

Get the most out of your interns: A guide for startup success

Many startups opt for junior talent as their first hires, from founders' associates to sales executives. We've seen a rise in recruiting interns and graduates instead of VPs and department heads to help startups scale and get work done.

Temps de lecture : minute

16 August 2024

But how valuable is a junior hire if you can't fully delegate work to them or trust them with decision-making or difficult client interactions?

Hiring junior talent is an excellent solution, but they can't be expected to know everything from day one. Here's how to approach their onboarding and growth to get the most out of them and empower them to take on more ownership.

The 4 key elements

1. Proper onboarding. As startup founders or solo HR departments putting out fires, onboarding might be reduced to a meeting with the founder and timely laptop delivery. However, there's more to it. Onboarding is crucial to make a good impression, give them the opportunity to absorb information, and allow them to ask questions once they've digested it. Consider providing a 3, 6, and 12-month development plan so they know what milestones to hit and what you expect during their ramp-up. Give them an overview of the company, your mission, progress to date, and the key areas their role will impact. Have them shadow meetings and other activities to get a

sense of what's happening. At the start of each week, discuss your priorities and what they should focus on.

2. **Continuous feedback.** Regular, constructive feedback is essential for junior employees to understand their performance and areas for improvement. Implement a structured feedback system that goes beyond annual reviews. Consider weekly check-ins for immediate concerns and monthly or quarterly sessions for more comprehensive evaluations. Be specific in your feedback, offering concrete examples and actionable suggestions. Encourage a two-way dialogue where junior staff can also provide feedback on their experiences and challenges.
3. **Safe space for questions.** Create an environment where junior staff feel comfortable asking questions without fear of judgement. This openness fosters learning and prevents small issues from becoming larger problems. Establish 'no-stupid-questions' policies and lead by example by asking questions yourself. If you have enough employees, consider implementing a mentorship programme where junior staff can seek advice from more experienced team members or create space specifically for questions and knowledge sharing, such as a dedicated Slack channel.
4. **Skills development.** Provide training in essential workplace skills that may not have been covered in their education. Identify key competencies required for success in your startup and develop targeted training programmes. This could include workshops on presentation skills, project management basics, or industry-specific software tools. Remember that soft skills like communication, teamwork, and adaptability are just as crucial as technical skills in a startup environment.

Our experience: Transforming an intern into

a key player

At Maddyness, we've experienced firsthand the potential of hiring interns and junior talent. However, we've also seen how challenging it can be to support them properly and provide the resources they need to work confidently.

That's why we partnered with Kokoon, a talent accelerator for early careers. Kokoon's mission is to help startups in remote/hybrid settings properly train and onboard their early-career employees. Our new hire, Demi, joined the January School of Work programme for 12 months.

The programme focuses on three pillars: skills development, one-to-one mentoring, and community.

Demi's journey and the transformation observed

Demi shared her experience: "I joined the 12-week School of Work programme in January and I can confidently say that it has profoundly impacted my approach to work and my overall professional development."

She highlighted key learnings:

- Active listening and building confidence to ask questions
- Time management and task prioritisation
- Methodical and creative problem-solving

Demi particularly valued the networking opportunities: "One of the most rewarding aspects of the program was the opportunity to network with peers experiencing similar challenges. Sharing insights and strategies with others fostered a sense of community and mutual support. We

formed a study group that met weekly to discuss our progress and share tips, which was incredibly beneficial."

David, Demi's manager, noted significant improvements in Demi's performance: "I saw a real improvement in her confidence and proactivity and desire to take the lead in a wide range of scenarios. As a result, she is taking on more complex roles, thinking more long term and teaching me a few things too!"

Conclusion

Investing in junior hires can yield substantial returns for startups. By providing comprehensive onboarding, continuous feedback, a safe space for questions, and targeted skills development, you can unlock the full potential of your junior talent. Demi's success story at Maddyne demonstrates how structured support and training can transform an intern into a valuable team member, contributing fresh perspectives and driving innovation.

As startups navigate the challenges of growth and talent development, partnering with specialised programmes like *Kokoon's School of Work* can provide the structure and resources needed to nurture junior talent effectively. By investing in your interns and junior hires, you're not just filling positions – you're cultivating the next generation of leaders who will drive your startup's long-term success.

Join Kokoon on Thursday 22nd August at 12pm to dive into the easy-to-implement steps to successfully onboard your junior talent.

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