

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

First Impressions – Crafting the Employee Orientation

In many companies, the recruiting process is like a marriage proposal. You put your best foot forward, say all the right things and hope to get a “yes” when it’s time to pop the question. But what happens during the honeymoon period of a new employee’s first few days on the job? That experience may be quite a contrast to the expectations set during the recruiting process.

A new employee’s first impression of a company – good or bad – will be long and lasting. Positive impressions of helpful assistance and organized training will not be forgotten. Unfortunately, neither will a first day of chaos and confusion. Orientation procedures speak volumes as to the culture and management style of the company the new employee is about to join.

If you were a new employee in your company, what would your first impressions be? What cultural factors would have the greatest impact on your first days?

- Would a personal work area be ready and waiting for you?
- Would your computer and software be ready for use?
- Who would provide you with training for phone, email and voicemail?
- Would someone be waiting to hand you your business cards and building keys?
- Would employment and benefits paperwork be organized and ready for your review?
- Would the staff make you feel welcome and part of the team?

New employees must feel that they are part of the team right away. Allowing a new member of the team to feel alienated during those first days is simply not an option. Assign an established employee to guide them, show them around and introduce them to other coworkers. Talk about their role and who they’ll be working with. They’ll need answers to questions about breaks and lunch, where to hang their coats, where to park, etc. These things may seem simple, but they’re an important part of helping new employees get comfortable in a new environment.

And we haven’t even begun to teach them about the company or their responsibilities yet. That, too, requires preparation. Have documented company processes ready for new employees to learn. (You do have written policies and procedures, don’t you?) Be clear on the attitudes and values you want to instill in new employees. Make certain that new employees understand the mission of the business and how they can contribute to the big picture.

Don’t leave these things to chance. Your orientation process must be deliberate. In fact, a good orientation process begins during the hiring process, by letting applicants know what they can expect during the first few days. Having a structured orientation process can even support your recruiting efforts. The best and brightest candidates are attracted to companies that are organized and “on the ball.”

Here are some DOs and DON’Ts of a good orientation system:

- Do have a structured plan. Don’t operate as if orientation will just automatically fall into place.
- Do use checklists to ensure you have everything ready for new employees. Don’t leave it to memory or chance.
- Do have documented procedures, and use them to build in consistent quality in the orientation process.
- Do train your trainers. Teach them how to bring along new people. Don’t allow supervisors or coworkers to arbitrarily decide what they want to share and what they don’t.

- Do let your trainers and supervisors know how important their roles are. Don't make orientation just one more thing to fit into the workday.
- Do create realistic expectations for new employees in the hiring process. Don't paint such a rosy picture that their first day on the job will inevitably be a disappointment.
- Do assign someone to be a buddy or "running mate" for new employees – assign this task to go to an employee who is positive about the company and excited about their role as a company representative.
- Do take time for realistic scheduling when bringing in a new employee. Don't assign the new employee "busy work" that is designed to keep the employee occupied while others deal with a hectic week.

Finding good employees is hard work! Don't undermine your efforts. Begin as you mean to go on by adopting an effective orientation program, and treat new employees as the valuable team members you intend them to be. Your efforts will be rewarded.

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond helps owners and business leaders become more successful by providing innovative financial, technology and management solutions for every stage of their organizations' life cycle. MKS&H's organizational consulting division, Tandem Partners, specializes in people strategies that drive business results. For more information on this article or MKS&H, please contact Margaret Wilson at 410-296-6200 or via email: margaret@mksh.com.

© 2007 Tandem Partners. Permission to use, copy and distribute this document and related graphics is hereby granted, provided that the above copyright notice appears in all copies and both the copyright notice and permission notice appear. All other rights reserved.

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

11311 McCormick Road, Suite 100
Hunt Valley, MD 21031
410.296.6200

www.mksh.com

70 Thomas Johnson Drive, Suite 100
Frederick, MD 21702
301.662.2400