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OP-ED

Tap the power of internships

In business as in life, we make decisions every second of every day where we'll invest our money, our resources and ourselves. Since our time, talent and treasury will always be in limited supply, it becomes increasingly important as to where we think we'll get the greatest return.



**GUEST
COMMENT**

David W.
Brown

For me, I've gained the greatest yield by investing in the potential of people. The talent pool from which that potential is best judged has been through internships.

Throughout my more than 20 years in business, I have always benefited from internships — both being one and hiring them. As an entrepreneur, interns have provided me with a source of enthusiastic, skilled (and cheap) labor that has been invaluable.

Although they're not salaried, I have always insisted on paying interns because we — and they — need to get a real-life taste of accountability and value for their work.

The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce is engaging in an ambitious but achievable initiative to have businesses hire at least 1,000 high school students this summer as interns. This effort is part of the Philadelphia Youth Network's WorkReady program, which oversees the city's summer jobs program. PYN recruits the students, provides them with training and then matches them up with participating employers. They also provide insight and guidance to ensure the experience is mutually rewarding for both employers and intern-employees.

The cost? \$1,600.

The reward? Priceless.

But beyond a catchy phrase that captures the need to invest in today's youth, my interest in the value of internships represents a life or death issue.

Internships expose our kids to life choices that they have never known existed for them. Studies have shown that kids who participate in career-building activities are better students, are less likely to be involved in destructive activities and are more likely to make it through the challenging conditions that exist in our urban neighborhoods.

I know. I'm one of those kids who made it out.

Despite having two great parents and what most would consider a stable family upbringing, I got caught up...running the very same streets that are claiming the lives of too many of our kids today. Through a series of events, I survived a botched drive-by that scared me right off the street corner and right into a summer program that led to an internship that led to a career in advertising.

That fateful night was my last night on the street. It wasn't because I was scared to hang out. I just had better things to do with my young life. Like giving my life a future.

We need to invest in the potential of others knowing that we may see greatness that may take time to nurture and grow. If we don't grow talent now, that talent won't be there to make us grow in the future.

DAVID W. BROWN is president of BrownPartners, an advertising firm in Philadelphia. For information on the chamber's internship program, following the Working Solutions link at www.greaterphilachamber.com.