TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEW HIRE ORIENTATION

Research shows that successful orientation reduces staff turnover, increases productivity and boosts morale. This will initiate a positive working relationship with your employees and improve your bottom line.

Conducting a well-planned orientation program for new staff pays many dividends for both you and your new hires. Yet it is surprising how often orientation is conducted in an unsystematic fashion.

Orientation programs can run anywhere from an hour or two to several days in length. There are typically two components to an orientation program: a general introduction into the company, its culture, values, vision and policies; and a departmental or job-specific orientation when the employee actually starts work.

Decide what parts of your onboarding program can be done virtually before the employee comes to your workplace.

ENGAGE YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE BEFORE THE START DATE

Effective orientation programs start before the actual date the new employee starts work.

Send a welcome e-mail.

Send your new employee a welcome e-mail telling how excited the company is to have them onboard, and provide valuable information like available resources, access to their e-mails, the organization's chart, communication tools, and so forth. You might decide to share resources via an online portal or as simple as google docs.

Make a phone call.

It is helpful to have an introduction call by phone or video call with your new employee to welcome them and explain the onboarding process and timeline. Let them know you are accessible throughout the process. Provide clear and concise instructions.

EXPLAIN THE COMPANY'S MISSION, VALUES AND POLICIES

The general orientation should be designed to ensure that new employees understand your company's mission, values, vision, policies and procedures. If your company is adamant about providing exceptional customer experiences or is passionate about teamwork, then the orientation program can ensure that this message is provided in a consistent way to all new hires.

PLAN YOUR PROGRAM

The employee's initial questions are often fundamental and cover items such as hours of work, pay days, grooming and dress code, vacation time, sick leave, breaks, training or performance questions. Familiarize your new employee with the policies and procedures of your organization. An employee handbook can be a helpful handout, allowing staff the opportunity to study the expectations and rules of their new workplace and take it home as a resource document. Your policies around absenteeism, harassment, theft, and training can also be explained to ensure that there are no misunderstandings when the employee starts to work.

Ensure that your new hires have reviewed your COVID Health & Safety plan and are familiar with your COVID-19 Health & Safety policies and procedures at the workplace, how to communicate these to customers, and other communication protocols.

WELCOME YOUR NEW EMPLOYEES

Nothing beats a good first impression, so start with a warm welcome. Introduce the new employee to all key staff, especially everyone with whom the new hire will be working over the course of a shift. It's important for the new employee to understand the "big picture," how each position relates to the others on the team, and how the team relates to other departments or areas of the operation.

If possible, the owner or CEO should also meet with the employee. This gives the leader an opportunity to impart company values and ideals, and lets the employee knows that the owner is a hands-on part of the business.

SHARE YOUR COMPANY'S HISTORY

Let your company shine. Brag about how the company started, and how it's growing. Talk about your culture of teamwork, and why you enjoy your own job. Showing pride in your company helps employees know they are part of something bigger. It also instills pride, making their adjustment more seamless.

PROVIDE THEM WITH THE BASICS

Never underestimate the simplest things. Point out the location of the washroom and lunchroom. A quick tour of the facilities, including where the new employee can store personal belongings and take breaks, is appreciated. Mention security and safety issues, such as how to lock up or call for help. Review your policy on Internet and telephone usage on company time. This attention to detail speaks to the care you have for new employees. Outline behaviour expectations and practices in your workplace including acceptable treatment of tools, property, other employees and customers as well as workplace safety and emergency procedures. It is often helpful to assign your new hire a "buddy" who can answer simple procedural questions later.

COMPLETE ALL PAPERWORK

Companies can also use the orientation program as the time to have new hires sign up for company's benefit programs and payroll. Employees want to know when, how and what they get paid. Review their salary, benefits, paydays, and, if appropriate, the probationary period and performance-appraisal time. Make sure appropriate income tax and benefit forms are signed.

Some companies also provide basic training (such as WHIMIS and safety procedures) at this time. If a union represents the new employee, there is often a component of the program that has the union representative talk explain the requirements and benefits of union membership.

SET JOB AND EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

Review the job description, pointing out what's expected in regards to hours, staff meetings, workload, training and job appraisal. Pay particular attention to sharing your customer service philosophy. Laying out this foundation provides a clear guideline of performance, and it sets the foundation for the employee's time with your company.

BEGIN THE TRAINING PROGRAM

On the first day, provide preliminary training, whether it's how to run the cash register or how to handle phone calls. The first day of work is truly the first day of training. Explain that you'll offer ongoing training in the days ahead—whether it's mentoring one-on-one or attending a training session.

An effective orientation program sets the tone for new employees. It allows you to motivate them to be successful, and it encourages them to do their best. That makes new employee orientation a sound investment for all concerned.

DON'T STOP AFTER THE FIRST DAY

Effective onboarding programs are long-term projects and can take anywhere from three and twelve months.

CHECKLIST

Because an employee's orientation can be broken into multiple phases, you might want to cover off these fundamentals as soon as possible. Create a simple first-day **checklist** to keep from overlooking important steps.

You only have one opportunity to make a first impression, and for employers, the orientation of new hires is that opportunity. A positive working relationship with your employees leads to lower staff turnover, higher productivity and higher employee morale. Take the time to do it right and reap the rewards of another satisfied new hire. Ultimately, this will help improve your bottom line.

Research shows that up to one-third of applicants embellish their employment history. Checking employment references ensures that you select the most qualified person who is the best match for the position. You are validating the information presented to you on the applicant's resume. You will be provided with greater insight into the candidate's skills, knowledge and abilities from someone who has observed the candidate perform.

- Once you have a shortlist of your top 2 – 3 candidates, check a minimum of two professional employment references for each candidate. (Ideally, at least one should be from an immediate supervisor or reporting manager).

- Obtain consent from the applicant to contact their references or have them provide you with references if details were not already provided during the application process.

- Advise each candidate that you would ideally like contact details for someone who they reported to and could speak to their recent work or volunteer-related activities.

If a previous employer refuses to provide a reference, this should not necessarily be held against a candidate, as it may simply be that Company's policy and not specific to the individual. Some employers may refuse to provide references based on legal ramifications and will only confirm dates of employment and the last position held. These details are still considered important information and should be verified. Consider asking if they would re-hire the candidate in the future? Their response (what they say and how they say it) may provide more insight.