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Getting the most from interns

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Choosing the best intern for your business

By [Karen Haywood Queen](#) • Bankrate.com

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Interns working in your small business can be a win-win situation. Your business gains a boost to creativity as well as the bottom line, and the intern gains experience and builds a resume. But as a small-business owner, you want to make sure you use interns for maximum benefit.

"If you're looking for someone to take out the trash, pick up your laundry or buy gifts for your spouse or significant other, don't hire an intern," says David Politis of Politis Communications near Salt Lake City. "Hire a personal assistant. Serious intern candidates are looking for several outcomes from their time spent with your firm -- the most important of which is real-world experience."

A conversation with Dilbert creator

Dilbert creator Scott Adams answers questions about Asok, possibly the world's best-known intern:

What could Asok accomplish, given the chance? Asok is an engineer, and like all engineers he longs to invent the product that will forever change the world. Failing in that, he would like to one day earn enough money so he can stop making his own underpants out of sandwich bags.

What's the worst thing that's happened to Asok? The Pointy-Haired Boss asked Asok to crawl into the

Here are some tips for hiring and getting the best out of a working relationship with an intern.

Widen your search

Now that you've decided to work with interns, don't restrict your search to the closest high school or college, or even only to schools. [Melissa Kenney Ngaruri](#), legal assistant at Patrick Hoover Law Offices in Rockville, Md., spoke to teachers at several high schools who run internship programs. She passed on the school just down the road in favor of two other

ventilation system and find whatever died in there.

What's the best reader storyline suggestion based on real work life that you've received related to Asok?

Most of the suggestions for Asok revolve around the ridiculous "make-work" projects that interns famously get.

Is Asok getting anything at all he could use on a resume? All he's getting is a chance to steal some company resources to print his resume at work.

schools with programs that better met her needs. At her favorite program, the interns send their own resumes instead of expecting the supervising teacher to do it. "We noticed a big difference between those students who were proactive and those who weren't," Ngaruri says.

Choose your interns as if you were hiring them full time. Run background checks just as you would for

any new hire. Don't forget to check social networking sites for red flags.

In the interview, be clear about your expectations. Specify the hours, if the position is paid and type of work involved "almost to the point of pushing them away," advises David J.P. Fisher of RockStar Consulting in Evanston, Ill. "Interns are there to help me, not cause me more headaches."

Look for drive -- not just good grades. We've taken kids with lower GPAs who were super hot in terms of rolling up their sleeves and getting involved," Ngaruri says. "I'll take someone who is average to below average intelligence who is dedicated any day."

Realize there is risk

No matter what you do, you may experience horror stories. An intern may flake out and just stop showing up, Ngaruri says, or worse. One intern at Tavalon Tea in Brooklyn, N.Y., actually was scoping out the company. "He was here six months to extract our know-how and business concept to start up a competing tea company of his own," says Tavalon Tea founder and CEO John-Paul Lee.

But Lee, who still uses interns, notes that was just one intern out of more than 100 in the past three years. Overall, Lee says, "We have gotten some amazing talent. Most of our unpaid interns ended up working harder than our paid staff. Employing competent interns with strong ambitions can be crucial to startups with small budgets, and we are living proof."

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