

## **POINTING THE WAY TO JOB SUCCESS**

### **Designing Effective Orientation Programs**

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You carefully recruited, screened, and tested several applicants for that new position. When the time came to make a hiring decision, you confidently selected the most qualified candidate. But two months later, the new hire resigned, confessing that she "never felt part of the company." The right first impression is everything, and a poor employee orientation can cost you dearly. It's a fact: those who don't start right don't tend to stick around long. And high turnover means you must find new people all over again. What's more, turnover takes a high toll on the morale of those who do stay behind. They begin to wonder whether they too should be looking for another job.

To retain new employees, it's critical to have an effective orientation program. Staff members who are properly trained and welcomed at the beginning of their careers feel good about their choice of employer, fit in quickly with colleagues, and readily contribute new ideas. They also represent the company more confidently to customers, business partners, and suppliers.

#### Keys to a Good Orientation Program

Now is the time to review your orientation program. The following ideas can help new staff members succeed in your department or organization.

##### 1. Create comfort and rapport

To help new staff feel accepted, give them opportunities to interact with co-workers and managers. Diversify the time and nature of these meetings. For formal presentations, meeting rooms work well. For informal conversation, lunches and after hours get-togethers are a good choice.

In addition, allow new employees to visit other company departments and customer facilities. Spending a week, a day, or even an afternoon in a different part of the business or with a customer helps new employees understand the company's entire operation, and it also builds rapport.

##### 2. Introduce the company culture

New staff usually want to follow accepted norms and values (e.g., dress, punctuality, hours worked). But understanding actual company culture happens gradually through formal presentations, informal dialogue, and personal experience. Over time, "official" positions are compared to what gets said "confidentially" over lunch.

Because company culture is not determined solely by formal presentations, it's helpful to extend your positive influence beyond them. Create a buddy system or mentor scheme to match your most sincere and enthusiastic staff with your incoming employees. Be sure to give the mentor relationship real support: pay for a few lunches, allow time in the weekly schedule for conversations, acknowledge mentor services in annual staff appraisals, and show appreciation to mentors with tokens of recognition.

### 3. Show the "Big Picture"

New staff need quality answers to the following questions:

- Where has the company been? Where is it today? Where is it heading?
- Who are our customers? What do they say about us?
- Who are our major competitors?
- What is our market position?
- What is our current focus: are we expanding operations, going regional, and launching new technologies? Or are we trimming costs, rationalizing product lines, and streamlining operations?

Introduce new staff to these "Big Picture" issues with a well-designed presentation. Using transparencies, slides, video, or multi-media, highlight your history, outline your current goals, and introduce your future plans. Keep the "Big Picture" presentation upbeat, lively, and up-to-date.

### 4. Explain job responsibilities and rewards

Clarify expectations from the beginning. Ensure new staff are thoroughly familiar with their job responsibilities and accompanying levels of authority. Explain and demonstrate your staff appraisal system. Show new staff a copy of the actual appraisal form and explain how good performance is assessed, measured, and rewarded. Use career paths of those who have come before them to illustrate possibilities and potentials in the job.

### 5. Handle administrative matters

There will always be paperwork. Employment agreements, tax forms, insurance policies, benefit packages, charitable contribution forms... the list goes on and on. While these documents are important, resist the temptation to "get through them" in one long sitting. Instead, spread administrative tasks over a number of short sessions during the first few weeks. Requiring new employees to spend hours filling out forms on their first day is no way to generate enthusiasm about the dynamic nature of your organization!

### 6. Provide reality checks

Make sure your orientation accurately reflects the nature of your company. If your program shows only the bright side of the business and the happy side of daily work, don't be surprised when new employees come back shell-shocked after two or three weeks on the job. Be open and candid about pressures associated with your company, your team, your customers, and your competition. This truthful approach produces staff who understand the workplace and wish to make it a better place.

### 7. Gain full participation

Give everyone in the organization a role to play in new employee orientation. Involve co-workers in your mentor schemes, engage managers in talks and panel discussions, put colleagues in charge as hosts and guides during cross-department visits. Invite the families of new staff members to a special "Meet the Company Day" and take lots of photographs. Later, mail the best photographs to your new employees' home addresses-with copies of your company's newsletter and hand-written 'thanks for coming' notes.

Most important, gain full participation from the new employees themselves. Resist the temptation to provide only "one way" information from the company. Instead, have new staff generate their own questions by exploring the company, researching the competition, and meeting the customers. When the time comes, involve your new employees in welcoming the next batch of incoming staff. Such participation helps your orientation program stay fresh and makes new staff feel like company veterans-experienced, involved, and able to contribute.

#### Effort Well Spent

It takes a lot of work to make sure your new employee orientation program is thoughtfully designed and carefully delivered. But the time, money, and human resources you dedicate can become valuable long-term investments that reduce turnover, smooth out learning curves, strengthen employee commitment to your company, and make human resource management easier and less costly.

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*This article was adapted from Ron Kaufman's "It Pays to Help New Staff Start Right." Ron is a leading author, trainer, and keynote speaker in the fields of improving service quality and implementing customer focus. Based in Singapore, he has helped hundreds of clients, including Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and associations around the world. More free ideas, techniques, articles, and information are available at [www.ronkaufman.com](http://www.ronkaufman.com).*

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