

High School Student as Intern

Folks,

One of my wife's current students found out I was an attorney. She wants to go to law school. I haven't been able to talk her out of it - yet.

She wants to do an internship for me this summer. Risks? Downsides? Up sides? What should I look for and what should I worry about?

Thanks!

High school interns can be great. Find out if she has any previous office experience. What tasks you have her do will be based on that.

Just think - you don't have to do any filing anymore.

Corrine Bielejeski, California

I've been down this road though not in the summer, and I think it was helpful for both of us. Don't overthink it. Give her assignments that she can do, that she can learn from and really feel like she's contributing.

Some of these kids are really smart. Mine did a lot of social media stuff, I kept her away from client stuff but I would talk to her about client stuff. She only worked a couple of days a week for 10 hours max, and she got school credit as an assignment. She recently asked me for a letter of recommendation, so I think it wasn't total hell working for me.

Bob Arnold

I have a high schooler doing some data filtering for me right now. I just brought him on about a month ago. I don't have an office so he's working remotely which we both agree is beneficial in many ways: He gets to work whenever he feels like it, and since he gets paid a flat rate per unit, he doesn't really have to keep track of time so if his mom needs him to stop to do a chore or eat dinner he doesn't have to remember to record stop/start time.

I pay him better than minimum wage and we had a long conversation with mom present (and mom's approval) that I'm paying him for not only the work, but for confidentiality.

While I know he wants to be an electrician, I hope he'll be working for me for the next 2 years or more. I'm giving him the ability to show future employers that he can be trusted with the very important small stuff. I hope I'll be able to give him more tasks and responsibilities as we get more comfortable in our working relationship.

And of course, I'll be writing recommendation letters as long as he's in good stead with the work.

AnnMichelle G. Hart

My initial thought would be pay. Hopefully one of the CA labor practitioners (e.g. Gene Lee) can chime in here, but I think an internship can be unpaid if the intern actually learns something meaningful and related to their education. The practical problem, though, is that many people with interns abuse that and the intern does a bunch of useless stuff that doesn't teach them anything at all. That gets in to a situation where you've failed to pay wages properly and CA would draw and quarter you. If you're lucky.

Andy Chen, California

You have to pay minimum wage. Will you get equal value? Will she save you any time at all that you would otherwise be stuck doing. Only you know what work you have she could do. Scanning? Copying? Typing? Filing?

Roger M. Rosen, California

Check this Dept of Labor fact sheet

<https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>

Deb Matthews, Virginia

Last week, at the request of a neighbor, I joined a panel of lawyers at her daughter's high school Law Club. The kids, pretty highly motivated students at an all-girls academy, wanted to know about law school and law practice.

Five lawyers had one hour - minus question time. You can imagine we didn't delve too deeply but I found it very rewarding. My advice to them: work hard but have some fun.

So I can't advise on internship but I can say the students were bright, attentive and asked some pretty good questions. Nobody asked about an internship but I would consider it if approached. I think I'd follow Bob Arnold's advice to give appropriate assignments and not overthink it.

John Leonard

One of my best secretaries, ever, was a girl who was a neighbor, in high school, and who I would not expect much from. She asked me for a job a couple times. The second time my secretary was taking off on vacation so I hired her, part time/temporary. She was bright, friendly and as silly as it sounds, decorated for holidays. While initially a file clerk, within a couple years she was running the office and keeping track of me. She married and moved on. That was 15 yrs ago and I still miss her. YMMV.

Randy Birch, Utah

One of the best secretaries my partner and I had was a high school senior (part-time). Very responsible and motivated to learn. She left to go to college and become a CPA.

Veronica M. Schnidrig, Oregon

What is data filtering?

Gerald Gilliard

My law firm has had 3 high school summer interns (paid) through a local Juniors to Jobs program, and has also had a younger college student intern (paid) last summer. I also worked at my father's law firm part-time each summer when I was 14-18 (I had another part-time job at night year-round,) an experience I loved so much that I foolishly vowed not to become an attorney and majored in engineering.

We required submission of a resume and interviewed multiple students each time, as with any other position.

I've had a generally positive experience, but found that you have to be much more specific with folks who have never been in the workforce before and provide some more basic knowledge. Unless they took some sort of class in it, don't expect them to be able to format a letter. This actually was also true for a college graduate I hired years ago, who is now a paralegal at my firm. I'm not a true solo (have a small firm) and found a lot of things worked well when I put my office manager in charge of the intern - things got done, I don't know what, but she was happy for the help in accomplishing stuff like scanning closed files and other projects that during the year just get shoved further down the to-do list.

You need to have a REALLY thorough talk about confidentiality. I do so with all new hires, but make sure you are both general and specific, and put the fear of God in them regarding any breaches, whether deliberate or accidental. I required as a condition of hire, even as an intern, a signed confidentiality agreement. Also you may want to set up some ground rules regarding personal devices and social media, even if it is as simple as "no pictures in the office, and no posting to social media about anything at work" (unless, of course, that is what you want the intern to actually be doing for your firm.) Again, this is really true for all employees, but something you may not have previously thought about.

If I have work to give them, I really enjoy hiring and mentoring folks in late high school or college. We all have to learn somehow how to do actual jobs, and what society's expectations are in offices and such (regardless of whether you agree with them or not.) Having that experience in high school was truly helpful to me on the whole, even if I found the actual work to be boring.

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida