

# Bob Kustka

Factoring Human Capital Into Your Business Plan

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**By Jennifer LeClaire**

## Internship programs ease pain in tight labor market

After Mike Masseur graduated from college, he landed an internship at Aigner Associates. After he finished the internship, he landed a job. Now, he's both an account executive and head of the Allston-based public relations firm's all-important intern recruiting program.

"Interns are vital to the firm's success in a tight labor market," said Masseur, noting that Aigner brings on several unpaid interns each semester. "Our interns do more than make copies and fetch coffee. They work on client projects. Almost all our employees were first interns."

Like Aigner Associates, many Boston companies are aggressively pursuing interns. With a skills shortage in many fields, corporate motives run deeper than winning the intern's career allegiance tomorrow. Indeed, companies need them to fill employment gaps today.

"Companies that implement strategies for employee retention and recruiting through internship programs before the real talent war begins will be the ones who emerge victorious," said Bob Kustka, principal of The Fusion Factor, a human resources and management consultancy in Norwell. The real war will begin, Kustka argued, when the baby boomer generation retires.

While Aigner Associates relies on interns to boost productivity, Boston-based Third Sector New England views interns as the next generation of leaders at nonprofit organizations. A long-running internship program gives this nonprofit training and management consultancy an opportunity to expose students to the NPO world, explained Jennetta Hyatt, recruitment manager at Third Sector New England.

"We treat our interns like employees. We encourage them to attend staff and client meetings," said Hyatt, who typically keeps three to five unpaid interns on hand. "Our interns are part of our organization."

Finding talented interns -- in any sector -- is as competitive as finding talented employees, Kustka said, especially in accounting and technology. By 2011, education and engineering will also see major shortages, Kustka noted, and the health care industry is already suffering. Interns can help relieve the stress -- if you can find them.

Third Sector works with training and career programs at area colleges and universities to find interns. The non-profit needs a diverse intern base, from administrative help to graphic design to technology and more. Despite the fact that the nonprofit makes no post-internship job promise, Hyatt says she hasn't "had a hard time recruiting interns."

As a public relations firm, Aigner Associates has a different story to tell. It's more competitive to recruit the best and brightest PR pros, Masseur said, and the same holds true for interns who truly extend the firm's ability to service clients. "PR firms are fighting not only to get immediate help, but also to raise future employees," he explained.

Aigner Associates reaches out to local universities' career services departments, and Masseur reports that building relationships with liberal arts professors is a fruitful endeavor. "The professors have daily contact with the students and know their skill sets and attitudes," he said. Off-campus, the firm posts ads for interns on sites like Craig's List. Masseur called this approach "hot."

Companies have the best shot at the best interns, Kustka said, if they have a strong program in place that gives interns meaningful work. Broader internship descriptions will yield more candidates, and paid internships will likely yield more candidates than unpaid ones.

"A common misconception is that organizations and individuals don't have the time to run an internship program," said Matthew Zinman, president of Z University.org, an internship program builder in Newtown, Pa. "What employers and managers need to realize is that they don't have the time not to have interns."