



Ensuring new employee success

Give new hires the tools, information they need.

By Tim Smith, Principal

“People who need people,” as the corny old song goes, “are the luckiest people in the world.”

Ahhh, if only some business managers could relate. But leaders sometimes forget that people – in the form of employees – ultimately make an organization succeed or succumb.

Yes, planning, processes and perseverance are important, but in the end, it's people who either get the job done, or not.

In other words, if you're running an entire business or even just a small department, you need people. Don't you feel lucky?

Probably not. But you should always remember that the right people – trained properly, plugged in to the company's vision, aware of what is expected of them and comfortable within the existing culture – can achieve great things.

Yes, even at your company.

Employees are an investment

Recently, I ran across several studies of worker attrition rates. The findings of one study reported that relatively new employees – those with less than two years of service – voluntarily leave at an average rate of about 20 percent per year. Those with longer tenure left at only about 10 percent per year.

And of course, in some industries, the turnover percentage is even higher.

Every time a departing employee walks out the door, your costs go up. It takes time and money to find replacements. It hurts productivity when you are short-staffed. It derails your progress toward financial and customer service objectives when new employees are constantly thrust into unfamiliar roles.

And if you are in a service business, employee turnover often leads to client turnover.

The way to stem the loss of employees – especially those with less than two years' experience at your company – is to consider each new hire an investment, and take steps to protect and nurture your investment!



Proper orientation helps new employees understand the company and their job.

During the first two years in a new position, employees find out how their actual job compares to the one the employer described. And of course, the “job” isn't just the work they do. It consists of the entire experience of

working at the company – bosses, environment, relationships with co-workers and so on.

Getting a new employee integrated into the company – and ensuring that there aren't any surprises for either the worker or his or her boss – takes time and deliberate effort.

Don't just cross your fingers ... provide orientation

For many companies, "orientation" consists of nothing more than an hour or so spent filling out forms and getting introduced to their coworkers.

Smaller firms are especially guilty of short-changing the orientation process. Many times they will hire someone, put them to work right away and just cross their fingers that it all works out.

If a worker doesn't do well, or leaves after a few weeks or months, it's the employee who gets the blame. In fact, I've heard it many times from business owners and managers – "It is so hard to find good people. We've hired several into that position, but they haven't worked out."

But companies that view new hires as investments in future success take the time and make the effort to ensure that orientation is detailed and worthwhile. They see orientation as a formal, necessary process that helps new employees assimilate more deeply and reach the desired level of productivity more quickly.

In fact, just as a new plant requires care and feeding to be able to put down roots and flourish, new employees at all levels need their own "care and feeding."

You should schedule and coordinate orientation for all new employees as soon as possible after their arrival (preferably on the first day or week). Your session should include topics such as:

- Administrative issues
 - General organizational policies and procedures
 - Benefit plan details including paid time off, insurance, retirement plans, etc.
- Company issues
 - Customers and their needs
 - Company products and services and how they meet customer needs
 - Competitors and how the company compares with those competitors
 - Company culture and direction – including the company's vision and values, strategies and goals.

- Job issues
 - Organization structure and core processes
 - How the person's efforts contribute to the success of the company – how their job is connected to other jobs in the company
 - Key people who influence the employee's success – coworkers, supervisor, customers, internal customers, suppliers and other third parties, etc.
- Performance expectations
 - Employee's responsibilities and scope of tasks
 - Performance objectives, goals and standards
 - Performance evaluation process and timing

Your orientation can take on many different formats or styles – there is no right or wrong way as long as you are covering the necessary information in an easy-to-understand way.

Keep in mind, too, that orientation doesn't have to be company-wide. Even department managers can plan and implement successful orientation sessions that help employees feel comfortable and knowledgeable about their new jobs.

Get new employees plugged in!

I once saw the word "company" described as "a group of people working together to get something done." While for-profit companies exist to make money by meeting some marketplace need, these organizations rely on the efforts of **people**. At the core, your company is a social entity and the employee's social connection with other employees is critical to that employee's success.

Even after they join your company, most new employees question whether they have made the right choice. They look for positive signs to support their decision. Today's job market favors the employee, so they may still be receiving offers from other companies even after they've accepted your offer. That is why new employees need a high level of support and guidance. You want the employee to feel wanted, welcomed, supported and able to do their job well.

To help the new employee build supportive relationships at work, some companies use a "buddy" system. They may also use mentoring programs. Both rely on the personality match between the new employee and the buddy or mentor. The bond is what's important. Preferably, the buddy who works with the new employee should be a high performer who is well-regarded, is willing to help others, has reasonable interpersonal skills and maintains confidentiality.

Why have a buddy system? The first few weeks on a job can be stressful. Steps for the new employee's buddy could include:

- Meet the new employee for lunch within a few days of the new employee's first day.
- Stop by to check in with the new employee each day for the first couple of weeks to help solve any problems the employee encounters.
- Make certain that the new employee knows about spontaneous lunches, happy hours and other opportunities to get to know other coworkers.
- Check in with the new employee weekly for the first few months to answer questions or to provide informal guidance on "how things get done."

Mentors provide much of the same support as buddies, but are often in higher level roles with a focus that is more strategic. They try to help with longer-term issues that affect the employee's career development. Mentor responsibilities often include:

- Serving as an advisor by listening, guiding and providing feedback.
- Encouraging and guiding the employee on training and development issues, as well as other, more personal, issues.
- Referring the employee to his/her manager or other party as appropriate when other counseling is needed.
- Serving as a role model on how to conduct oneself in the work place.
- Recognizing and validating signs of the employee's professional growth and development.
- Providing constructive feedback on the employee's actions, products and skills.
- Maintaining confidentiality. Nothing kills trust in a mentoring relationship faster than a breach of confidence.

Stay visible – provide feedback

It's important that managers stay close to new hires during the first few months. New employees need feedback to let them know whether they are on the right path in a new organization. Schedule reviews at the end of 30, 60 and 90 days. Use those conversations to guide the new employee by comparing their actual performance (activities, results, habits, etc.) to the performance expectations covered during their initial orientation.

At the end of 90 days, both the employee and you should know whether the job is a good fit.

And don't just use those conversations to give feedback. Ask for some feedback from the new employee, too. What's confusing? What improvement ideas do they have? What obstacles make it difficult for them to get their work done? People tend to adapt to challenges over time, so if you don't solicit that sort of feedback from the new employee early on, you'll have harder time getting it later.



A formal mentorship program helps new employees navigate the culture successfully.

Employee success is up to you

Of course, some employees are destined to move on regardless of how they are treated or managed. But keeping the good ones is always a benefit to your company.

By formalizing the orientation process, ensuring that employees are plugged in to others who can help them feel comfortable, and being visible and available to them as needed, you can ensure that you are giving newcomers every possible chance to be successful.

After all, they are people who need people, too – and they need you!

More Information? If you'd like to learn more about laying the groundwork for your employees' success, please send an E-mail to tim@plaidgroup.com, visit our web site at www.plaidgroup.com, or call us at 713-627-3569. The Plaid Group publishes a free bimonthly e-mail newsletter filled with insights and ideas you can use to enhance your company's operational performance, spur growth and increase bottom-line profits. To subscribe, change your e-mail address or unsubscribe, please visit www.plaidgroup.com/newsletters_subscribe.asp.

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