-level hiring or assessments.* The CEO may wish to seek input from board members regarding the creation of new staff positions, or how well staffers work with board committees. But make no mistake about it, other staff report to the CEO, and he or she is responsible for both the selection and the evaluation of staff – not board members.
- *What regulations?* Like all other aspects of personnel management, employee reviews should be handled in a manner that is non-discriminatory, as defined by state and federal regulations.

Practical Tips

- If the employee refuses to sign the review or disciplinary action, try writing “Employee refuses to sign” and have them initial it.
- Have two different types of reviews – summative and formative – and use the appropriate one for each employee. To put it simply, a formative evaluation focuses on the measurable results an employee delivers, while a summative evaluation looks more widely at the processes the employee uses to pursue position goals.
- Empower the employee to set their own individual goals for the coming year so they take ownership in their improvement.

Chapter 4 – Hiring Practices

“I am convinced that nothing we do is more important than hiring and developing people. At the end of the day you bet on people, not on strategies.”

Larry Bossidy

Few management decisions have such far-reaching consequences as who you put on your team. This is one aspect of the executive director’s job where it is worth using your head, your heart, and your gut, not to mention best practices, to ensure you get sound results. Good employees are the lifeblood of a foundation; bad ones not only waste precious time and operating dollars, but can put your foundation’s reputation at risk. Do your homework beforehand, and take your time in hiring. You won’t regret it.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

- The position description is reviewed to ensure it is still consistent with organizational needs.
- A pool of potential candidates is developed through advertisements, placement firms, personal references and other sources.
- A final candidate is chosen through a fair and unbiased process, using requirements listed in the position description.
- Each applicant completes and signs an employment application.
- A detailed offer letter is sent to the successful applicant, contingent on a successful background check and a drug screen indicating no use of illegal drugs and/or abuse of prescription drugs.
- A background investigation is completed, which includes, at a minimum, reference checks and criminal background checks.
- Relevant payroll documentation is obtained, including Form W-4 and Form I-9, as well as information needed for benefit plans (Health, retirement, etc.).
- If employee will use personal car for business, a copy of current driver’s license and auto insurance is obtained.

Stories

First Day Surprise

We recently completed a long and thorough process to hire for an open position. We selected an excellent candidate, made the offer, and prepared for her first day of work. Before she began work, after she reported on her first day, she informed us that she was pregnant and would need maternity leave.

It didn't change our plans at all. We knew that she was the best candidate. Furthermore, other staff members had filled in for the responsibilities of that position, which had already been vacant for several months. And, knowing that a good new staff member would soon be on the way, everyone was eager to pitch in until she returned from her leave. While her work status with us was delayed, she got the clear message that she was important to our organization, and it turned out to be one of our best hires.

What I Learned: Good people are worth extra-ordinary measures. That's how vital they are to your organization's effectiveness.

What I Wish I Knew

- Follow your gut at the interview – if it doesn't feel right at the interview, it won't be good in 6 months.
- Have criteria going in to the interview that will ensure you fill your needs.
- It can be problematic to have board members involved in the hiring process.
- This is one of the most important decisions you will make – the consequences of a bad hire are significant.
- Don't be afraid to reopen the job search if you don't find the right applicant. It's better to leave the position open than hire the wrong person.

Red Flags

- *Lukewarm references.* When checking references, you may ask the question, "Would you hire this person?" If a reference responds negatively, or refuses to respond, it should raise a red flag.

Practical Tips

- Don't put an annual salary for an exempt employee in their offer letter. Quote the salary as a weekly number or by the pay period. Quoting an annual salary could be construed as a contract to employ for one year, regardless of performance.

- Foundations may want to consider credit checks for positions that handle money. If you use them, keep in mind that this may penalize people who have suffered financial hardship, and minorities (who have, on average, lower credit scores than Euro- Americans). Educate yourself on the pros and cons of credit checks, and how to use them legally, before going down this road.
- It is often wise to hire someone who has skills that you are lacking. Unless those skills are at odds with the position, it can only help to have a more well-rounded team.
- If you feel that you are lacking in the skill set that you are hiring for, include in the interview someone who is knowledgeable about necessary skills (e.g., your accountant for a financial position).
- Check references and verify the information on an application. Applications can be enhanced.
- Temp firms can be a good avenue through which to find new permanent employees – you can test their skills, how they interact with other employees, etc.
- You should have well-defined policies and a script for interviews to ensure that the proper questions are being asked – and the wrong ones are not.

Chapter 5 – Staff Orientation

“Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.”

Aristotle

So you’ve made a smart hire and your bright new staffer has shown up for work. What happens next? To get off to a good start, orient the newcomer to the position, your organization, and the community foundation field. With a solid foundation of knowledge, the new hire will enjoy his or her job – and do it well.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

- There is a well-defined process for staff orientation.
- New staff receive information regarding Ethical and Operational Standards for the community foundation.
- New staff are made aware of the foundation’s current financial situation.
- New staff are informed of current foundation initiatives.
- New staff are informed of how the foundation is structured and staffed.
- New staff are given a sense of the foundation’s history, including its culture, stories, and values.
- New staff are introduced to all relevant policies and operational procedures.
- During the introductory period, feedback is provided to the employee on a frequent and regular basis (such as weekly).
- New staff are encouraged to ask questions.
- New staff sign documentation that they have received orientation.

Stories

First Impressions Go a Long Way

Recently, we hired two interns to help with different projects at our foundation. While the internships were temporary, we were also looking for someone to fill a more permanent position, and we viewed the two interns as potential candidates. Neither intern, however, knew that we had a longer-term assignment in mind.

The two interns had different attitudes, which was apparent as soon as the first day’s orientation began. One was eager and excited; the other seemed bored and disinterested. The first asked relevant questions; the second was silent.

That attitude, unfortunately, carried through with their internship assignments. While the first intern jumped into each assignment with vigor, the second let it be known that she viewed her internship as only a temporary layover until she landed a “real” job. The competence of the second intern was just fine; the attitude, however, was lacking.

In the end, the first intern was offered an extended assignment with us, while the second intern wasn’t even considered for the position.

What I Learned: A good employer-employee relationship begins in orientation. Our second intern’s attitude at the staff orientation set the tone and made a poor first impression, which was borne out by further experience. In contrast, we built a lasting, effective relationship with the first intern. This outcome was due not only to that intern’s positive attitude, but also to our warm welcome and thoughtful orientation process.

What I Wish I Knew

- Time spent in orientation of new employees is time well invested in the operation of the foundation.
- Written information can be convenient, as the employee can access it anytime and work through it at his or her own pace. Keep in mind, however, that people can only digest so much at once, and adults learn best through a variety of media. It’s best to incorporate multiple training methods, including peer-to-peer contact, just-in-time coaching, and hands-on application.
- Beyond what you do and how you do it, the most important piece to communicate during orientation is why you operate in certain ways.

Red Flags

- *Blank stares.* Observe the new employee’s behavior during orientation – a staff member who seems disinterested in the beginning will most likely not improve.
- *Tunnel vision.* Employees need to learn about the big picture in which they work, not just their specific job duties. Help them see how they fit into the mission and operations – and make sure they feel a sense of belonging with the team.

Practical Tips

- Prepare an orientation plan specific to the position. Space out the learning over time – keeping in mind the foundation’s annual activity cycle – and plan for a variety of learning methods.
- Consider existing board orientation materials as a resource to tap and adapt as you develop your staff orientation process.

- Repetition is key.
- Encourage new staff members to ask questions.
- Encourage peer-to-peer connections within your organization (between co-workers) and within the sector (to other community foundations or local non-profits), and coach the new staffer to take advantage of the technical assistance that is available through your regional association of grant makers, non-profit training groups, and software providers. While the CEO plays an important role in training new staff, you want them to build relationships and learn to train themselves on an ongoing basis.

Chapter 6 - Internships

“As a student I learned from wonderful teachers and ever since then I've thought everyone is a teacher.”

Bill Moyers

Working with an intern provides community foundation leaders the opportunity to do something we don't often get to do – to make a direct impact on an individual, unmediated by a grantee. As a real-world teacher to our interns, we get to help them put their knowledge and ideas into action, and to encourage them along a path of service.

Enrichment can work in both directions. Interns can bring new skills, fresh ideas, and high energy to a foundation. There are no guaranteed outcomes, but with proper preparation and careful execution, we can maximize the chance that an intern program will be productive and rewarding for all involved. More often than not, we will even find that the student becomes our teacher.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation's level of effectiveness in this area:

1. There is a thorough examination of the costs and benefits of recruiting, training and supervising interns, before the board of directors agrees to employ student interns.
2. An internship plan is in place which includes, at a minimum, procedures for recruitment, compensation, orientation, supervision, and evaluation.
3. The plan has clearly articulated goals and objectives.
4. The plan has position description(s) that explain each intern's duties and includes meaningful project work.
5. If the internship is unpaid, a thorough internal assessment is done to ensure compliance with state and federal wage guidelines and university requirements.
6. When determining the scope of an intern's work, the student's educational objectives are reconsidered.

Stories

From Fast Food to Philanthropy to Film School

When we learned of a private foundation's offer to fund a college intern, we jumped at the opportunity. Our 20th anniversary was approaching, and we decided to look for an intern who could help us produce a video to celebrate our accomplishments. Rather than taking the traditional approach to finding an intern, we contacted a student named Nick at the high school next door. I'd seen some of his work on YouTube and knowing that he was just a few days away from graduating, we approached him about his plans for the summer.

With shrugged shoulders, Nick confided that he didn't have the money to go to college and that he planned to work at Dairy Queen. I explained the internship opportunity and asked if he would be interested, noting that the position was contingent upon him taking at least one college class. He lit up and within the next week, he'd enrolled in a class at a regional campus. Nick's first semester with us was spent interviewing board members and creating a video library. He stayed on with us to complete the video. At our 20th anniversary celebration, Nick's video was a hit when premiered before about 175 guests. He did a great job for us and we will continue to use this resource to help tell our story.

One day last summer, I pulled Nick along to an ad agency and introduced him to their creative team. They promised to let him attend one of their commercial shoots and asked to see some of his work. The guy was beaming! As we walked to the car, he said "This is so cool. I'm just overwhelmed!" Before we headed back to the office, I shared my opinion that I thought he belonged at a different university, one that offered a better fit for his film interests. He'd never been to the campus, so we took a detour. A stop at their Art Department led to Admissions. Long story short, he's currently a full-time student in a program that reflects his talents. Between the money earned through his internship (for which he also got college credit!) and financial aid, he was able to make ends meet. And he has already started to build an impressive portfolio through his work with our foundation. We have been pleased and inspired to see this special young man start creating a bright future for himself.

What I Learned: Internships really can be a win-win proposition – especially if you know what you are looking for, and are able to offer caring mentoring.

What I Wish I Knew

- Interns are typically knowledgeable and energetic, but lack prior work experience – so you are able to set the baseline for their professional growth. You will do them a favor if you have high standards.
- You are going to have to hold their hands.
- In the long run, having an intern may not be a time-saver.

Red Flags

- *Indifference.* Interns generally want to please you – if they appear not to, that is a red flag.
- *Busy work.* It's okay to include some grunt work in a well-rounded intern experience, but don't forget about the educational component.

- *Shielding them.* Be honest with interns when you evaluate them. Although avoiding conflict is the easy way, you are not doing the intern any favors if you withhold useful information about their performance (or lack thereof).

Practical Tips

- Give them experiences that challenge them.
- If you can keep an intern longer than a semester, it will make your life much easier in the long run.
- Give them concrete due dates – interns are used to working on class deadlines, so this usually works well.
- If interns have a good experience, they will want to come back.

Questions?

Have questions about this information? Please contact us.

Community Foundation Research and Training Institute

PO Box 86

Grabill, IN 46741

(260) 804-5617

cfrtinstitute@gmail.com