

An Internship Vision

Mill Steel Company

By Tom Stanfield, People Development Director

Early in 2004, our President, Andrew Samrick, and I were having a planning session related to employee training. We came to a realization that altered our recruiting and training strategy. The realization was

You cannot train employees any further than their abilities will let them go.

The root problem we were facing wasn't improving our training methods. It was actually our interviewing process. We were working under the old philosophy that assumed the only people available for employment would somehow find us, or at best, answer an ad in the newspaper. After a candidate gave us an application, the interviewing process was a lot like getting married on a blind date, or maybe after one or two dates. The candidate and Mill Steel would agree to join into a hopefully career-long relationship, not unlike a marriage. Once we recognized this, the insanity of it was overwhelming. Is it any wonder we had double-digit turnover?

The other problem we faced was "untraining" new employees hired from our competitors or similar industries. Mill Steel fosters an open and truly empowered environment. People who came from companies with a different environment found it difficult to believe they were free to "do their job."

With these two challenges on the table, we searched for a "pipeline of talent" that had the capabilities to learn our business our way. In May 2004 we were introduced to Troy Farley, GVSU Career Services. Over the next year we worked with Troy and the Career Services staff to establish the "pipeline" we needed. My passion comes from working with Troy and finding a way to "build" Mill Steel's

"tomorrow" with the best talent GVSU has to offer. Through career fairs, on-line postings, etc., we now have a steady supply of interested students.

The interviewing process was established in that time frame. We created on-line testing that eliminates candidates that don't fit our criteria. After that stage is completed we have two interviews. A "people fit" interview and a "skills fit" interview. Once we have filtered the candidate field, we use the best interviewing process of all — internships.

We created intern positions in all of our areas. Every employee has tasks that are easy to learn. They are important, necessary tasks, but you can master them in a few weeks. We had every department pool these jobs and create an intern position. This gives the intern exposure to multiple parts of our business. It also allows for multiple "interviewers." After four to six weeks, we know if this intern would become a good addition to our team. If we believe the intern would be a good fit, we start adding more difficult work to the plate. If the person handle it, he or she is obvious choice to fill our next opening.

This process helps our employees eliminate work from their "plate" and take on greater challenges. It has been a great win-win situation. Our intern-hired-as-an-employee rate has been well over 50%. The retention rate is awesome. We have reduced our turnover rate from double digits in 2003 to 1.8% in 2005. Hiring the right people after "dating for a long time" is much better than getting "married on a blind date." ■

*Pictured at upper right interns:
Pamela Grubbs, Ryan Deur, Stacy Nagelkirk
Melissa Skrobot, Savana Witcher.*





Year	Number of Seidman interns at Mill Steel	Number of hires at Mill Steel
2004	5	2
2005	8	5 (to date)
2006	5	TBD after graduation

Since an active partnership was formed in June of 2004 between the Seidman College of Business and Mill Steel, both organizations have benefited from the experience.

Tom Stanfield points out that they now have a running list of potential interns who have been tested and have completed an initial interview. When a manager needs help, they can usually put a student to work within a week of the determined need. Their fall-out rate is near zero.