

IDEAS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

by Daniel J. Casey

Many companies today are going the extra mile to help make their employees feel comfortable in their work place surroundings. Offering flex-time to telecommuting, firms are accommodating, some encouraging, alternative "work-styles". However, orienting new employees to their new workplace is too often neglected, resulting in a weak welcoming event - or none at all.

Imagine for a moment that it's your first day at a new firm. You arrive in the office at 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. and call your new supervisor from the reception area - and no one answers. You sit down in the lobby and wait and wait some more. People are trickling in, but you don't recognize any of them. 9:00, 9:15 leads to 9:30. Finally, your new boss shows up, greets you, and tells you they're not sure where you'll be sitting, but they've arranged to have a desk set up in the hallway for you until they find out where your new space will be. Then you spend a long monotonous day reading a mountain of human resources documents and job files.

Interesting! They couldn't wait for you to start, but now that you're there it's as though they weren't even expecting you.

Few things in life are as exciting - or as harrowing - as starting a new job. As a hiring authority or human resources representative, it's important that you make the new employee on the block feel welcome and valued. Remember, first impressions last a long time and this

is your opportunity to make it a good one.

How important is your firm's first impression? - Many HR managers agree that a favorable experience in the initial few days on the job is critical to an employee's continuing success and motivation. A well organized new employee orientation, whether it's a large-scale presentation or a one-on-one meeting, can help to create a positive perception of the firm. In fact, studies have shown that a well-planned orientation can effectively contribute to:

- + Length of employment
- + Fewer mistakes
- + Improved client relations
- + Healthier work attitude
- + Self-Motivation
- + More effective communication among the partners, managers, and the new employees

It's not enough for the "loud" partner to be a bit more reserved, the "reserved" partner a bit more garrulous, for the new hire's acclimation. The orientation must provide concrete information as well as create a comfortable - but not false - environment. So, how can your firm develop and present a rewarding orientation program?

Here are some ideas that will help:

Welcome Call - Ask a new hire's supervisor or co-worker, even a partner, to call the new hire a few days before his or her start date and set expectations. They should enlighten the new hire that the firm is looking forward to having them aboard, what they'll be doing the

IDEAS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

first few days, and ask if they can answer any preliminary questions. A simple phone call will reduce first day anxieties by presenting a friendly, helpful face of the company.

Welcome Note - Send a welcome note, if appropriate, to the new hire's family, offering to answer any of their pre-start questions. You might consider assembling and sending commonly asked questions and answers.

Business Hours - Let new hires know what time they are expected to arrive on their first day. They'll feel more comfortable having an initial "goal" and knowing that someone will be expecting them.

Unwritten Rules - You or a manager should fill new hires in on the "unwritten rules" and corporate ethics. Despite its importance, moral code is frequently unspoken. Don't be shy about filling them in on the acceptable vs. the unacceptable.

Dress Code - They will not want to show up in a three-piece suit on casual Friday.

Organizational Chart - This chart may change continuously, so keep them up to date on the latest organization structure.

Departmental Goals - How does the department measure success? How does it measure performance? What are the "official" and "unofficial" goals?

Telephone Procedures - These days, mastering the phone system is a bit like neurosurgery. Make sure they know the

system and any "phone etiquette" i.e. do employees forward their phones to voicemail at night? Are they expected to pick up the main line when the receptionist is away from his/her desk?

Mission Statement - Mission statements can be helpful in fostering a team environment. If your firm has one, make sure they know what it is and the importance of it.

Customer Service Philosophy - How are they expected to treat visitors, clients and vendors?

Office Supplies - Where should they go for extra glue sticks, pads, staples and paper clips? Which items need to be requisitioned or special-ordered and proper procedures for doing so?

Parking - Is there special parking for their office or department? If they work in the city, maybe there's less expensive parking known only to company insiders.

Extracurricular - Do you have a firm softball team? Are there any parties or field days coming up? They may want to put important dates on their calendar.

New Employee Class - Organize a combined orientation class with other new employees - it helps to know there are other people in the same orientation schedule.

Employee Manual or Handbook - Take this opportunity to review the employee manual, discuss the "rules and regulations" and even take care of some administrative tasks during this time.

IDEAS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

Corporate Phone Directory - Give them a list of "important numbers and people to know". This list should include the mailroom, fax center (if you have one), receptionist, maintenance, security, and any main contacts in the departments with which they'll be most closely associated. Also, be sure to explain the functions of each person along with their job titles and responsibilities.

Corporate Video - Show your new employees a firm video (if you have one) starring the partners, managing partners, and other executives whom they may not know or see on a regular basis. It'll familiarize them with your firm's leaders and better acquaint them with the firm goals, beliefs, mission and culture.

Mentoring - Assign a mentor to take them out to lunch and answer their questions or consider allotting them a little cash for a night on the town or to spend on whatever they wish: dinner, drinks, playing golf at a nearby club, or getting a massage during their lunch break.

Breaks & Lunch - Speaking of lunch, what about it? Does your firm have a cafeteria or restaurant? Are there any good places to eat outside of your office space? Clue them in to the best places so they won't waste their lunch hour wandering aimlessly in search of sustenance.

Office Tour - Take them on a tour of the office. You may know your way around, but they don't, and most offices can be confusing to the newcomer.

Welcome Basket - Wrap up their new office supplies like a gift basket. It makes their first day a bit more "celebratory" and is a fun, inexpensive way to liven up an empty office or cubicle.

Security Codes & Keys - Make sure they have security codes, a pass, keys, or whatever else they need to be self-sufficient and able to come and go, whether its early or late.

Greetings - Say "hi, hello or good morning". It's the fastest and easiest way to make a new person feel welcome, wanted and at home.

Conclusion - No matter what your time and expense budget, you can always make your new employees feel like they are vital members of your firm. After all, an employee's first few days are the most important one's he/she will remember the best, and those experiences will affect the rest of their tenure as a valued employee. Some of these ideas will assist and make sure that everyone starts off on a positive note.



You have our best wishes and regards for continued success.

John C. Colson, President