

Startups offer interns vital lessons



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Entrepreneurs

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This summer, college students interned in our region's startups and entrepreneurial companies. Recently I met with several of them as they reflected on their experiences. Or more accurately, raved:

- » "There's nothing like going to work in the morning knowing it will be nothing less than an adventure."
- » "I learned how entrepreneurship can manifest in so many ways."
- » "My supervisor taught me to embrace being outside my comfort zone, and never doubt myself."
- » "I couldn't replace what I gained

this summer with any life experience."

These reflections are what any educator wants every student to say after completing a course and often only result from the most empowering of teachers. This summer, our region's startups educated our students, teaching "real-world."

Startup companies provided the right environment to empower interns to learn and deliver results. It wasn't just the environment that led to making an impact but also a few common characteristics of the host company culture, supervisor or team members. Any employer could apply the following characteristics to empower their student interns to have a tangible impact in the workplace:

Trust

Trust is earned and takes a long time to build. By providing bits of trust at a time to interns from the onset, interns feel a sense of account-

ability and ownership over their work. They get the chance to prove that they can be trusted. It's also a quick way to learn about the intern - if he or she is ready for more or want to stay on the sidelines. Once trust is established, the sky's the limit.

Failure

F's don't always happen in school, but failure happens all the time working in an entrepreneurial company. Learning how to recover from not making the sale, meeting timeline expectations or pivoting are critical in the entrepreneurial world. By bringing interns into the "failure" process, they can learn to accept it and move quickly to making improvements on the next big thing.

Communication

Even if it's just a 10 minute check-in, or 30 minutes a week, providing a consistent touch point with an intern allows a specific time to ask questions,

raise concerns, or share any relevant news important to the intern's work. Without this, like so much of the fast-pace of the company, the intern's work, motivation, and understanding of the company may just get lost in the shuffle.

Feedback

In school, students become accustomed to receiving a grade. In the workplace, we seem to receive feedback only when something is either really amazing or really awful. But what about how to improve? Some of the most productive interns have increased their value because a supervisor took a small amount of time to provide advice on a blog, a presentation, a sales pitch, etc. In this environment, a little bit goes a really long way.

Take note of what's going on in the region. These companies know how to foster growth that lead to meaningful impact. Don't we all want that for the region? ■