

New Hire Orientation - Eight Tips For Effective Integration

First impressions last a lifetime, and the perceptions formed by your new employees are no exception. Find out the eight steps you can take to ensure your new hires make the transition smoothly and happily into your workplace.

Most employers focus a lot of time and attention on the recruiting and hiring process: finding qualified applicants, interviewing, checking references, and ultimately, crafting an acceptable offer. But, your job does not end once the new employee has been hired. The smooth assimilation of new hires is an essential ingredient for reducing performance problems and turnover. And, further complicating the process, you must make sure that all necessary paperwork is completed to ensure compliance with the growing maze of employment laws.

Unfortunately, too many organizations become overwhelmed by the paperwork demands and neglect the fundamentals of the orientation process. A better approach is to focus more on welcoming and integrating new hires into the workforce and to pay special attention to laying the groundwork for improved performance and retention. Below, we provide eight tips on how to coordinate both orientation and new hire legal compliance into an organized process.

Engaging a New Team Member An effective orientation program makes the new hire feel comfortable and introduces the employee to the organization's culture, supervisors, coworkers, and work expectations. Employees who get a positive first impression and "buy into" your culture are more likely to develop loyalty, cooperate with coworkers and supervisors, offer ideas, and take a personal interest in your organization's success. While every employer must adjust its approach based on size and management philosophy, the following eight steps provide a guideline to help you cover the right bases.

Make the new employee feel welcome and part of the group before work begins. Often, there is some lag time between the date the employee accepts your offer and the first day of work. You can make your new employee feel more a part of the group during this period by having his supervisor touch base with him, for example, to brief him on the people he will be working with and any special projects that are in the pipeline.

Be ready for the new hire's arrival on the first day. Little things can go a long way to help overcome first-day jitters. For example, start by alerting receptionists and security guards to the new employee's arrival. Make sure the new employee's workspace is ready and that keys and any necessary entry codes are provided. Assign an e-mail address and computer password, if applicable, and add the employee to your internal contact lists. In addition, have top officials take the time to meet each new hire, or at least send a personal welcome note.

Provide an overview of all operations. This step should include a review of the corporate history and organization chart, a discussion of important products and services, and a tour of the immediate physical facilities.

Communicate information about the organization's goals and culture. The orientation process (free policy download) is an ideal time to educate new hires about your organization's mission, market presence, culture, competition, and plans for growth.

Provide detailed information about the new hire's position and performance expectations. New employees should be given a clear outline of their job description, classification or title, and duties. In addition, the supervisor should provide written training and performance goals with appropriate benchmarks and expected completion dates.

Assign new employees meaningful work. Many employers make the mistake of giving new employees "busy work" when they first arrive, such as reviewing training manuals or shadowing other employees. This approach is intended to "ease" the employee into the job, but often backfires by making the new hire feel unchallenged, or even unneeded.

Inform the employee about the organization's policies, procedures, and benefits as soon as possible. For most organizations, the employee handbook is the source of much of the information needed to be informed about benefits, hours of work, pay policies, and work rules. Most employers also require new employees to sign a receipt acknowledging they received and read the handbook and that they understand they are "at-will" employees, if in fact that is the case.

Some policies, such as sexual harassment (free policy download), equal employment opportunity, drug and alcohol use and testing (free policy download), and safety, are so important that you may want to conduct special training for them. (A few states, such as California and Connecticut, require sexual harassment training, so check state law.) In particular, new employees should understand how to make complaints under these policies.

You also should review information in the handbook regarding benefits and provide appropriate summary plan descriptions. In addition, if the employee will be participating in your health insurance plan and COBRA covers you, you must provide an initial COBRA notice to the employee and any covered spouse and dependents.

If you have a policy requiring new employees to take a physical exam or undergo any medical tests, these typically should be conducted prior to the employee's first day. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), you may conduct any type of medical exam at the post-offer stage if all entering employees in the same job category must undergo the examination. However, once the employee has actually started work, the ADA requires that any medical exam be job-related and consistent with business necessity.

Complete necessary paperwork. The first day often is also the most convenient time to have a new employee fill out required forms. Some forms, such as the employment eligibility verification (Form I-9) and withholding allowance (Form W-4), are required by law. The Form I-9 should be completed within three business days of the employee's first day. The Form W-4, designating the employee's number of withholding exemptions for tax purposes, should be completed on or before the first day of employment. If the new hire is under 18, you also may need a certificate of age and a work permit issued by your state to verify the employee may work in the particular job. Other forms may be needed to administer your policies, such as those for benefits enrollment and beneficiary designations, direct pay deposit authorization, and employee emergency contact information.

You also must complete state-required new hire reports for all new employees. Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which establishes a "parent locator service" to help enforce child support obligations and child custody and visitation orders, you must provide information on your new employees to your state "new hire directory." Most states provide new hire reporting forms, and many employers give the forms to their new employees to fill out and then submit them to the state. (You can find helpful information on each state's reporting requirements from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Administration for Children and Families on the Internet at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/newhire/employer/contacts/nh_matrix.htm)

Nurture Your Newbies There is no question about it - finding, training, and replacing employees is expensive. HR experts estimate that turnover costs from 30% to 50% of an employee's first year salary. Some suggest that this cost is closer to 100%. Clearly, most actions you take to retain new employees are worth the effort, and an effective welcome and new hire integration process can help ensure a better retention rate.

Remember, these actions do not have to be elaborate or difficult to be effective. None of the eight tips suggested above are expensive, although they do require careful advance planning for successful coordination and implementation. Your goal should be to provide a professional setting and make the new hire feel as comfortable as possible.

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