



[DR. SHIRLEY SAYS...]

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# Effective employee orientation: A key to reduced turnover

Do you remember your first day on the job? Was it a day to remember or a day to forget? According to Charles M. Cadwell, author of "New Employee Orientation," "most new employees arrive for the first day of work full of enthusiasm and excitement. This initial interest can either be put to positive use, or destroyed, depending on how it is nurtured."

If we think about it, when our new employees succeed, our organizations succeed. So, it makes pretty good sense that the first step on the road to everyone's success is a thorough, well-planned orientation program. Such a program can reduce turnover and save a company thousands of dollars. No matter the size of the organization, it should not leave new employee orientation to chance.

It has always been interesting to me that while many managers agree that new employee orientation is important, very few invest the time and attention necessary to make sure it's done right and done consistently. So, where do you stand in your company with employee orientation? Do you currently have a program? If not, why not? Now is the time to get started either reviewing what you have in place or beginning the process of developing and implementing a program.

The essentials of an effective new employee orientation encompass three key elements:

- Planning and implementing. When planning your new employee orientation, consider who will be involved, what will be included in the orientation, how long the orientation program will be, and when will it be

held. Your decisions will be determined by many variables, in particular, the size of your organization. If your company is small, everyone may be involved; if the company is large, senior management, human resources, and the department manager/staff may all be involved.

It's a good idea to develop an orientation checklist containing all items that need to be covered. The checklist is one of the most effective means of making sure that new employees are properly introduced to the company and to their jobs. Another helpful tool to be developed if one does not already exist is an employee handbook. Make sure any existing handbook is up to date.

Length of time for the orientation and when the program will be held are best determined by the size of the organization, and how often employees are brought onboard. In our global business world, many companies that are nationwide as well as worldwide are using multimedia such as CD-ROM, diskette, the Internet and company intranet to provide flexibility in providing individualized, just-in-time orientation. This media can provide much-needed support and information during the new hire's first weeks on the job. Of course, face-to-face sessions are still the norm.

When the new employee arrives, it is important that participating staff be prepared to devote uninterrupted attention to their part of the orientation. Also, consider introducing the new employees through a tour of the organization, or at least, through a tour of the department in which they will function.

A key is not to overwhelm or overload the new staff members. It is suggested that a mentor, coach or "buddy" be assigned. This person may be a coworker. It is, however, very important that the person selected has a good attitude about the company, supervisor, fellow workers and customers.

- Evaluating. To determine the effectiveness of the new employee orientation, I suggest developing a questionnaire to be administered to both the new employees as well as the orientation providers. It is good to discover what worked, what needs to be improved, and what may need to be deleted. The information gathered can ensure continuous upgrading and improvement.

- Follow-up. To ensure that the orientation program is effective and meeting its goals and that the new employee is experiencing job satisfaction, follow-up should be conducted at intervals of one month, three months, six months, and one year with the new employees and the orientation providers.

Starting a new job is exciting, but it is also stressful. Effective managers know that employee satisfaction is essential to healthy teamwork, cooperation, motivation and high levels of productivity. The time, money and staff you dedicate to new employee orientation can be one of your organization's best long-term investments that will pay major dividends time and time again.

**For more information, please contact Dr. White at (225) 769-2307 or visit her Web site at [www.successimages.com](http://www.successimages.com). □**