



## **Developing Meaningful Learning Objectives**

Presented By:  
Dr. Robert Shindell

Learning objectives are brief, clear, succinct statements of what an individual will learn as a result of performing specific tasks or activities. Regarding internships, these goals typically fall into four different categories:

- 1) Particular skill development
- 2) General academic enrichment
- 3) Career exploration and examination
- 4) Personal improvement and enhancement

In a perfect internship, each learning objective the student has in mind will directly correlate to a specific assignment delegated by you: the supervisor. Therefore, the student will meet each learning objective by fulfilling a certain job task. However, perfection may not always be achieved. So instead, let's talk about reality!

At many colleges and universities where the internship experience may be part of the curriculum, internship agreements involve a three-party contractual agreement amongst the school, the student, and the host employer. In many of these situations, students work concurrently with their faculty advisors and your company. The best-case scenarios dictate that the intern will have already created a set of learning objectives with his or her faculty advisor.

In this situation, it's up to you to discuss these learning objectives with the student soon after the internship begins, so that you and the student can jointly determine how to meet these objectives. Hopefully, the job description you created during the internship-planning process will allow the intern to meet his or her goals. If not, you'll want to revise or tweak some or all of the tasks, in order to meet the student's learning aspirations. If the student enters into the internship without a predetermined set of learning objectives, it's up to you—the supervisor—to sit down and brainstorm with the intern about the best way to create this kind of learning plan. Using the previously constructed job description should guide you in this endeavor.

Whether you create learning objectives between the student and their faculty advisor, the student and the internship supervisor, or amongst all three parties, they will serve to identify, describe, and structure the knowledge gained through the internship. When you create or review this kind of plan, you need to ask a few questions. To begin, it's important to think about which learning goals are possible, in order to work within the timeframe of your internship. Next, determine the tools and resources the intern will have at his or her disposal to accomplish such objectives. Finally, decide which methods of evaluation exist, and determine whether the expectations have been met.

As a supervisor, you may have heard about the S.M.A.R.T. goal system. To briefly review, when setting goals for yourself or for others, you must remember to make these goals:

- 1) **Specific** - *Who, what, where, when, and why*
- 2) **Measurable** - *There must be a concrete way to evaluate success.*
- 3) **Attainable** - *You must be able to obtain both small and large goals.*
- 4) **Realistic** - *There must be appropriate resources in place to support success.*
- 5) **Time Bound** - *There need to be firm starting and ending dates.*

These same guidelines apply to creating learning objectives for interns. They are extremely important; especially given the desire many students have for structure.

Remember, students will have unique reasons for wanting to participate in internships. The strengths they bring to the table and the areas they want to improve will also differ. Therefore, no two learning plans will be the same (although two students may share one or more individual objectives). While we'll discuss feedback and evaluation methods in the next chapter, please note that as the student progresses through the internship, you'll be periodically reviewing his or her work. At some point, you and the student may very well find that a learning objective has not been met by a particular project.

Therefore, another task needs to be assigned, *which is okay*. Alternatively, you may find that the student mastered an objective much more quickly than anticipated, so other objectives may need to be added. *This result is also fine*. Finally, as the internship progresses, you and the student may realize that learning objectives need to be changed as student interests and/or business priorities shift. *No problem*. The learning plan should be a working, living document that has the ability to be adjusted at will (assuming all parties are in agreement).

Internships are designed to enhance and complement a student's formal education in the classroom. Learning objectives that are carefully constructed will ensure that students obtain the best internship experience possible, and that employers reap the value of the student's expertise and the work they perform. By providing a well-thought-out structure to the internship, learning objectives will increase the productivity of the student in the workplace, while also enabling him or her to successfully achieve his or her aspirations.

The following list offers sample learning objectives and accompanying learning tasks. Again, please understand that these examples are very simple, and they are largely generic. They are not intended to be a "catch-all" for the majority of your interns. You will also see that learning objectives and tasks may sometimes fall within more than one particular area. *That's also fine*. Again, learning plans aren't set in stone, and must remain fluid in nature as your intern progresses through the experience.

#### **Area I: Particular Skill Development**

**Learning Objective 1:** ANALYZE quantitative data, statistical data, or human social situations.

**Learning Task 1:** The employee will review and analyze current market data to determine product success.

**Learning Objective 2:** CONVERT paper documents to electronic documents related to marketing (e.g., correspondences, reports, memos, programs, sales presentations, and promotional brochures).

**Learning Task 2:** By the end of the internship, the employee will convert all of the organization's paper records into electronic form in Microsoft Word/Access.

**Learning Objective 3:** USE time management to organize and prioritize goals and deadlines.

**Learning Task 3:** The employee will effectively manage tasks, communications, and required meetings to ensure goals and deadlines are achieved.

## **Area II: General Academic Enrichment**

**Learning Objective 1:** REVIEW and REPORT on trends in Patient Care about sharing and explaining medical diagnoses with patients and their families.

**Learning Task 1:** The employee will conduct a literature review on patient care, including trends for sharing medical diagnoses with patients and their families within the first three weeks of the internship. Then they will write a report explaining potential new strategies for increasing patient and family understanding.

**Learning Objective 2:** FIND and research information from various sources, as well as people that can be helpful with navigating the Salesforce portal.

**Learning Task 2:** The employee will review all training modules for Salesforce, go through one-on-one training, and develop shortcuts and resources for learning how to use the Salesforce portal within the next two weeks.

**Learning Objective 3:** CONDUCT outreach with current and prospective customers by using various methods of communication (e.g., cold calling and direct marketing).

**Learning Task 3:** The employee will research potential clients; conduct a one-week marketing marathon (including telephone, email, and other direct marketing); and produce a chart that summarizes the results.

## **Area III: Career Exploration and Examination**

**Learning Objective 1:** READ and/or review the history and services provided in the New Deal. This objective will help you better understand the field of public service and its impact on American society.

**Learning Task 1:** The employee will review the New Deal policy, and research each formed agency that was created to determine the impact of those services and address the impact the role of a public servant has on American society.

**Learning Objective 2:** Examine and reflect your experience as an intern in this organization, as well as the feedback you received.

**Learning Task 2:** The employee will constructively examine written and oral feedback, and reflect on how he or she could have increased his or her understanding of the task to meet the expected goal.

**Learning Objective 3:** PLAN the logistics for the upcoming professional development retreat—from start to finish.

**Learning Task 3:** The employee will work with the Director of Special Events on the professional development retreat, and gather information about past retreats and other responsibilities (e.g., compiling the invitation list, securing the space, and arranging for food, beverage, decorations, and speakers for events involving professional development and technology needs).

*(Note: This learning task should be subsequently broken down into sub-learning tasks for each activity mentioned.)*

#### **Area IV: Personal Improvement and Betterment**

**Learning Objective 1:** LEARN more about this role and the roles that shape the unit team.

**Learning Task 1:** The employee will conduct informational interviews with team members (about their specific roles within the company) with three of my team members, and write a report that paraphrases their remarks by the end of the internship.

*(Note: This learning task can also cover Area 3, if the intern also wants to find out more about the particular company in which he or she is working.)*

**Learning Objective 2:** Improve social etiquette skills during mealtimes.

**Learning Task 2:** The employee will complete an etiquette workshop before the completion of the internship to better understand formal dining.

*(Note: This learning objective can also be considered part of Area 1.)*

**Learning Objective 3:** REVIEW the company manual, and follow all company policies as they relate to dress code.

**Learning Task 3:** The intern will walk around to different departments, take notes on the different styles, and determine if company policy is being followed. If not, they shall report to the supervisor before lunch about any dress code concerns.

#### **Knowledge Level: The learner will recognize or recall learned information.**

|        |        |           |
|--------|--------|-----------|
| list   | record | underline |
| state  | define | arrange   |
| name   | relate | describe  |
| tell   | recall | memorize  |
| recall | repeat | recognize |
| label  | select | reproduce |

#### **Comprehension Level: The learner will restate or interpret information in their own words.**

|           |           |            |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| explain   | describe  | report     |
| translate | express   | summarize  |
| identify  | classify  | discuss    |
| restate   | locate    | compare    |
| discuss   | review    | illustrate |
| tell      | critique  | estimate   |
| reference | interpret | reiterate  |

#### **Application Level: The learner will use or apply the learned information.**

|             |           |           |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| apply       | sketch    | perform   |
| use         | solve     | respond   |
| practice    | construct | role-play |
| demonstrate | conduct   | execute   |
| complete    | dramatize | employ    |

**Analysis Level: The learner will examine the learned information critically.**

|               |            |             |
|---------------|------------|-------------|
| analyze       | inspect    | test        |
| distinguish   | categorize | critique    |
| differentiate | catalogue  | diagnose    |
| appraise      | quantify   | extrapolate |
| calculate     | measure    | theorize    |
| experiment    | relate     | debate      |

**Synthesis Level: The learner will create new models using the learned information.**

|          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| develop  | revise    | compose   |
| plan     | formulate | collect   |
| build    | propose   | construct |
| create   | establish | prepare   |
| design   | integrate | devise    |
| organize | modify    | manage    |

**Evaluation Level: The learner will assess or judge the value of learned information.**

|             |          |           |
|-------------|----------|-----------|
| review      | appraise | choose    |
| justify     | argue    | conclude  |
| assess      | rate     | compare   |
| defend      | score    | evaluate  |
| report on   | select   | interpret |
| investigate | measure  | support   |

To assist you in building meaningful and measurable learning objectives, please visit – <https://teachonline.asu.edu/objectives-builder/>



## **A BRIEF DISCUSSION ABOUT THE CURRENT GENERATION OF STUDENTS**

This chapter wouldn't be complete without a few additional words about the current generation of students making the transition to the working world. Over the last fifteen years, there has been an increase in the number of research projects conducted, case studies carried out, and articles written about this "generation". In addition, the number of books published on this topic has exponentially increased. My intent is not to provide you with a thorough analysis of the differences between generations of workplace employees, but to give you an overview of the most important things you need to know about these students, as it pertains to internships and your role as their supervisor.

First and foremost, please understand that I don't believe you can categorize an entire generation of students into one specific stereotype. I am also not fond of the current labels that get placed on today's college students, such as "Gen Z" or Post-Millennials." All of today's students will not fit any of the current descriptions of the terms we choose to label them. In fact, doing so can be offensive to today's students. Perpetuating stereotypes that have been created about them fosters an ongoing and pervasive culture of inherent bias that can have negative repercussions to your internship program.

However, I think it's still acceptable to base your job descriptions and learning objectives on the following information. Whether or not students typify more or less of the following attributes, using the data below will allow you to create valuable experiences for *any* students that cross your path.

### **A SUMMARY**

**The good...** This generation of students making the transition to the world of work brings a set of new values with them, as well as a new definition of work ethics. Students of this generation are big fans of collaboration, structure, risk-taking, and technology. They are sociable, talented, open-minded, and achievement-oriented. These students have very high expectations for themselves and others. They're quite skilled at time management, multitasking, and problem-solving. Today's students are incredibly diverse and value-inclusive, and they deeply believe in causes of social goodness and promote multiculturalism. They enjoy challenges, welcome leadership opportunities, like flexibility, and value respect. In general, their outlook is positive and hopeful.

**The not-so-good (but not really bad) ...** Students have VERY high expectations. While they are a generally optimistic bunch, they are also impatient when things don't move fast enough, or don't entirely meet their expectations. They're used to moving at the speed of light, since they've been overscheduled for much of their lives. But occasionally, they work so quickly that they miss important details or skim over areas, when they should have paid a bit more attention. They're not afraid of taking risks, and they don't fear making mistakes, since they view these occasions as learning opportunities. However, this situation sometimes leads to carelessness and a lack of due diligence on their part.

Since they're so technologically advanced, they may not have a lot of tolerance for people who are "out of the loop" or "behind the times." The concept of "paying your dues" may be foreign to these students, especially if they believe that they're quite capable of jumping into a more complex role from the get-go (which many of them do). Tenure doesn't mean as much to them as credibility; in other words, the fact that an employee has been with a company for ten years doesn't mean as much as the

fact that a relative newbie has a better education and many more creative ideas. Their belief in the concept of “fairness” (while admirable) may sometimes not sit well with the managers of more conservative, hierarchically structured companies.

WHAT DOES THIS VALUE SYSTEM MEAN TO YOU?

Ideally, you should try to create learning experiences that satisfy the needs and adhere to the values of today’s young professional, which will make the transition to the working world easier. To help with that effort, I have created the following chart. Remember, these are simple guidelines for you to consider. You’ll need to tailor your specific opportunities according to your own desires and requirements.

| <b>WHAT TODAY’S STUDENTS VALUE</b> | <b>WHAT YOU MIGHT PROVIDE</b>  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Collaboration</b>               | Team-based assignments and projects  |
| <b>Structure</b>                   | Well-thought-out tasks with definitive start dates and end dates, a formal internship orientation and conclusion process, and scheduled meetings for evaluation and mentor discussions |
| <b>Risk-taking</b>                 | The opportunity for creative problem-solving and the chance to use an out-of-the-box approach to completing a task   |
| <b>Technology</b>                  | Opportunities that utilize the newest forms of technology, the chance to learn a new software program, and the opportunity to utilize their skills                                     |
| <b>Social Networking</b>           | Invitations to client meetings and customer appointments, lunches out with members of your team, and exposure to the higher-ups in your organization                                   |
| <b>Challenging Goals</b>           | Assignments and projects that require the acquisition of new knowledge, in-depth research about a specific concept, and a theoretical principle to apply                               |
| <b>Diversity</b>                   | The opportunity to work with many different members of your company—in many different departments  |
| <b>Flexibility</b>                 | A flexible work schedule, the opportunity to work from home (or on nights or weekends), and the ability to choose the projects they work on  |
| <b>Social Responsibility</b>       | Opportunities to make a difference in the world, ways to do service for others, and the desire to make the world a better place.   |
| <b>Leadership</b>                  | The opportunity to make presentations to other employees and the chance to run meetings, organize events, and head committees  |