

Managing Co-op Students Successfully

Panelists:

1. Tom Ferguson – LyondellBassell (LB)
2. Chris Couchell – Parker Hannifin (PH)
3. Adrienne Lynn – Campbell Soup (CS)
4. Roxanne Tumminelli – Electrolux (E)
5. Cyndi Madden – Black & Veatch (BV)

Q1: How do you prepare for the arrival of a new co-op?

LB: Mentors are all former co-ops and go through a training process.

- Make sure the co-ops have a place (Desk, computer, cubicle/office, login ID, people to greet them, phone number etc)
- Have a mentor (employee with less than 5 years with the company) ready for the co-op; the co-op shadows the mentor.

PH: Identify projects that will benefit the student and the business. The first term is mainly training. Assign a mentor, and usually an employee who went through the co-op program.

CS: Put co-op at ease before the start date. Call them and make arrangements for them to visit the site before they start.

E: Make co-op feel needed. Provide a document similar to a syllabus outlining the co-op experience.

BV: Overlap co-op terms so that new co-op can learn from the one who is leaving. Assign a supervisor who will call the co-op before he/she arrives.

- Corporate co-op advisor speaks with co-ops before arrival.
- Maintain a web-based chat room just for co-ops.

Audience question: Do you have mandatory or voluntary mentorship?

LB: Struggled but came up with training for mentors.

- A good mentor is determined by enthusiasm NOT age.
- A mentor is viewed as an organizational expert, usually established in the company and knows who to talk to and who understands the corporate culture.

PH: Full-time employees will volunteer to mentor co-ops

CS: Co-ops are typically intimidated by senior leadership therefore CS finds it better to have younger mentors. This setup also gives younger employees mentorship experience.

E: Good mentors believe in the co-op program and so you can't require employees to mentor.

Q2: What do you expect of co-ops and how do you help them meet your expectations?

LB: Get involved. Learn something everyday. Show up on time.

PH: Don't be afraid to ask questions. Ask a lot of questions. Take initiative.

CS: The supervisor lays out expectations at the beginning and communicates to the co-ops that even though they might not realize it, people are watching them because of the energy and freshness they bring to the office.

E: Train them on rules and expectations immediately. Introduce them to people who will help them throughout their term.

BV: Communicate to the co-ops that you expect them to: Bill hours correctly, act professionally, and submit goals and objectives.

- Supervisor meets with co-op regularly to establish and monitor goals.

Q3: How do you balance the need to challenge students with the need to have less challenging work completed?

LB: Expect co-ops to be full team members since there is a shortage of full-time engineers.

- Let less challenging tasks be teaching moments.
- Assign current work – therefore it is meaningful since it is not some minor task that was planned months ahead.

CS: Develop the project before the co-ops arrive and have the co-ops run the project.

E: Encourage co-ops to take initiative to learn and not just sit around. Idleness leads to being asked to carry out menial tasks.

- Have co-ops meet engineers in different roles so that they can figure out what challenges and interests them.

BV: The whole group identifies tasks that are beneficial to co-ops so that all employees have a sense of the kind of work that co-ops do. All extra tasks are considered learning experiences.