

Effective Employee Orientation

By: Brian K. Linhardt

Most every year superintendents are faced the need to hire staff members. A well-planned employee orientation can do much to help make this transition as painless as possible and get new employees off on the right foot immediately.

The essence of effective management is to get the job done right through other people. Business success depends on the quality of performance that managers get from their employees, which in turn hinges upon not only the workers' abilities, but also the instructions they receive, the standards the organization sets for them, and the company rules under which they function. The work environment created by the employer and the performance pattern that an employee establishes during the first few days will have a strong influence on that person's attitude, productivity, and team spirit for weeks, months and even years to come.

A former personnel manager and mentor taught me a valuable lesson: Once bad habits are developed, and unacceptable standards of performance tolerated, they are hard to change. Workers tend to fall into good or bad patterns very early in their employment.

Steering new employees on desirable paths and monitoring success is a primary responsibility of management. If it is not done well, one likely result is high employee turnover that disrupts work and raises costs associated with recruiting, hiring, training, some payroll taxes, and workers' compensation. Golf courses need stable, productive workers to operate

efficiently. If managers want to mold workers' performance from the beginning, they cannot afford to treat the orientation employee process casually.

In many organizations, however, the orientation process is either short or nonexistent. The best way to begin cultivating committed, high-performance employees is through an organized introduction to the values, culture and expected work ethic of the business, as well as to their particular jobs. Ideally, it includes filling out personnel forms, having the job duties explained and maybe reading or listening to job descriptions, reviewing the company handbook, if there is one, taking a tour of the new surroundings, meeting coworkers, and starting the work day. All of these activities are important.

What else can be done to prepare employees for a new work environment? It helps if company rules and standards are clearly communicated in the orientation, including management's expectations that workers will perform to a specified level after being trained. New employees should be given explicit goals and work performance standards to meet or exceed in definite time periods. Fewer conflicts will occur if rules are evenly enforced over time and across the workforce. If after some time it is necessary to terminate a problem employee, it is best if others in the workplace see that the termination is deserved.

Employers can help new workers learn the job and can improve the firm's bottom line by stressing the importance of safety from the start. Reinforcing safe work behavior will help to reduce the frequency

of accidents and cost of workers' Compensation premiums in the future. Eighty to ninety percent of all injury incidents are reportedly caused by human error. Recently hired employees are involved in a disproportionate number of accidents and in general file a greater number of workers' compensation claims. By providing workers with safety information, scheduling regular safety training, and calling attention to specific safe and unsafe acts, managers and coworkers alike can increase safety recognition at work.

What To Do On The First Day/Week

Initial impressions are often lasting ones, so special care should be taken to provide the employee with a helpful introduction. The following are suggested elements to include in an orientation

Pre-hire

Realistic job previews are a good tool to open communication lines with employees, manage initial expectations, and begin to set work standards. When given ample information about the job, uninterested or unqualified applicants may walk away, and hired employees are likely to provide a better fit with the organization. Explain how to perform the essential work tasks and responsibilities of the job, and give an idea of what an "average" day on the job might entail, both positive and negative aspects. The common result from using a job preview is reduced turnover, which could save substantial money and time.

Initial Welcome

- ◆ Introduce yourself and find out what

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- name the employee wishes to be called.
- Give a brief history of the company.
- Introduce the employee to the lead person and coworkers, and ask a worker to join the new employee for lunch during the first few days.
- Provide a document discussing the nature of the employment contract, such as at-will.
- Give new employees a handout detailing orientation information that they can refer to later.

Hours of work, pay policies

Discuss work hours, starting and stopping times, tardiness and absenteeism policies, and the call-in procedure if any employee cannot make it to work. Give information about the work schedule and its variability.

- Explain time card or other timekeeping procedures.
- Discuss any overtime requirements.
- Tell the employee about the lunch and break periods.
- Disclose the starting pay rate, including incentive wages or bonuses based on quantity, quality, or employment duration, and the piece-rates if applicable. Also discuss any fringe benefits available.
- Describe paycheck distribution — when, where, how.
- Tell the new employee what to do and whom to ask about any pay discrepancies.
- Outline performance review and appraisal procedures.
- Explain whether pay increases may be expected as a function of merit, longevity in job, cost of living, or a combination of these.
- Discuss vacations, holidays, and sick/personal leave procedures, as well as pregnancy and FMLA leave, if appropriate.

The Job

Closely supervise the employee's first efforts, immediately correct errors, and reinforce successes until performance standards are met. Allow more independence as competence grows, and keep a record of the employee's progress for future reference.

- Give a tour of the work site.
- Discuss the organizational structure or chain of command.
- Describe the job duties and scope.

See Effective Orientation page 7

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Effective Employee Orientation (Cont'd)

- ♦ Talk about the employee's job as it relates to the customer.
- ♦ Explain specific performance expectations, work standards, and any promotional opportunities.
- ♦ Outline disciplinary procedures, the grievance process and any probationary periods.
- ♦ Discuss how or to whom you would like employees to make any suggestions toward improved work procedures.

General Information and procedures

- ♦ Show the employee where restrooms, personal storage areas, and phones are.
- ♦ Discuss personal use of telephones and other company equipment or facilities.
- ♦ Have foremen introduce special policies or procedures that are unique to working under them.
- ♦ Provide information, special policies or procedures that are unique to working under them.
- ♦ Provide information, special forms, reference materials, and any other details the employee needs to know immediately.

Safety

Involve workers in safety management by encouraging them to submit suggestions. Also, allow employees to take turns presenting tailgate safety sessions, and reward contributors.

- ♦ Proper use and care of equipment.
- ♦ Identification and location of all common job or workplace hazards.
- ♦ Use of fire extinguishers and emergency procedures.
- ♦ Location of first-aid/medical care.
- ♦ Training in CPR assistance and identifying pesticide illness and heat stress.
- ♦ How to report and document accidents and illnesses.
- ♦ Requirement for use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and eye protection.
- ♦ Wearing and the proper care of protective clothing and foot wear.
- ♦ Proper lifting techniques, and avoidance of ergonomic hazards.
- ♦ Use, storage and disposal of solvents and hazardous chemicals.

Checkpoint to Evaluate New Employees

After a specified period of time, it is a good idea to evaluate the new employee to decide whether he or she is performing adequately and making adequate progress in learning the job. The evaluation is more beneficial if it also gives the employee developmental information, suggestions for improvement, and praise for what he or she is doing right.

- ♦ Use standards previously explained during the orientation. It helps if work standards are specific, mutually agreed upon in advance, realistic, clear, objective, and consistently applied to everyone.
- ♦ Assess the performance, not the person. Be as descriptive as you can, not heavily evaluative when talking about the employee's performance. Be sure that appraisal comments relate directly to the established standards.
- ♦ When presenting your observations, ask for and listen carefully to the employee's comments. You may learn a great deal from them about the orientation process as well as about the person. Good communication at this time is key to more successful work performance later.

Final Words

These employment practices may seem time consuming at first glance, but they generally cost less time and money than damaged equipment, mishandled crops, large medical bills, high workers' compensation premiums after frequent or severe injuries and governmental fines. All employee orientations and safety training sessions should be documented in writing. A well-conceived and reinforced orientation can help set the stage for high employee productivity and positive work attitudes.

Knowing and using efficient golf course maintenance methods often are not enough to make for a successful operation. The ability to lead, manage, and structure work practices comes with experience, knowledge and the use of appropriate management tools and techniques. It helps if lines of communication are opened at the outset of employment. Make sure that rules and standards are adhered to while encouraging employee participation in some decisions. A reliable, productive, and conscientious employee is a valuable asset to any business. /

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