



DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION PROGRAM

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Developing a Successful Employee Orientation Program

Developing effective employee orientation programs is an important job for human resources professionals. A well-planned employee orientation program introduces employees to a company, supervisors and co-workers. It illustrates job duties and company policies, it lowers the learning curve and it gets employees off to a good start that ensures long-term success. Time and resources spent on employee orientation programs improve efficiency and reduce turnover. Statistics compiled by the American Society for Training and Development show that U.S. companies spend more than \$100 billion on learning and development services for employees. Despite these numbers, more than two-thirds of corporations say they need to improve their employee orientation programs.

Program Strategies

A refined and well-developed orientation program reduces employee anxiety and helps everyone establish realistic expectations. Bombarding new employees with too much information too soon and reusing programs that are boring are the most common failings. Finding the middle ground is a challenge that HR departments need to overcome. Occupational education experts typically

break program planning strategies into three or five parts that include developing, implementing and refining orientation materials. Programs are further divided into general and job-specific or department-specific portions. Human resources professionals are typically responsible for providing general orientation services while job-specific orientation is conducted by department supervisors.

Pre-Arrival Orientation

Successful employee orientation programs begin before new employees arrive at work. Emotions are pivotal in determining how new employees respond to training programs. Before employees arrive, HR contacts should send new employees a welcome letter and an employee handbook. An employee letter should welcome the new staff member warmly while mentioning the company's mission and values. It should also include a written job description that prepares the new employee for the orientation program.

Employee handbooks are useful for explaining company benefits, procedures, complaint protocols and general rules. HR contacts should also call new employees a few days before their scheduled start date to tell them that the company is looking forward to working with them. It's also an opportunity to

further explain what they'll be doing during orientation and their first days on the job. A simple phone call is a wonderful way to appeal to new employees' emotions and reduce first-day anxiety. Before new employees arrive, a companywide email should be sent out introducing them to the group so they don't feel like strangers.

Day One

Once pre-arrival protocols are complete, it's easy for HR professionals to make a good impression and welcome new employees to the company. It's important to make sure that the new employee's work space is ready when the individual arrives. According to employment statistics, four percent of employees quit after the first day and 50 percent of employees leave during the first six months. Creating a warm, welcoming and professional environment starting the first day is a cornerstone of any employee orientation program. To avoid overwhelming new employees, it's a good idea to provide information on an as-needed basis. First-round orientation materials should include critical items needed to ensure the employee's survival and self sufficiency.

Orientation is an ongoing process that can't be crammed into a one- or two-day program. Before transferring new employees over to a supervisor for

additional orientation, HR professionals should have the employee complete any forms and discuss general topics regarding sick leave, business hours and procedures. Employees should complete direct deposit forms, tax documents and all required paperwork in the HR office. At this point, appointments with coordinators, directors, IT staff members and department personnel can be scheduled. It's a good idea to set up a second meeting with new employees to cover additional points and answer any questions they have. Providing new employees with a weekly agenda and details about who they'll be meeting with are helpful for adding structure and clarity.



The Buddy System

Employee orientation is more than paperwork and lectures about business. It's a chance to integrate new employees with supervisors and peers. One of the most effective ways to do this is using a buddy or mentor system.

Ideally, a co-worker in the new employee's department should volunteer to be a personal guide. A buddy can help with training and assignment questions while being a friend. A mentor can give new employees an office tour, and they can introduce employees to the people they'll be working with. Some companies give mentors a \$100 allotment to take new employees to lunch, dinner or community landmarks.

Additional Info

Depending on the company structure, a co-worker, supervisor or member of the HR department can review checklists with the new employee. These checklists allow existing personnel to cover rules for parking, smoking, personal calls, business protocols, technology systems and job-specific duties, which vary for each position and company. After each item is addressed, it should be checked off the list, and the document should be signed and dated by the new employee and the reviewing party.

Once employees have been immersed in their new work environment, it's a good opportunity to continue the orientation process in more detail. These interactions can be performed four to six weeks after the employee's first day. By this time, employees may have questions or a need to know more about the company. Topics that can be covered in secondary

orientation materials include an overview of the internal business structure and departments. Dress codes, time and attendance policies, safety protocols, ethics guidelines, career development opportunities, workers' compensation info, retirement plans and requirements for mandatory reports and complaints can be discussed. Many of these topics are referred to in the employee handbook or included in pamphlets that can be reviewed together with employees.

Follow-up Surveys

Collecting opinions from employees and supervisors is important for assessing and refining employee orientation programs. A one-page survey is a quick and easy way to assess the effectiveness of the information being presented and determine how it's being received. On an emotional level, the survey should ask employees to measure their feelings. It should also ask supervisors and employees to rate the effectiveness of key objectives to see if these goals are being achieved. A numeric rating on a scale between one and five is a simple analytic way to measure program performance and identify areas that need improvement. Points include the timing, effectiveness and value of information and assessing key objectives. Program assessments should also ask employees and supervisors to give the orientation process an overall rating.

Opportunities for Discussions and Q&A Time

After the first day, the initial two to three months are important for new staff members. A large number of employees and executives don't make it past this critical time. Answering questions, providing tools and sharing resources are important during this period. Roundtable discussions in the first three or four months are a great way for company representatives and new employees to share their concerns and expectations. An informal lunch table discussion creates a non-intimidating environment where anyone can address concerns. If an employee is unhappy, these meetings can help improve the situation. Employee orientation has a lot to do with establishing loyalty and giving employees the resources and information they need to do the best possible job. It's also about fostering company spirit and making work more fun.

Fun and Creative Orientation Ideas

Employees and the people administering orientation programs feel that the content is simplistic, boring, overwhelming or unnecessary. Creating a comprehensive curriculum that is manageable and fun requires forethought and originality. Interview processes are changing and work environments are evolving too, but many employee orientation programs are

stuck in the past. Small things make a big difference to new employees. Preparing hall passes and wrapping office supplies in a creative package goes a long way when making a good first impression. If the office is too hectic on Mondays, have new employees start on Friday. Don't ignore new staff members. If workers see a new face in the office, they should say hi. It's the easiest and fastest way to make someone feel welcome.

Developing creative ways to present orientation information aids in long-term retention. If there's someone on the team who is particularly friendly and gregarious, make this person the chair of a welcome wagon committee. Establishing cultural liaisons is a fun and effective way to introduce new players to a company and its culture. Create a rite of passage. Whether it's watching an inspiring film, attending a company sports event or going out for a night on the town within a certain time frame, group events make new employees feel like they're part of the team.

Successful employee orientation programs focus on material at the macro and micro level and present information in a fun and friendly manner. A carefully planned orientation program that mixes business and fun will create skyrocketing comfort levels and will show employees that the excitement of starting a new job is mutual.

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