

Essay

An Effective Strategy for Getting the Long-Term Unemployed Back to Work

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Operation A.B.L.E. (Ability Based on Long Experience) has found “midternships,” internships midway through one’s career, to be a very effective strategy to get the long-term unemployed back to work. We had so many jobseekers say to us, “If I could just get a chance to prove myself, I know I could show an employer how competent I am.” For the past 2 years, we have been giving candidates a chance to prove themselves by providing them with very strategic midternship assignments, and the results have been terrific! In FY 2014, almost half of the midterns found employment as a result of the midternship experience.

The process starts with a conversation with our Midternship Program Manager (PM). The candidate and the PM discuss talents, interests, and areas of expertise. Together they agree on the types of jobs/internships that would be of interest to the candidate and would also be a good fit. The PM reviews the candidate’s resume to make sure that it reflects the interests and talents stated. Then the PM goes to work. He or she is looking for that strategic fit—an excellent match between job requirements and the candidate’s job skills and talents—and

ideally, an opening in the company if the match works out to everyone’s satisfaction.

Midternships last 4 weeks. We deliberately limit the midternships to 4 weeks so that the employer can get a snapshot of how well the candidate works and fits into the company culture. But because these midternships are unpaid, the 4-week cap limits how long the midtern will work with no pay. However, the payoff is when the candidate gets the offer to join the company.

We have also found that if a placement does not happen from the midternship, it often happens shortly after the midternship has been completed. However, the candidates now have current work experience that they can talk about on an interview, and they often use the midternship supervisor as a

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current reference. These are two critical pieces that are often difficult for the long-term unemployed to provide.

Another important component that the midternship experience brings is a new sense of confidence. A long period of unemployment, with multiple job rejections, wears down any candidate's self-confidence. The midternship offers a new sense of possibility as candidates perform tasks they have been performing for years. A look of desperation is replaced with a confident stride. Now the candidate can interview effectively for jobs! Employers want to hire "winners," and until candidates feel like "winners," they will not interview effectively. This is key to getting that next job offer!

Financing these midternships is a challenge. Foundations that support workforce development initiatives might be a very good place to start. A good program requires at least a part-time Program Manager who can meet with candidates,

as well as employers, and knows how to make those important matches. Our A.B.L.E. Program Manager also conducts a professional networking group on Fridays with all the candidates to keep their job search skills fresh and to keep them motivated. Good time management, excellent relationship-building skills, strong attention to detail, and excellent job search know-how are critical skills for the Program Manager to possess. Other ways to financially support the program are to ask companies and individuals for donations. Federal, state, and city grants are another possibility.

Midternships are an excellent strategy for the long-term unemployed, and we would encourage any career center to have this strategy in their toolkit to get jobseekers back to work.

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