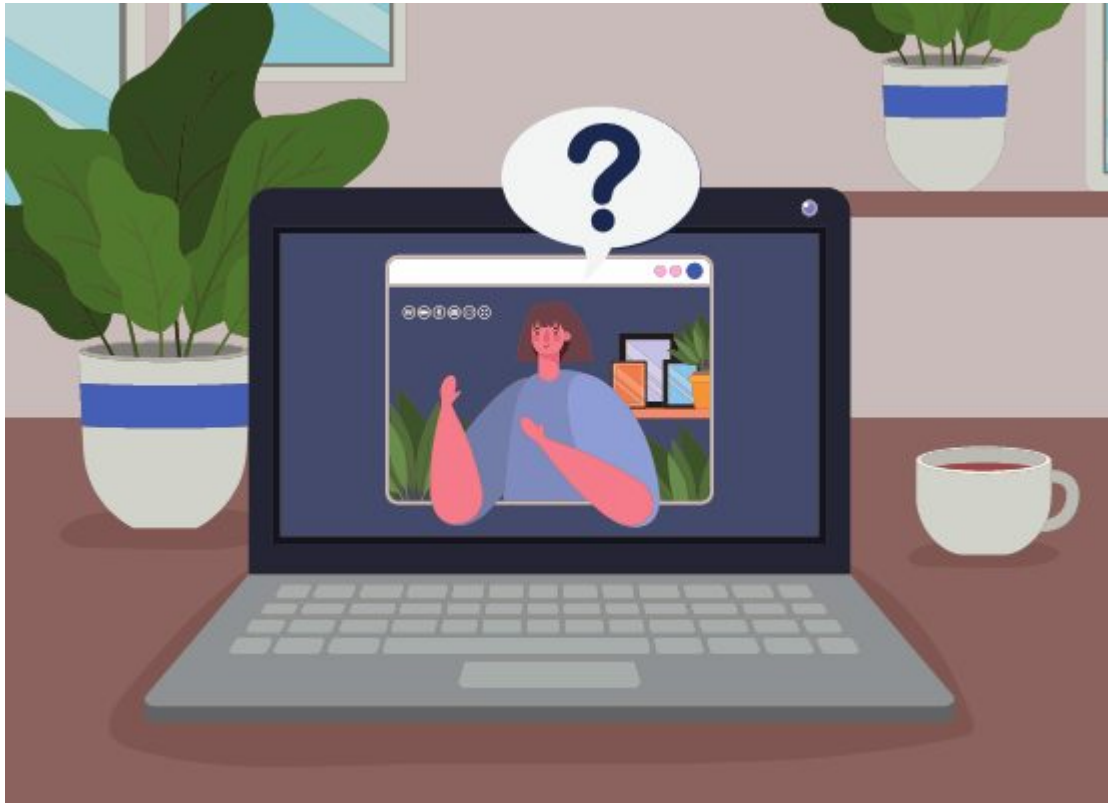


# Managing young workers in the new working world



Entry-level hires and interns generally approach the first “real” step on their career path with a mixture of excitement and nerves. They want to make a good impression and be on their way to rising up the ranks, but lack of experience can rattle confidence. Solid onboarding and training strengthens comfort level and assists in forming a connection with the employer.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis has forced many companies to abandon usual procedures and make the best of remote operations. Despite the chaos, however, management still needs to keep young workers engaged and able to contribute, both for the sake of retention and for the good of the organization.

Don’t leave newly employed young workers feeling all dressed up with no place to go. Get them up-to-speed on however your “normal” looks at the moment with strategies such as the following:

## **Provide what they need to do their job**

Perhaps nothing kills the spirit of new hires as fast as not having the tools to get to work. Show that you’re excited to make entry-level workers a vital part of the team by ensuring they possess what is needed to start contributing – hardware, software, login information, passwords, and the like. Also, put new employees on the appropriate lists to receive staff emails, Zoom invites, and other company communications.

While most members of Generation Z tend to be comfortable with technology, do not assume they inherently will know how everything operates. Just because someone mastered Instagram doesn't mean she won't need a tutorial to understand your project management system. Provide the appropriate training resources, including the contact information of who to turn to for assistance.

## Offer clarity

The turmoil of the pandemic has even seasoned workers confused at times about what they should be doing. Imagine, then, being a new worker or intern who doesn't have any past experience with the company on which to draw. Managers must provide easy-to-follow instructions that guide new hires to success.

"Provide structured assignments during the employee's first few weeks," says Ursula Craig, implementation program manager at [DevelopIntelligence](#). "Each assignment should spell out the result you are looking for and the steps you want them to take on the road to delivering that result. As you become more familiar with their skill set, you can reduce the amount of guidance you are providing. Eventually, you want them to be able to make decisions and tackle work independently, but it may take some time to get to that point."

## Prioritize communication

Oftentimes, young workers or interns do not want to ask questions for fear of looking "stupid." Obtaining correct information and catching small errors before they turn into costly ones, however, paves the road to both better individual performance and company success. Keep the lines of communication open constantly, and let them know you want to hear their voice.

"Pay attention to them," stresses Bradley Keys, marketing director at [PatchMD](#). "Young employees will often require more attention and patience from you to help them navigate through their tasks and responsibilities. Giving them constant feedback about how they're doing as well as hearing them out is a great way of establishing healthy communication as well as showing that you value what they have to say."

## Analyze background

While you bring aboard entry-level employees and interns for their potential, individuals come to the workplace with different strengths and weaknesses. Learning where someone could use improvement enables tailoring training while working remotely.

Craig suggests incorporating skills tests early in the onboarding process, noting that "you could have five new hires who studied JAVA in college, but they could have very different levels of mastery." Even if knowledge gaps surprise you, though, do not laugh or make comments such as "I can't believe you don't know how to do that" or "What did they teach in school, anyway?" What you view as gentle ribbing likely won't be interpreted the same by sensitive and anxious new hires.



## **Don't assume familiarity with workplace etiquette**

Similarly, young workers may not be particularly well-versed on how to act in a business environment. Everything from looking professional at a Zoom meeting to how to construct a proper e-mail message could be unfamiliar territory. Thus, be certain their onboarding experience presents information on a variety of such topics. In our current climate, reminders of zero tolerance for bullying or harassment and guidelines on respectful online interaction with colleagues could prove particularly relevant.

"In normal circumstances, we would expect a young, new employee to enter the workplace and learn how to act and succeed from what they see at work. However, working remotely throws up some real challenges for young people and their managers," says Jenna Carson, HR manager at [Music Grotto](#). "We need to remember that the things that seem so obvious to us after working for many years -- such as etiquette around workplace communication, or how to present yourself, or even how to work successfully as a team -- may not be so evident to those who are brand new to the workforce."

## **Provide mentoring**

Despite the physical distance, pairing an entry-level worker or intern with a specific colleague still can prove worthwhile. A "buddy" provides someone other than the manager to turn to with questions, which may feel less intimidating than always "bothering" the boss. This person also offers insight into workplace culture, which can help a newcomer navigate uncharted waters more smoothly.

Similarly, "tagging along" with a co-worker facilitates learning by observation. By virtually shadowing, a newcomer gets a better understanding of company operations and how people perform tasks before taking on such responsibilities alone.

## **Create opportunities to socialize**

Companies may no longer be able to gather the troops to take a new hire to a favorite restaurant, but they still can make an effort to help the person feel welcome. Introduce the newbie at a video conference so that staff

can associate a face with the name. Encourage team members to write introductory e-mails, chat over Slack, or lunch together via Zoom.

Make a particular effort to introduce young workers to others of similar age. A peer support system can feel comforting when others around seem more experienced and mature.

## **Stimulate and engage**

Lastly, watch that you do not do the virtual equivalent of always sending the intern or entry-level hire to fetch coffee. Young workers want more than scut work, endless training, and hours upon hours of watching others. Find opportunities for them to make a difference and feel important.

“Young employees are full of ambition, so try to make the most out of it and direct that burning passion towards a goal,” Keys says. “Show them clear and specific career paths in their position to drive them and positively impact their motivation levels. Recognize achievements and let them know that their accomplishments are propelling them forward.”