

THE FIRST 90 DAYS:

Making Your New Employee's First Three Months a Success



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You've finally found the right candidate to fill your open position. You've hired him, and he starts in two weeks. Time to sit back and relax, right? On the contrary, this time should be spent getting organized for your new employee's arrival and his first 90 days of employment with your firm. A good first impression and an organized orientation plan will make the transition for your new employee smooth, informative, and maybe even fun.

Welcome to the Company

Welcoming new hires into the company is an opportunity that is often overlooked. Having a formal plan for introducing new employees, or even promoted individuals, into their new work environments will help make them feel welcome without hurting productivity.

Get Organized

The first day for a new hire should be well organized. Making sure they have the essentials is an easy and inexpensive way to make a positive first impression. Common things a new hire will need:

- Access to the facility--a keycard or an ID
- A place to sit
- A computer and log-in
- Human resources forms to fill out
- A phone and/or cell phone
- Business cards
- A list of project work documentation, so the new hire knows what he should be doing

Get With the Program

A **new employee orientation program** makes a positive first impression and reinforces the new hire's decision to join the company. Employee turnover within the first two years can be directly attributed to a lack of employee integration, according to Tim Augustine, vice president of corporate services at Atwell-Hicks, a national land development consulting firm based in Ann Arbor, Mich. To emphasize his point, he uses his own company as an example. "By instituting a formal integration and orientation program, I was able to reduce our turnover rate by 10%," he says.

Having a mentoring program or buddy system for new hires also can ease the transition and makes employees more likely to stay on board through the initial 90 days of employment, according to a 2005 study called *Retaining Talent: Retention and Succession in the Corporate Workforce* conducted by the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and the Aberdeen Group.

The buddy or mentor should be a veteran peer or leader who can provide cultural as well as professional mentoring. Some of his or her responsibilities include:

- Giving the new hire a tour of the office
- Acting as the main go-to person for questions
- Training the new hire on the operating systems the company uses
- Helping the new hire attain the goals set by his manager

Having a designated buddy or mentor helps other members of the new hire's team stay productive. Team members won't need to take time out of their day to assist the new employee

when a buddy is in place, according to Johanna Rothman, president of the Rothman Consulting Group, a software management consulting service specializing in IT project and people management, based in Arlington, Mass.

The more effort you put into making a new hire feel welcome and comfortable, the better the job performance during the first few months. Will Helmlinger, president of Your Hire Authority, a human resources consultancy based in Gladstone, Ore., suggests that a manager lay out a **game plan** for the new employee during his first 90 days that includes realistic goals to be attained every two weeks to 30 days. Knowing what to expect from each other opens the lines of communication and will help ensure the successful integration of the new employee into the company.

Learning the Ropes

"Be prepared" isn't only the Boy Scout motto--it's good advice for the workplace, too. Creating goals to be obtained in an orientation program as well as on one's own is a good way to get the new hire up to speed.

Formalize Orientation

"A lot of companies view orientation as a one-day class," says Augustine. He suggests choosing a standard day each month to hold a formal orientation session. Not only are these orientation sessions informative, they are a great way for new hires to meet leaders and other staff members in different areas of the company.

Augustine suggests focusing on the following areas during the orientation:

- Company history
- Expectations and introductions
- Product / service knowledge
- Organizational structure of the company
- Benefits and human resources information
- Software training
- Career development

"This is the easiest time to make or break an employee," Augustine says. If you don't make an effort to orient new hires on the company and their jobs, they may second guess their decision to work at your firm.

Setting Goals

Setting realistic goals helps the new hire feel a sense of purpose and accomplishment during his first 90 days, while giving the manager a way to monitor the success – or failure – of a new employee. Managers should set these goals based on how much they expect new hires to accomplish while becoming acclimated to new roles.

As an example, Augustine suggests the following goals for a new salesperson:

- Week Six
 - Present a company overview presentation to the business development team
- Week Eight

- Present a product overview presentation to the business development team
- Conduct role-play scenario with business development manager
- Make five calls to five new business prospects/clients
- Week Twelve
 - Present a draft of you business development plan to the team

“The new hire should understand the goals and strategy of the organization with which they’re working,” says Rothman. Having a manager describe how the new hire’s activities are feeding the company’s strategy and bottom line not only will make him feel useful, but also will give him a sense of what is expected of him in his new role.

Helping Managers Manage

Just as new hires need to adjust, so do employees who have been promoted. An employee who has been promoted into a managerial role may have a hard time adjusting, says Rothman. Adjusting to a position where he has to develop interdependencies on other people instead of working alone can be difficult. Coaching the new manager to be honest about the work environment change with peers and co-workers is the best way to go. And remember, even though an employee might be technically astute, don't assume this astuteness will prevail in the managerial role. “Helping a manager to become a great manager is not trivial,” Rothman says.

Augustine suggests the following Company Knowledge Orientation for an employee who has been promoted to a management role:

- Revisit the company history
- Go over the position description in depth
- Discuss role expectations from the managers supporting leader
- Discuss specific process and procedures of the management role

Evaluating a Job Well -- or Not So Well -- Done

Six out of 10 human resources managers report doing follow-up interviews as employees become acclimated to their new jobs and companies' cultures, according to a research study conducted by Monster.com. However, only 27% of these human resources managers make these interviews standard practice. Conducting a follow-up interview with a new employee or promoted employee is the key to assuring he is not only comfortable in the new role, but also is competent in it.

Evaluating the Employee

The evaluation process should be **customized to fit the employee**, suggests Helmlinger. Figure out the position's learning curve and determine what the new hire needs to know to do the job well and set goals from there. These goals should be ready and waiting for the new hire when he arrives for the first day of work.

Frequent meetings set the stage for positive or critical feedback during the evaluation process. The sooner the manager of the new hire identifies what he is doing wrong, the sooner they can work together to remedy the situation. “Giving frequent feedback is huge,” says Rothman. “If a manager doesn’t give the new hire feedback, they don’t know what they’re doing right or wrong.”

If the **new hires' personality isn't melding with co-workers or staff members**, address the situation as soon as possible. "Most people are willing to learn better interpersonal skills; they just don't know they need it," says Rothman.

When It's Not Working Out

Retaining employees that are not your best performers should not be your goal. The team you want to keep together is the one that is going to win, states the HCI/Aberdeen Group study.

Rothman, Helmlinger, and Augustine agree on this point, but have different ideas on how to handle a situation in which an employee clearly isn't working out.

*** Cut your losses**

Helmlinger suggests **cutting your losses early**, because to continue on with someone that isn't working out isn't fair to that person or the company. Be candid with the individual – show the gaps and shortcomings in the work, and do it right away. Hiring someone who doesn't fit with the skill set needed shouldn't happen if the hiring process was done correctly, Helmlinger notes, but sometimes it's inevitable.

*** Use the "cause-and-effect approach"**

Rothman suggests a more **cause-and-effect approach** to working with a sub-par new hire. She suggests the following steps be taken with a new employee who isn't performing up to standards:

- Start with informal but specific feedback in regular one-on-one meetings
- Issue a verbal warning, and then wait a week to see if performance improves
- Issue another verbal warning and wait another week

If the employee can't seem to make his weekly goals, it's time to put a "get-well" plan into action. Rothman offers this outline as a "get-well" plan:

- Week One: Provide two or three milestones, with deliverables (list of people the salesperson cold called, for example), between Monday and Friday.
- Week Two: Provide another two to three milestones.
- Week Three: Provide another two milestones.
- Week Four: Provide two milestones. At the end of this week summarize your conclusion/decision on the new hire.

Some examples of conclusions Rothman has reached as a manager include:

- The new hire says, "I can't do this job. It's just too hard," and the employee leaves.
- The employee succeeds one week, but the next week he is back to his old behavior. "In this example I do a two week 'get-well' plan with much harder milestones. Every time I have done this, the employee decides it's not worth it," she notes.
- The employee has succeeded in changing his behavior or learning new skills to do the job.

If the problem with the new employee is a skills-based problem, Rothman believes the manager has a responsibility to provide training to the employee before giving any sort of formal verbal warning. For example, if a new salesperson isn't completing his list of cold calls because he doesn't know when to stop building the relationship and get onto the next call, the manager

should sit with the employee and coach him for an hour. Another tactic may be to send the new hire to a sales workshop.

*** Institute a counseling period**

If it's a personality or a cultural fit problem, institute a **counseling period**, suggests Augustine. If the new hire is alienating his co-workers with lackluster communication or teamwork skills, a 30- to 60-day counseling period should be instituted. However, before instituting the counseling period, answer the following questions:

- Can the new hire work on a different team?
- What teams can you suggest the new hire move to?
- Does the new hire want to move to another team?

If the new hire does not want to change to another team in the department, give the employee the following goals to complete over 30 days to see if he can adapt to your company's culture:

- **Teamwork:** Have the new hire meet with each member of his team to identify expectations.
- **Communication:** Have the new hire meet with the manager each Friday to talk about how he worked together with the team during the previous week.
- **Outside Classes:** There are classes nationwide built around Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It provides advice on communication, interpersonal, and management skills.

If the employee is attempting these goals, it's worth it to spend as much time with him as he needs, says Augustine. If after 60 days the new hire still isn't melding with the group, the manager needs to demand that the new hire move to another group or move to a different firm, because as Rothman puts it, "It's not worth spending your time with your worst people."

The Bottom Line

When a formal orientation plan is in place not only will your company make a great first impression on a new hire, but your retention rate will likely increase, as well. Creating room in your busy schedule to have frequent meetings is essential during the first 90 days for a new hire. Making sure your new hire has everything needed to begin work – including a list of goals to attain over the next three months – helps smooth the transition into a new role, acclimate the new hire to the office culture, and ensure the new hire and team remain productive during the your new employee's first 90 days at your company.

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