



Industry Update



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How To Develop Effective New Employee Orientation Programs

If you are an employer, you have likely increased compensation packages over the past year to combat the effects of continuing tight labor market conditions and to attract qualified employees to positions within your company. While nice compensation packages are an important part of attracting new employees, they do not guarantee retention. In fact, workplace trends show that effectively orienting new employees to your company will decrease the amount of time it takes for them to become productive and increase the likelihood that they will still be employed with your organization after one year.

President Signs Act to Increase the Federal Minimum Wage

On May 25, 2007 President Bush signed the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Appropriations Act, 2007 into law. The legislation included the first increase to the federal minimum wage in almost 10 years which will affect U.S. employers and their employees as soon as next month.

The federal minimum wage increase included in the Act will raise the current federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour by \$2.10 in a series of phases over the next few years. The first phase of the increase is scheduled for 60 days after enactment of the bill, July 24, 2007, when minimum wage will be raised to \$5.65 per hour. The second phase of the increase will go into effect 12 months following the first increase, making the federal minimum wage \$6.55 per hour as of July 24, 2008. The final phase will go into effect 24 months after the first increase and will bring the federal minimum wage up to \$7.25 per hour on July 24, 2009.

The current minimum wage for the state of Minnesota is \$6.15 per hour. In general, when state minimum wage laws and federal minimum wage laws differ, the higher standard applies.

Effective new employee orientation programs are ones that combine the necessary, but often tedious, employment paperwork and company policy reviews with coworker introductions, workplace tours, and other training content that is both interesting and important for helping new employees quickly become comfortable with their new corporate environment, aware of their department's role in achieving company goals, and knowledgeable of the specific expectations of their new position.

There are three main stages to a well-executed new employee orientation. From the top-down, they are: general orientation, department orientation, and job specific orientation. Each stage should contain certain key components that are designed to achieve the above mentioned orientation results. Creativity and an element of fun should be used when designing key training components in order to keep trainees' attention and get the lesson across. Key training components should also be planned in advance to show new employees that you have been anticipating their addition to your team and to avoid unproductive, first day downtime that occurs when companies are unprepared to introduce new employees into their role.

General orientation should be executed by a human resources representative and completed by every new employee in the company. The goals of general orientation are to welcome new employees, make them comfortable in their new work environment, and make them aware of communication outlets for any issues that may arise during their employment. The following are a handful of tips for ensuring that general orientation meets these objectives:

(Orientation continued on page 2...)

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1. Send out employee handbooks in advance, and ask new employees to review the handbooks prior to orientation.

Sending employee handbooks out in advance will minimize first-day jitters by giving new employees a preview of your corporate culture and policies. It will also reduce the amount of time spent reviewing the information within employee handbooks during training, which is often a long portion of orientations that puts trainees' attention spans to the test.

2. Introduce new employees to coworkers and the management team.

Introductions let existing staff know that they should make an effort to welcome their new coworkers and help new staff avoid those awkward first week moments when they are asked to meet with a coworker whose name they can't quite put with a face. Photo matching scavenger hunts are a fun and creative way to do new employee introductions.

3. Address typical new employee obstacles and encourage employees to communicate with HR when they face those obstacles.

Discuss employee turnover rates. Touch on the fact that, in general, employee turnover rates reduce after an employee has been with a company for a period of more than six months. Let employees know that HR has an open door policy for communication and troubleshooting any issues that may arise as they adjust to working at your company.

Once general orientation is complete, there should be a more specific department orientation. The goal of department orientation is to go more in-depth about the role an employee's specific department plays in achieving the company's goals. Department orientation should be administered by the head of the department. Department orientation training activities should familiarize new employees more closely with their work area and direct coworkers. The following is a couple of training suggestions for achieving department orientation goals:

1. Familiarize new employees with their department, including: how it interacts with other departments, the specific area in the department where they will be working, and the location of job-related equipment in that area.

Introducing new employees to how departments interact is important for employees to understand which departments they will be working with on a daily basis and how the chain of communication in your company works. Introducing new employees to their specific workspace and the location of equipment in their workspace will help them become productive in their new position more quickly because they will know where to find the tools they need to complete their duties. Have a scavenger hunt to find things within the department that employees will regularly need to use on the job.

2. Re-introduce new employees to the individuals they will be working with most often and most directly.

Setting aside time for new employees to meet and mingle with their direct coworkers will help them learn to communicate with one another more quickly than if they are left to make their own introductions. Hosting a department lunch or snack break is a great way to welcome new employees and allow them to get to know their new coworkers.

Finally, once new employees have been through department orientation, they should go through job specific orientation. The goal of job specific orientation is to clearly outline the expectations and requirements of the new employee's role. Job specific orientation should be administered by a trainer who has experience performing the main tasks of a position and can teach new employees the skills they need to successfully perform their job. Components that should be included in an effective job specific orientation are:

1. Clearly outline job expectations and responsibilities.

Making expectations clear from the start lets new employees know what to expect so there are no unpleasant surprises about what a new job entails.

2. Complete job specific task training and safety training.

Educate employees about all job-related procedures, required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), emergency exit routes, the location of fire extinguishers, and any other information that is required for their position.

3. Identify who to go to with questions.

Let employees know the appropriate individual to go to with questions and emphasize that your organization has an open door policy for all employee questions, problems, feedback or issues.

The above list of tips for creating an effective new employee orientation is not all-inclusive. Your creativity is the limit to effectively assimilating new employees to your workforce. As a result, when faced with creating an effective new orientation program, which requires a great deal of development investment and forethought, it often seems easier and more cost effective for companies to stick with existing orientation programs. However, investing in a program that effectively orients new employees to their positions in a company will have significant productivity and turnover rate benefits that will far outweigh the program costs.