Are You Creating a Culture of Unwanted Employees?

By Kate Zabriskie

Twelve Low-Cost Suggestions for Welcoming New Hires

Jacqueline remembers her first day at her last job almost as if it were yesterday. She had on a new outfit, left her apartment early, and was excited to get to work and learn everything she could about her new company.

After a brief "hello" in the morning, she was shown the coffee pot and led to an empty office. The desk obviously not been cleaned well, as evidenced by the personal notes, candies and other items left by the previous occupant of what was now her chair. The person apparently had a thing for peppermints and not much use for pennies.

Happy to have the change but afraid to touch the candy, she spent time cleaning. During the next few hours several people stopped by to introduce themselves. These encounters were somewhat random, and clearly there wasn't much of a plan for dealing with new hires. When 12:30 p.m. rolled around and nobody said anything about lunch, she finally took herself out for her first day on the job.

The afternoon played out much like the morning. Jacqueline read and tried to figure out what she was supposed to be doing, and a few more people walked by her door. Some stopped. Some didn't. She began to wonder what she had gotten herself into.

Eventually 5:00 p.m. arrived, and her new boss asked how the first day had gone. "Okay I guess," was the best she could come up with. How else did he think it had gone? Reflecting upon it now, Jacqueline stands by that answer.

Granted it was a small office with no formal orientation, but really? The message was loud and clear. They were less than excited to have her there! That first day still stands out as a lonely eight hours.

Were they bad people? No. Were they unprofessional? Surprisingly not. Did they position themselves to get the most out of her? Not so much. Could they have easily done better? You bet.

Sadly, Jacqueline's story isn't unique or unusual. In fact, similar situations are unfolding right this very moment to dozens or even hundreds of people starting new jobs today. And how do they feel about the organizations they've just signed on with? Probably not too great.

Statistics and practical experience show it costs time and money to replace an employee, so does it not make sense to get new hires off to a good start?

For very little money and a modicum of effort, you can set the stage for a new hire's success.

1. Send new employees a note (handwritten if possible) before they start work. These aren't messages about policies or parking passes. Rather, you are writing to say "We are glad you are going to be working with us."

2. Tell new people exactly what to do when they arrive on their first day. Do they park in visitor parking? Should they report to Human Resources first? Eliminating uncertainty will show that you've got your act together.

3. Make sure the space a new hire is going to occupy is clean and free of the last person's personal effects and well stocked with supplies. Nothing says "We don't care" like dirt and clutter do.

4. Does the new person get a computer, phone, or other electronics? If so, be sure to have those items in place as soon as possible. Without the proper tools, it's hard to hit the ground running.

5. If your organization has coffee mugs, shirts, or other promotional items emblazoned with the company name, gather these together, and present them to the new hire. Most people like a present, and this small gesture is another signal that you are welcoming and excited to have a new team member.

6. Avoid doubt and confusion by providing the new person with a written schedule for the first day. The schedule should include lunch with the immediate supervisor, new colleagues, or other people who will contribute to making the new hire's first days a success. And while you're at it, provide the firm's emergency telephone number.

7. Along those same lines, establish expectations early. Meet with the new person and review what you expect in terms of quantity and quality of work, appearance, hours, and so forth. Much of this could also have been covered by Human Resources or outlines in an employee manual provided by your organization. However, if something is important to you, highlight it verbally. New people have a lot of information to digest, and extra emphasis can't hurt.

8. During a new hire's first few weeks, set up 20-minute informational meetings with key employees throughout your company. This should go without saying, but be sure to choose people who believe in your organization, set a good example, and can provide insight about the business.

9. A little background information can help new employees avoid potential landmines. While gossip is obviously not a good idea, insight on the idiosyncrasies of the workplace should be shared if knowing about them will help the new person without hurting anyone else.

10. Pay attention to distribution lists. New people won't necessarily see the emails or memos they should if someone isn't looking out for them.

11. If the employee is new to your industry, share trade magazines, websites, and other resources that might be useful.

12. Finally, check in throughout the week, but don't be a pest.

None of these suggestions are difficult to implement, but they all take planning. The good news is, it's usually worth it. The faster you can get new employees up to speed, the sooner they will produce the work you hired them to do!

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