



Building Tomorrow's Leaders: How An Intentional Internship Program Creates A Stronger Workforce

By Jesse Head



For years, the construction industry has struggled to attract, develop, and retain talent. As seasoned professionals retire and the demand for a growing workforce continues to increase, organizations must rethink how to develop future leaders at their companies. This was one of the driving motivations for Batson-Cook to enhance its internship program to be more than “a summer job.” Internships should be viewed as a talent development pipeline designed to tackle the industry’s biggest struggles.

One of the easiest places to develop a workforce is at its start: with interns. The Batson-Cook Intern Program is purpose-driven with symbiotic goals for both the student and the company. Students, some of whom have never held a job prior to their internship, have the opportunity to gain meaningful exposure to the industry, while the company creates pathways in roles needed the most.

Our first goal at Batson-Cook is identifying high-potential individuals. One of the biggest misconceptions is that a student must have previous knowledge or experience in construction. In reality, these are technical skills that can be taught to anyone. Our human resources team prioritizes individuals who want to learn, take the initiative, and have a passion for the industry. By finding the right people who have a desire to contribute to something larger than themselves, we know the person can be successful on a job site despite the lack of experience.

We usually start the process at career fairs, taking former interns with the human resources team so they can share their experience. Once a candidate is identified, we bring them to the jobsite for a tour and informal introductions with the team to assess how well they align with the group and our company’s culture.

It’s also important to know that interns are not just going out on a construction site to perform menial work like swinging a hammer and building a fence all day long. While interns may occasionally assist with routine tasks, we are equally focused on teaching them the responsibilities of project managers and superintendents. From managing submittals, change orders, and RFIs to coordinating subcontractors and participating in key project meetings, interns gain firsthand exposure to practical work that every employee experiences.

That experience extends well beyond operations. While many interns spend time on project sites, Batson-Cook also creates opportunities across departments such as preconstruction, marketing, VDC, safety, accounting, and human resources. This companywide approach gives students a broader view of the business, helps them understand how each department supports our projects and clients, and allows us to build future talent in every area of the company.

“From day one I was given real responsibilities on site,” said Sawyer Stevens, former intern and current assistant project

manager. “For example, I was reaching out and coordinating with trade partners for submittals, tracking material procurement, and helping the team with drawing and document management.”

Interns are treated like a full-time employee because that’s where we want them to be at the end of their academic career. With these opportunities, interns gain more confidence, learn much faster, and develop a connection built on trust and respect with the organization.

It’s also important for the interns to learn how they are performing, which is why we’ve developed a feedback cycle called huddles. Each intern goes through three huddles during their internship. The first huddle happens within the first two weeks and will help establish the expectations for the internship. Two goals are developed during this time as well. The second huddle happens in the middle of the internship to ensure everything is on track or, if needed, make adjustments. The final huddle is simply an evaluation of the intern based on their time with the company. Huddles are conducted at every level of the organization, giving interns firsthand experience to the planning, communication, and accountability that drive our projects and business operations.



“The internship program helped me understand what it takes to be a problem solver,” said Rashad Davis, former intern and current assistant project manager. “Especially with understanding what my roles and responsibilities would be going into the project engineer role. I was able to work on building my skills to be a project engineer on a smaller scale before having the full responsibility of helping manage a project. The internship program bridged the gap between classroom education in college to real-world application and the importance of the tasks we do no matter how menial they may look from the outside looking in.”



The success of our internship program is measured by the number of interns who become employees. If we’re filling most of the entry-level positions with former interns, then we’re doing a good job. The primary goal is that every intern becomes a full-time employee. I estimate that 95 percent of our entry level roles are currently filled by former interns, making this a successful and worthwhile endeavor.

Said Cam Merritt, former intern and current assistant project manager, “Back in 2019 when I had my first internship, I was familiar with construction sites having grown up on them, however the complexity and urgency of commercial projects, specifically healthcare construction, caught me off guard. I think this is normal for interns who haven’t been around these types of projects. My responsibilities were a little more than I originally anticipated I would get, but I loved it and it kept me busy. The project team ensured I was integrated with sub meetings, subcontractors, owner meetings, and more, which gave me a broad confidence for the field. After my two internships, while still being green by all accounts, I felt confident to step into my full-time role.”

One of my favorite things at Batson-Cook is seeing former interns evolve into project managers, superintendents, mentors, and leaders. Some are on committees now, driving enterprise-level change and tackling some of our biggest challenges. Internships should be viewed as a long-term investment and partnership. Their success is closely tied to our company’s success. The future workforce is here, and Batson-Cook is investing in it.

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