

Building loyalty through an intern program that caused intern acceptance rates to soar

One of the greatest challenges for large professional services organizations is the frenetic competition to attract the best and brightest people upon their graduation from college. One commonly used recruiting approach is to bring promising students through a winter or summer internship.

During an internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers, students experience an introductory training program and approximately 10 weeks on client assignments. It is excellent training for full-time work upon graduation. In order to secure intern resources to fulfill their recruitment goals, the firm maintains a very robust intern program which allows students to witness a true client environment. This aside, all of PwC's competitors are in the same situation and maintain equally rigorous internship programs to fulfill their respective goals.

The company examined the need to distinguish its internship program from that of competitors. PricewaterhouseCoopers saw that if it could get the students as interns, the vast majority would return for employment upon graduation. (In fact, historically, 95 percent of the company's interns return for full-time employment.) Getting students to choose PwC for their internship became a critically important objective. After a great amount of studying and benchmarking, it was felt that one differentiator for an internship program could be the inclusion of a higher level of training for the students that provided substance, but was also engaging and fun ... *in short, the company needed to create a meaningful experience for the interns, one that would build memories to last a lifetime.*

Matt Schuyler, today a Managing Director of Human Resources for PwC, led the team that researched training options. The group he worked with decided on *Disney Institute* as its training partner. From there, the group demonstrated a business case for the new program

with the senior partners of the firm that oversaw the recruitment process. This creative internship training initiative signaled to employees that the organization placed a strong priority on the importance of education and training.

Results

In just three years, 'The Magic of Our People,' PricewaterhouseCooper's Internship Development Program (now called 'Discover the Magic'), has resulted in a dramatic jump in intern acceptance rate, moving from approximately 40 percent acceptance of intern offers before the program to a consistent 70 percent following the program. By the end of 2000, the company will have brought 3,300 interns through the *Disney Institute* programming, which focuses on many of the skills and behaviors that will be required for success in the 21st century. As the orientation video developed for the program states, "The lessons you learn here at *Disney Institute* should follow you throughout your career."

Says Schuyler, "One of the greatest benefits *Disney Institute* programming offers is the ability to go behind the scenes and benchmark best practices in leadership, customer loyalty, people management, and other aspects of excellence at the *Walt Disney World*® Resort. At the same time, our interns are together while they are on the site visits and in the classroom, so the experience affords ample opportunity to bond as a group. They are able to observe PricewaterhouseCoopers as a global entity by meeting students brought in from all over the world. All of this helps to ensure their internship ends on a high note — exactly what draws them back to us upon graduation."

Not only has the internship program boosted intern acceptances by 30 percent; in 1999, PwC was rated number one in a study of more than 3100 business students in 46 universities, conducted by Universum

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International, an independent research firm. Business students chose PricewaterhouseCoopers as their first-choice employer over 180 other companies listed in the survey.

Says Amy Thompson, the 'Discover the Magic' project leader for PwC, "Many of our recruiters indicate that this has been the most educational and rewarding project on which they have ever worked. We have learned we can leverage a lot of skills and enthusiasm internally with our people as we keep the program moving. We've also benefited greatly from learning the perceptions of interns about our company, something we would not otherwise have known. We see our investment in the intern program — the entry level point of our professional workforce

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Continues Schuyler, "We are extremely pleased with the rich partnership we have forged with *Disney Institute* and the Disney organization as a whole. We have learned much from each other; we have changed portions of our training based on *Disney Institute's* experiences, and vice versa. We have gained tremendous insights about curriculum design, internal marketing, and other issues involved in creating and sustaining a program of such broad magnitude. We always look forward to the next generation of programming as a means to be better at what we do and add value to our clients through our workforce."