

How organizations, interns can better benefit from relationship



MICHAEL ABRAMSON

When sports organizations look to improve their internship programs, they likely do so from their own perspectives of how the internships functioned and benefited the organizations. How many of these organizations

assess an internship from the intern's perspective? This additional dimension of review could result in insights that could improve the opportunities future internship programs offer, ultimately benefiting both the organizations and the interns.

As a practicing lawyer and subsequently as an MBA student and graduate, I have interned with multiple teams and volunteered at several events. I've experienced firsthand the rewards and the shortcomings of internship programs. The following are my suggestions to transform internships into more valuable experiences for both organizations and interns.

■ How to train

While this point seems elementary, it should be noted that training in sports internships is often subpar or nonexistent. Several reasons could account for this phenomenon: inadequate time, the hectic nature of a sporting event, or the trainer did not impart the necessary information. Training is crucial, and, armed with the proper training and information to do their jobs, interns will be able to add the most value possible to an organization.

Successful training should have three components. First, organizations must tell the interns their tasks and preferably provide written descriptions so that interns can refer to them in the future. While it is hard to believe, organizations often do not tell interns what to do but rather assume that interns know their tasks.

Second, organizations should teach interns how to do the tasks. Interns come to internships with the aptitude and passion to do the tasks, but organizations



When interns sign on with a sports team, they should receive training for the tasks given them, freedom to pursue special projects and encouragement to offer their perspective.

Interns come with the aptitude and passion to do the tasks, but organizations have to teach them how the tasks should be carried out. This part of the training should not be based on assumptions.

have to teach them how the tasks should be carried out. It is important that this part of the training be in depth and not based on assumptions.

The need to explain the "how" is even greater if interns are helping to put on an event. Putting on an event, such as a basketball game, involves much more than getting two teams on the court to play and letting fans into the arena to watch them play. Industry insiders know this fact, but interns likely do not. It is important, therefore, to explain all of the logistics, timing, and planning that goes into a sporting event.

Third, organizations should teach the proper way of interacting with fans. Or-

ganizations should reinforce the basics of common courtesy and teach interns the answers to typical fan questions such as the locations of restrooms and exits. Organizations must remember that their reputation for fan friendliness is determined through fans' interaction with team employees and interns.

■ How to empower

Many organizations mandate that interns only take on those tasks that were assigned to them. Even if interns want to do more, organizations often do not allow interns to take on additional work. These organizations, however, are missing out on the value that these interns can provide. Interns come to positions with various skills and talents and, most importantly, great passion and a desire to benefit the organization. Organizations should take advantage of these talents, skills, and positive attitudes and encourage interns to create their own project(s), in addition to their assigned projects. The added value to organizations would be significant.

Most interns would jump at the opportunity to use their abilities to design and complete their own projects. The possibilities are endless: An intern with

video skills could create a viral ad for the organization; an intern with law skills could draft or review contracts; an intern with business skills could create a marketing campaign, etc. Organizations must merely give interns the freedom to act and have the humility to take advice from interns.

■ How to encourage

Interns bring theory and knowledge from their classes (whether business, law, sports management, etc.) that can be useful. Interns can provide input in two areas. First, they can offer fresh and critical perspectives on organizations' daily activities. For example, interns may suggest different ways to track ticket-holder information. Second, interns can give feedback on the fan experience. In this scenario, interns would use both their academic knowledge and insight as fans who attend games. For instance, interns may suggest a different way of handing out promotional items.

Organizations spend a great deal of time and money searching for interested individuals to buy tickets. While this research is valuable, organizations should not miss out on the sales opportunities that are immediately available to them. Interns, who are typically students, have large networks (classmates, friends, teachers, etc.) with potential ticket buyers. Interns could also arrange group sales to their fraternities, sororities, religious youth groups, etc. In these scenarios, both parties win: The team makes money from ticket sales and the intern makes money from commissions on the sales.

As a former intern, I can attest that the existing structure of and practices in typical sports internships in many ways prevent both organizations and interns from attaining their goals. To remedy this situation, organizations might want to adopt these easy-to-implement and low-cost suggestions. Organizations, interns, and the sports industry will reap the rewards. ■

Michael Abramson (mbabramson@yahoo.com) is a lawyer in Atlanta. He received his J.D. from Emory University (2004) and MBA from Washington University in St. Louis (2011).

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