

## **Sales Internships Are All About Fit\*\***

**By**

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Experience at many universities that teach sales suggest that one of the best models to deliver effective sales readiness training combines classroom teaching with “real world” experience and training. Perhaps the most significant outside the classroom component to receive “real experience” while still in college that will lead to “real success” after graduation is the opportunity to complete a practical job trial or internship. To complete such an internship often involves 300 hours of hands on learning in a real professional selling environment. Some programs require the experience in order for students to receive their sales certificate. These opportunities are usually provided by corporate sponsors who are also looking to hire candidates after graduation.

Selling at the professional level is not a singular “one size fits all” approach. There is a substantial difference in the skill and lifestyle requirements between a salesperson charged with landing new accounts, versus supporting, penetrating, and maintaining existing accounts, and different again from a technically proficient specialist who can support a complex product offering.

A sales internship is all about career fit. For the student, it starts with the question: “Is this type of sales job a good fit for me?” and, ends with an equally important questions: “Is this company a good fit for me?” Such in depth exposure leads to a very low dropout rate that typically averages only 3% to 5%. And the vast majority of those dropouts occur after their sales internship. Mistakes and poor choices are far better handled in the internship rather than have the student discover that this type of selling or working in this type of company is just not for them after they have accepted a full-time sales job.

From their comments after completing internships, it’s obvious that our students “get it” when it comes to fit. Some typical comments are:

“You have to research and find a company that you think would be a fit for you.”

“Don’t worry if your internship isn’t right for you. That is why you are doing the internship, because you need the experience and the knowledge to decide what type of sales (job) is right for you.”

“It is...most important to sell if your strengths will fit the culture and the organization.”

For the company providing the sales internships, it’s about fit, too. According to Calvin Borisuk, Director of Sales at Marriott Vacation Club International, “The employer get the chance to see the student perform in a real work environment which allows the company to better understand the student’s talent and fit to their organization.”

Steve Lewis, Regional Sales Manager at Paychex, adds that having had a hands-on sales internship “makes a significant difference to a new hire’s application and knowledge of the sales process and what it means to be a professional salesperson”...more “fit” in other words.

Bottom line: hands-on sales internships contribute significantly to graduates hitting the ground running, ramping up faster and not dropping out in the real sales world. And that’s a good thing, a win-win for both graduates and their hiring companies. These programs and their impressive success rates are one of the greatest proofs that college sales programs that also train students in the real-world sales skills help build careers that can satisfy for a lifetime.

\*\*Excerpted from “Top University Sales Education Programs: 2008, pp 6-7, a special supplement to Selling Power Magazine, April, 2008