

Cultivating Success

Mentorship in the High School Internship

Moving beyond the role of a supervisor

Staff working primarily with interns should understand their responsibility as more than an on-the-job supervisor. Staff should see themselves as mentors who play a crucial role in the personal and professional development of interns. While they will be assigning tasks, they should also make intentional efforts to incorporate interns into the culture and guide them through the successes and challenges of this professional learning experience.

Ultimately, the mentor represents the employer through their interactions with the intern, which means the intern's perception of the mentor is their perception of the employer. Preparing your team for the mentor role is worthwhile time invested in building a program that motivates interns to come back and work for your company.

- ⇒ Download [A Mentor's Guide to Youth Development](#) from the U.S. Department of Education
- ⇒ Download [Resources and Guidance for Supporting Young Women in Manufacturing](#)



Best practices for providing feedback

A key role of the mentor is providing consistent and high-quality feedback, both formally and informally. The mentor/supervisor should take an asset-based approach, which is crucial for interns to see themselves as capable of being successful in a professional space. While interns may have room for improvement, they should be valued for the skills and knowledge they bring (many interns will have completed multiple manufacturing or other related coursework before they begin their internship).

An asset-based approach provides space for intern reflections, focuses on strengths, and views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets. Interns should be valued for what they bring to an employer instead of being characterized by what they lack (often, there is a focus on inadequacies and what they need to gain or change about themselves to be successful).

- ⇒ Download [Participant Reflection Questions](#)
- ⇒ Download [A Guide to Providing Feedback to Participants](#)
- ⇒ View [Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation](#)

Utilizing observations and formal assessments

One of the most valuable aspects of an internship is the ability for an intern to receive feedback and have conversations about their performance. A professional skills assessment is a tool-based observational assessment of an intern's performance given by an adult supervisor and shared with the intern that addresses both essential and technical skills. This assessment should be used primarily as a feedback tool and development strategy.

Depending on the length of the internship, it may only be appropriate to do one professional skills assessment. If the length allows (for example, a full semester), it is beneficial to have a baseline, middle, and final assessment with the same questions to evaluate an intern's growth over time.

Schedule time to sit down in person with the intern to discuss the professional skills assessment. Be prepared to manage the conversation so it remains collaborative and everyone is talking with, rather than at, one another. For youth to truly develop essential employability and technical competencies, they must be treated with respect and provided room for their voice to be heard during these conversations.

- ➞ Download [Illinois' Recommended Technical and Essential Employability Competencies](#)
- ➞ View GPEAK's [Guide to Competencies and Performance Indicators](#)

Navigating challenges

Internships typically get off to a great start, but challenges may emerge as interns and their mentor/supervisor move beyond the initial excitement and anticipation. Through continuous coaching and support, it is possible to navigate challenges and improve the experience through a better understanding of needs and expectations.

This is a typical process for anything new and if an intern or mentor/supervisor reaches a moment of frustration and discontent with the internship, it is not a sign that the experience is unsuccessful but rather an opportunity to learn and improve.

- ➞ Download [A Guide to Difficult Conversations](#)
- ➞ Download the Navigating Challenges Worksheet: [PDF](#) // [Word](#)

COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

Morton Industries created an [evaluation form](#) for mentors/supervisors to complete for their students and share with the students' high schools. Mentors/supervisors are asked to discuss the evaluation with the student intern before submitting it to the school, creating a great opportunity for feedback and to build trust, as interns will see it soon after it's completed.

John Deere engages in a behavioral competency development approach to their internship program, which is reflected in their [evaluation](#).

