Welcome to
First Footings
for
Supervisors of Students
Research shows that communicating expectations and instructions to new workers can be a tricky business. Making assumptions about a new student employee’s work ethic and experience leads to misunderstanding and disappointment.
New student employees want and expect specific information about their jobs to be communicated *up front* by their managers and supervisors. They want expectations clearly defined and the details of their job clearly explained. Most of all they want supervisors to be honest about every aspect of their employment.
As a supervisor you also have expectations. You need reliable, knowledgeable employees. When new employees come through your door, you expect them to possess a fundamental idea of what having a real job entails. You can lay a foundation for helping a young employee develop a work ethic by keeping a few basics in mind.

This is a plan to help you start out on the right foot…
GET THE BASICS WORKED OUT EARLY

Let the student employee know who his/her supervisor(s) is. This seems obvious, but you might be surprised how often it is overlooked. The new student employee wants a *go-to* person. Make sure someone is always available to answer questions about the student’s job.

Also, agree upon vacation periods and other time off in advance. How early do you need requests for time off? Do you expect your student employees to work during semester breaks? The list of this type of question may be long, but be diligent. Learn these answers from the start.
EXPLAIN THE JOB

This takes time, but the survey results are clear: If you do not give student employees a thorough introduction to the details of their jobs, the student employee is much more likely to do unsatisfactory work, feel inadequate, isolated, and defensive. Get off to a good start: Explain the job description from start to finish.
TIP:
When training, do not let the student’s bored, know-it-all expression fool you. Explaining the job thoroughly is a necessity.
DISPEL THE NOTION OF PEON WORK

Explain to your student employee there is no such thing as menial work. All work is vital work. Ask them if they would want to eat off of a dirty plate at lunch, walk across a wet yard of uncut grass just before an interview, or have personal information about them circulating because someone left private documents laying around for everyone to see.
Show your student employee the importance of their place in the organization. When students see the role they play in the big picture of your organization, they will understand their job is real and vital!
Show your student employee that their place in the organization is important. When students see the real role they play in the big picture of your organization, they will understand their job is real and vital!

**TIP:**
Have your employee say out loud, “I am an important part of this office!” It is a good start.
EXPLAIN THE NEGATIVES

Just because there is no such thing as peon work does not mean there are not negative aspects to a job. Some jobs are strenuous, dirty, or monotonous. Let the student employees know up front this is the case. If you do not, they may feel misled or condescendingly treated.
Students have a hypocrisy radar the size of the moon. They know when a bad job is being sloughed onto them and they resent it. However, they will accept that you are asking them to do things you do not necessarily want to do yourself, as long as they know ahead of time that you have that expectation and that you value their help.
SAY, “REMEMBER IT!”

Tell the new student employee that it is their responsibility to retain the training you are giving them. Say specifically while training, “I expect you to retain the training I am giving you. It is part of your job to remember it. Ask questions, take notes, or use whatever method it is that you can best learn by.”
It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to say “remember it” to your student employee. If you do not say it, you may be in for a learning experience yourself. Student employees are wonderful people and most often are great workers, but sometimes their work ethic is less than what we would expect. That is why you need to be specific.
FOLLOW UP

In many ways this is the most important element to a successful start. Follow up with your student employee. Don’t accept a ‘yes’ answer as the end-all. Observe and evaluate.

Everyone wants to do a good job. Sometimes student employees may say they know how to do a job even if they do not. This may be because either they have a lot of confidence or because they lack confidence and do not really know how or when to ask for help.
Do they have questions? Do they have ideas? Do they need further training? Is the student employee’s work done to your satisfaction? Only you can answer these questions. You will need to follow up for your own peace of mind. The student employee will appreciate it.
Awkward moments are generally viewed negatively. However, think of them as necessities because like death and taxes, awkward moments happen.
Here is a list of possibilities leading to The Awkward Moment.

The student employee:

• Doesn’t do tasks in the correct order
• Frequently calls in ill
• Doesn’t do assigned tasks
• Doesn’t make good eye contact
• Frequently shows up late
• Mumbles
• Appears inappropriately dressed
• Has frequent visitors and phone calls
It is awkward to tell someone generally doing a good job that they must learn their job more thoroughly, dress more appropriately, or that tardiness and/or absence will not be tolerated. It is hard to say these things, especially to good people who may have personal issues; but there is no choice if you want to have a successful employer-student employee relationship.
Many things like the culture, the times, or the tilt of the earth can be blamed for lack of work ethic we see these days. Avoidance is the real reason that the supervisor-student employee relationship does not work out. Look at the awkward moment as an opportunity.

Generally, one of two things will occur: 1) The problem is resolved or 2) the student employee and supervisor may decide to part company. This last option is undesirable of course, but is also unlikely if you clarify your expectations early.
IN A NUTSHELL:

• Work out the basics
• Explain the job thoroughly
• Dispel the idea of menial peon work
• Explain the negatives
• Say, “Remember it”
• Follow up
• Do not avoid The Awkward Moment