how to cut the cost of job orientation

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Modern management has now come of age with the tightening of belts and gleaning the chaff from the wheat. Waste has been cut to a minimum and unnecessary employees, not keeping up with the new trimmed down economy, suddenly have found themselves seeking new employment. Everywhere, in every department, management looks for greater cost effectiveness.

One area in business which cuts deeply into profits is employee turnover and new employee orientation. The cost of orientation has been looked at in the past with indifference. Now the one thing a company cannot afford is a failed orientation. A failed orientation is one which either takes more time and effort than necessary to accomplish or which totally fails to assist the employee to adapt to the new environment. Failed orientations are not only costly for the company, but are also costly and time consuming for the employee who may have to begin his job search again. Fortunately, most employees acclimate to the job in spite of a faulty orientation, but, again, this process is not cost effective.

When an institution hires a new employee, it has a responsibility to assist him to adapt to the new situation and feel comfortable as soon as possible.

If you are responsible for orienting new people, take the following into consideration.

The orientation should be mapped out ahead of time. Plan what you want the new employee to learn. Write it down and organize it. Plan the logical sequences. Be specific and concrete. The new person doesn’t know how you want the work done. Some procedures are universal while others have institutional idiosyncrasies. If applicable, give the purpose of what you’re teaching. This will make learning easier.

Planning ahead will not only make the orientation go smoother and faster but will give the message you expect the same type of organization from the new employee.

It’s not uncommon in the work world for the new employee to show up for work and be greeted by, “Oh, yeah. I forgot about you. I don’t have time today to orient you. Here’s a policy book. Go somewhere and read it.”

No one is impressed by being overlooked as a result of someone’s hectic schedule. This shouts rudeness and disorganization. Most people would reconsider whether they wanted to work in that type of environment where there’s indifference and they aren’t welcome. It is much easier for an employee to withdraw before job bonding has occurred.

Your institution’s high standards need to be reflected in the orientation. This will set the trend for the work relationship.

Choosing A Mentor

If at all possible, don’t pair the new employee with an incompetent, or negative person, or one who will not demonstrate high standards. Make certain the person doing the orientation has thorough job knowledge, is patient and is a good teacher. This should be a person who can do the work and at the same time have a running dialogue with the new person to explain what is being done. The mentor should not get so busy she forgets to involve the new person in the task at hand or the new person will become distracted and precious time will be wasted.

Be kind to the new employee and sensitive to their needs. Talk to the new person to put him/her at ease. People are sensitive and when placed in a new situation where they are insecure, they can become paranoid, especially if the mentor doesn’t talk to them or isn’t
friendly. This can be misconstrued they are not doing a good job, they have some personal flaw or you’ve taken a personal dislike to them.

Some employees undermine the new employee by giving negative suggestions. If the new employee needs to overcome doubts and fears, she/he will not learn as fast which will lengthen the time before the employee can become functional and independent.

Be positive. Don’t start off by talking about disciplinary measures. It’s not appropriate to explain a demerit system for tardiness or no-show in orientation. This could give the new employee the wrong idea about the caliber of people he/she will be working with. Give professional courtesy. If it becomes necessary later, then give individual counseling. Don’t assume everyone entering the door is a malingering or your darkest dream may come true.

Don’t reprimand a new employee. The employee will feel their best efforts resulted in a reprimand and where can one go from there? The conscientious employee is devastated by a reprimand.

Some managers feel when they reprimand or condemn an employee, the employee will come back to work with a good attitude and will work harder. The reverse is usually true. The employee becomes angry and that anger slows him down. Any corrections must be made carefully and with sensitivity.

Never ridicule or threaten a new employee. When you threaten, it indicates a weak, powerless and incompetent management. A great leader never threatens. Remember stress is not a good teacher. Ridicule is a method of shaming which stifles growth. People who have a parental or paternal approach use shaming to control others. If an employee forgets something, storming at them, “I told you before...,” will not help that person learn.

The normal learning model indicates the student learns 1/10th of what he is taught. Therefore expect to repeat what you’re teaching at least 10 times. After all, the new employee has a great deal of information to learn and digest. Being in a new environment is an automatic stressor.

Be aware some established employees have an investment in seeing the new employee fail. Withholding information is a power move to ensure failure. One employee who wasn’t certain she wanted to leave when she gave her notice to terminate gave a minimum of information and assistance to the new employee so she would do poorly and fail. The old employee had no trouble stepping back into her old position when she finally made up her mind.

Each day, the orientation should progress. On a recent orientation, the new employee was put with a different person for three days. Each person went over the same material. This is both a waste of time and money.

Be sensitive to the new employee’s learning capabilities. Everyone learns at a different rate. If the new employee learns fast, push ahead. If she is slow, be patient.

If the new person seems to be having trouble adapting, also consider role confusion and problems setting priorities as contributing factors. Find out what in the person’s background can tie into the new situation. Again, be specific and concrete. Lay everything out. Orientation can be as easy as 1-2-3.

That 1-2-3 entails the following:

1. The first step is to demonstrate the procedure. Show the new employee how the work is to be done, explaining as you go. If the procedure involves a customer, go over the teaching before you enter the room so the new employee will appear competent. Talking down to the new employee in front of the customer is demeaning and unnecessary. It has happened before — the person you oriented becomes your boss.

2. The second step is to have a return demonstration. Be kind and supportive during this step. Don’t pressure or stress the orientee. Don’t make negative comments especially in front of others. Show you have confidence by saying such things as, “I know you can do it.” “You’re doing so well, this
procedure should be no problem."

You might have to repeat step one and two over until competency is established. Remember a person does not learn a new procedure until they do it personally.

3. Be available to answer questions as needed. This stage goes on as long as necessary. Check with the orientee occasionally to see if he/she has any questions or problems.

After the employee becomes independent spend some time each day regularly for questions and gentle corrections until the employee no longer feels this conference time is necessary.

Get feedback from the new employee during all steps of the orientation. How could the orientation be improved? How could it be more efficient?

How the new employee functions on the job stems from the orientation. If the orientation is good, he will take off and soar. If it is poor, he will have to wade through the misinformation and overcome the bad teaching which will be ultimately more costly to everyone.

Remember: Give positive feedback and it will shorten the orientation. The new person will feel more comfortable and it will accelerate learning. Causing insecurity will lengthen the orientation. People who are tense don't learn as fast and easily. The new employee needs reassurance — lots of it.

Don't look for what's wrong in the new employee, look for what's right. Seek out the strengths and you will all be winners. Make new employees feel comfortable and they may exceed all expectations.