Roll Out the Welcome Mat for New Hires

It’s a scary thought, but research shows that people decide within days, not years, whether they are going to stay with a company they have just joined. According to a 2015 survey, 33 percent of employees determine within a week or less if they are going to stay with their company long-term. Sixty-three percent said they made that decision within the first month. The Society for Human Resources Management has found that turnover can be as high as 50 percent in the first 18 months of employment.

If Things Start Off Badly

So what is it that causes people to disengage so quickly? When individuals feel unwelcomed, when they are not assimilated into the organizational culture, when they are not given the training and the tools they need to do their jobs, they decide to find work elsewhere.

Starting a new job in an unfamiliar place can be very intimidating. And all too often, busy managers or directors assume that a new employee will jump right in, and “learn everything by doing.” But what if you don’t know who to report to, if you aren’t familiar with your surroundings, if you aren’t greeted by a friendly colleague or manager, and you don’t know much about your duties? How can you feel welcome in your new job? Whether someone is a substitute or a new hire, they need to feel valued from day one.

I recently initiated a survey with the LinkedIn School Nutrition groups, and respondents had a lot to say about the reception new hires get:

- 60 percent of the respondents felt new hires and/or substitutes did not feel welcome on their first day.
- 88 percent were neutral, or dissatisfied with how substitutes and new employees are brought on board.
- 96 percent of respondents said their organization does not provide any formal training for substitutes.

And that’s a wasted opportunity for any organization because, as Bruce Posner, MIT Sloan School of Management, puts it, “the person who started work this morning is as close to a ‘model employee’ as you’ll ever get.”

The Right Way to Bring People On Board

You may have heard people use the term onboarding to describe new employee orientation. But onboarding is much more than a form-filled, meet-and-greet sponsored by the Human Resources department. Rather, it is a process by which individuals are fully assimilated into an organization.

The following definition of the term onboarding is the best one I have run across: “Onboarding is the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders.”

To ensure that your employees get what they need right from the start, here are some basic steps you can take to create an effective onboarding process:

1. Have a plan. Outline all the steps it takes to make a new hire or a substitute feel part of your organization, as quickly as possible. Make this one of your top priorities.

2. Roll out the welcome mat. Be there to greet the new employee on their first day. Don’t get sidetracked by your daily routines. If you’re there for them, new hires will feel they have made the right decision to join your organization.

3. Build a solid foundation. Explain your operation’s mission, goals, values and expectations. Introduce them to the team, and explain the role they will play as a new member. Stress the importance of food safety and sanitation, and the new person’s role in maintaining these concepts. And underscore that everyone they serve is a customer.

4. Familiarize people with key facts and functions. Tell new hires about your district, your program, and the impact school nutrition has on students. Describe how many students the district feeds each day, what food components are included in a school lunch, and so on.

5. Be detailed about the basics. At this point, managers can cover the tactical “housekeeping” facets of the operation. Create a detailed checklist of points you want to cover. Explain even the most basic aspects of your business, including when and where to take breaks, where restrooms are located, where to put their personal belongings, where they can park, and so on.

5. Be Detailed About the Basics. Describe your department’s food policy. Are employees entitled to a free meal? What is
included in the meal? Is it just the reimbursable meal? What will it cost
them if they want to purchase extras? Tell them whether food can leave
the cafeteria, and why there is to be no eating on the line.
Provide concrete examples of proper operational procedures. For
instance, do not assume the new employee knows what a disher is, or
what the difference is between scoop sizes. Emphasize the impor-
tance of handwashing, and where the handwashing sinks are located.
Remember, what may be common practice for you, could be a new
experience for them.
6. Assign them a mentor. Choose a mentor to help the new employee
“learn the ropes.” Pick someone who will be a good role model. It’s
a great way to build team relationships. But make sure the mentor is
both qualified and willing to do this kind of on-the-job training.

Research has proven that a good onboarding process results in higher
job satisfaction, lower turnover rates, improved productivity and happier
employees. It’s an investment well worth making for your organization.

1 "With Four Generations in the Workplace, New National Study Reveals Surprising Realities
As Technology Influences Employee Behavior and Performance," Ultimate Software and
PR/Press-Release/With-Four-Generations-in-the-Workplace-New-National-Study-Reveals-
Surprising-Realities-As-Technology-Influences-Employee-Behavior-and-Performance
magazine/19860601/8052.html.
3 Rebecca Mazin, “The Definition of Onboarding vs. Orienta-
employee-orientation-vs-onboarding-how-to-capitalize-on-the-difference/.

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