

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

Ever hear the expression "common sense isn't so common anymore"? This phrase certainly has many workplace implications. All too often, managers incorrectly assume that other workers have the same work ethic and knowledge of the workplace that they do. We take it for granted that people know what is expected of them. The fact of the matter is, employees need to know not only the specifics of how to carry out their duties, but also the company's rules and expectations, before they can succeed in the workplace.

The ideal time to set forth expectations of an employee is at the time he or she is hired, through some type of new employee orientation. In addition to providing a road map to workplace success, a thorough orientation has the added benefit of creating a positive first impression on the employee. The sense that he or she is important to the company will go a long way toward building a productive work relationship.

The temptations to skip the orientation process are many. Lack of time in already brimming schedules probably tops the list. Other possible reasons for omitting orientation are high turnover which results in seemingly constant orientations, and the fact that repeating the same information many times over is, frankly, boring for the presenter. Unfortunately, this boredom generally results in presentations that are lackluster at best and can result in incomplete or inaccurate information being presented to new hires. The use of technology can circumvent these problems; videos and computer software lend themselves well to the presentation of routine information that doesn't change often. Further, utilizing technology ensures that the same information is presented in the same manner every time, which can be important for legal reasons. Handouts of printed material are another useful supplement to the orientation process. One caveat, however - in a quest for efficiency, don't totally remove human interaction from the process. The opportunity to ask questions of another human being is critical to a successful orientation program and to effective relationship-building, which is another objective of the orientation process.

When designing an orientation program, don't forget topics that may seem self-explanatory; things as simple as knowing how to transfer a phone call seem trivial, but are vital for employee productivity. Following are some topics to include in a new employee orientation program: company history and philosophy; information about what the company does and its industry; customer or client profiles; an organization chart; pay, hours of work, and other

items such as overtime requirements, breaks or rest periods, lunch, etc.; overview of the employee benefit package; description of the performance appraisal process - how, when, and by whom are employees evaluated; opportunities for training and advancement; employee handbook and policy/procedure manuals; companywide safety rules; and a tour of the facility. The presence of top management is important as well. The company president should at least make an appearance (via video if he or she is at a distant location). As with all company programs the commitment of top management sends a positive signal to employees.

Although implementing an orientation program may seem a daunting and costly task, no company is too small for new employee orientation, even if it is as simple as assigning a veteran employee to mentor the new employee and to "show him the ropes". There is no doubt that properly orienting employees to their new workplace is time consuming process, but a wise investment of time that will reward the company with more productive, satisfied employees.