Induction and Orientation

PM:201:10001

OVERVIEW

Employee orientation is an important, but sometimes neglected, part of the hiring process. It is designed both to reduce first-day jitters and to bring newly hired employees into the fold by familiarizing them with their jobs and general and specific company operations, policies, procedures, and products.

When conducted properly, orientation sessions can:

- Instill positive attitudes about the organization.
- Ensure the quicker acclimation of new-hires to their jobs.
- Reduce the likelihood of performance problems stemming from misunderstandings or misconceptions about company programs, policies, or operational methods.
- Pave the way for better communication between employees and their supervisors.
- Promote company loyalty.

The more time and effort an employer puts into helping new-hires get off on the right foot, the less likely it is that workers will leave their jobs and that the employer will have to start the hiring process over again.

The objectives of a successful induction and orientation program should be to:

- Make new-hires feel welcome and at ease in their new work environment.
- Explain what the company is about-how it originated, who its customers and competitors are, how it differs from other organizations, what its structure, vision, values, and short- and long-term objectives are.
- Inform new-hires about company products, operational methods, and policies and procedures.
- Reduce the time required for new-hires to become productive on the job by ensuring that they understand what is expected of them and how they are to do their jobs.
- Communicate benefits and other information.

POINTERS-

Studies show that the first days and weeks on the job can set the tone for how an employee subsequently performs. Instead of merely expecting or assuming that a new-hire will "fit in," management should design a formal orientation program that shapes positive attitudes toward the company and the job. In designing such a program, management should keep these points in mind:

- An effective orientation program requires time. New-hires should not be given a lot of information all at once, especially in their first hours on the job. Information dispersed in segments over several days and as needed is more apt to be remembered and understood. If possible, follow-up sessions with new employees should be conducted after two weeks on the job, and again after one month and after three months, to reinforce a caring attitude, answer questions, and generally determine how the workers are faring.

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- New employees should be encouraged to ask questions about anything they are curious about or do not understand. They should know to whom they can turn for information.

- Personnel/human resources department representatives and supervisors should be trained in orientation techniques and be given specific orientation responsibilities. For example, a P/HR representative should be on hand the first day to greet every new-hire, ensure that necessary employment forms are completed, explain company benefits, and help each employee locate his or her supervisor. Each supervisor should provide a tour of the immediate work area, introduce the new-hire to co-workers, and generally explain nitty-gritty procedures. The supervisor also should review the individual's job description, summarizing primary job responsibilities, clarifying expectations, and going over the first day's schedule.

- Assigning a co-worker to be a "buddy" or "counselor" to a new-hire can help "break the “ice" and ease the new worker's concerns about adjusting to the workplace.

The chapters that follow examine the orientation process (201:10025), describe formal orientation programs (201:10101), and discuss the benefits of conducting orientation follow-up and evaluation activities (201:10201).

THE ORIENTATION PROCESS

PM:201:10025

OVERVIEW

Orientation is the process of pointing new employees toward successful employment and giving them the guidance and information they need to become productive on the job. This process, if well-planned and well-organized, taps into the reservoir of good-will and enthusiasm that new employees bring to their jobs by instilling confidence, stimulating interest in the

company, and helping workers to feel they belong. The "dividends" of successful orientations, according to research studies, are a reduction in turnover, absenteeism, and performance problems; positive attitudes about the organization; production efficiency; and improved communication between supervisors and employees.

POINTERS-

To be successful, an orientation program should be designed to:

- Make a good impression from the first day of employment.
- Speed up the adaptation or acclimation process by making new employees feel comfortable and needed.
- Introduce new-hires to the organization's history, philosophy, goals and objectives, structure, products and services, facilities, and personnel policies, procedures, compensation practices, and benefits.
- Apprise new staff of specific job requirements and of behavior and performance expectations.
- Be an ongoing, cooperative effort, involving not only representatives of the personnel/human resources department, but also supervisors and other managers, co-workers, and even some high-level officers of the company.

This chapter examines the different components of orientation programs and offers some guidelines for conducting the orientation process. Attention is given to supervisors' roles, the kinds of topics that should be covered during orientation, and the use of checklists, worksite tours, and "buddy" systems. Examples of employers' orientation policies are provided. Films and other media that employers may find useful in developing and implementing orientation programs also are noted. Examples of formal orientation programs are described in the chapter beginning at 201:10101; orientation follow-up and evaluation are discussed in the chapter beginning at 201:10201. Sample orientation forms to facilitate the orientation process are provided in *SAMPLE POLICIES AND FORMS*, beginning at 5:701.

PROGRAM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The hallmark of a successful orientation program is advance planning. A program that lacks well-thought-out objectives and direction will only add to the confusion and anxiety that new employees tend to experience during their first days on the job.

Questions To Consider

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In planning new-hire orientation programs, a number of questions need to be considered. Among the more important are these:

- Who should have responsibility for program implementation, updating, evaluation, and general oversight?

- What should the program accomplish? How can these results be measured?

- How can the program best address company-wide and departmental or supervisory objectives?

- Which employee groups should attend an orientation?

- How do differences in new employees' job positions, experience levels, educational levels, ages, and backgrounds affect program content? How can flexibility be built into a comprehensive program to accommodate these differences?

- What specific information must be communicated, and what is the best way to present that information? (For example, can any portion of the information be delivered online, via an intranet?) Should information be provided all at once or over a period of weeks?

- Who should participate in the program? What should be the roles of personnel/human resources staff, training staff, top management, supervisors, current employees?

- When, where, and how often should orientation take place, and how much time will the program require?

- What materials (checklists, policy handbooks, training manuals, brochures, slides, films, etc.) are needed to supplement lectures or demonstrations? Are the materials up-to-date? .

- Is there a sufficient budget to implement a comprehensive program?

- Do state wage-hour laws require that new employees be compensated for attending orientation sessions?

[**Note:** Employers should review their state's wage and hour laws to determine whether they must compensate workers who attend pre-hire orientation meetings. In a class action brought in Washington against The Boeing Co., the state supreme court ruled unanimously that nonexempt workers who were required to attend "pre-employment" orientation sessions for new employees are entitled to compensation under the Washington Minimum Wage Act, but not the higher contractual wage. Executive, administrative, and professional employees are exempt under the law and thus are not entitled to the minimum wage. (*Seattle Professional Engineering Employees Association v. The Boeing* Co., Wash., No. 67519-8, January 27,2000)

[The ruling reversed a 1998 Washington Court of Appeals decision, which held that Boeing must pay nonexempt employees for the orientation sessions according to the pay rate specified in their employment or collective bargaining contracts (Wash. Ct. App., 963 P.2d 204; 4 WH Cases 2d 1609). In reversing, the supreme court explained that the appeals court had relied on an erroneous decision in *United Food & Commercial Workers Union Local 1001 v. Mutual Benefit*

Life Insurance Co. (Wash. Ct. App., 925 P.2d 212,1996; 3 WH Cases 2d 986). That case held that an employee has the right under state minimum wage law to be paid either the regular wage rate or overtime pay. According to the supreme court, the statute directs employers to pay no less than the minimum wage, but it does not guarantee that an employee be paid the regular wage or provide any remedy for an employer's failure to pay for all time worked. "This is consistent with the concept of a minimum wage statute," the court said, reasoning that the WMWA [Washington Minimum Wage Act] "merely sets the floor below which the agreed rate cannot fall without violating the statute." Other provisions of Washington law provide a remedy for unpaid wages owed under a contract; however, the Supreme Court pointed out, the class members in the Boeing case, including those hired into executive, administrative, and professional jobs, at some point dropped their claim under a section of law (Wash. Rev. Code, Sec. 49.52) that probably would have entitled them to their regular rate of pay for orientation. Consequently, the court said, the group is ineligible for any pay for orientation.

[The Boeing employees had argued that a three-year statute of limitations for personal property claims applied to minimum wage claims (Wash. Rev. Code, Sec. 4.16.080(2). Boeing challenged rulings on both remedies and statutes of limitations, maintaining there was a two-year "catch-all" limit (Wash. Rev. Code, Sec. 4.16.130). The Supreme Court decided that a three-year limit applied, but it relied on the limit for implied contracts (Wash. Rev. Code, Sec. 4.16.080(3).

[The Boeing workers also had contended that their job confirmation letters requiring attendance at the orientation sessions without pay were contracts resulting from the company's and workers' mutually mistaken belief that orientation did not constitute "work." The Supreme Court pointed out, however, that some employees expected compensation, while Boeing itself had made clear in the letters that employees would not be on the payroll until the first day of work following orientation.]

Setting Program Objectives

The objectives of an orientation program should be to:

- Reduce first-day jitters and anxiety by helping new-hires feel secure, welcome, and part of an otherwise unfamiliar organization.
- Instill positive attitudes toward work and the organization.
- Promote open communication at all levels, but especially between supervisors and their employees.
- Communicate to new employees not only what the organization offers, but also what it expects in the way of performance and behavior.
- Provide all the basic information new employees need to perform effectively and efficiently on the job.

To accomplish these objectives, it is essential to identify the needs and goals of the organization, the needs of the new-hires themselves, and the needs of the new employees' supervisors. Several ways to identify such needs are to survey current employees and supervisors about their own orientation experiences; take note of information passed along, during exit interviews; and listen to employees' gripes.

Program Duration

The time necessary to conduct an orientation depends on these factors:

- The size and complexity of the organization.
- The number of employees participating in the orientation program.
- The complexity of the new employees' jobs – what and how much information workers need to perform to the organization's standards.

While some formal programs last only a few days, others last a month or longer, with sessions spread out over a period of weeks to prevent information overload. Some sessions, for all new employees, are conducted in large meeting rooms; others, for smaller groups, may be held in a private office.

Program Content

Generally, an orientation program can be broken down into three parts: the welcome, the introduction to the organization, and the introduction to the specific job. An effective program also will include follow-up sessions to answer questions and generally determine how well the new employee is adapting.

Welcome

The welcome, which usually takes place on the first day the new employee reports to work, may include introductions to personnel/human resources staff, the new-hire's co-workers, selected first-line supervisors, and, perhaps, a representative of top management. Often, printed material, such as benefits brochures, organization charts, and policy and procedures manuals, are distributed on the first day.

Introduction to Company

The new-hire's introduction to the organization may occur over a period of days; involve meetings with division directors and product and service managers; and include work-area and facility tours led by a member of the P/HR staff, the new employee's supervisor, or a co-worker or department representative.

Presentations, which may be supplemented with videotapes, slide shows, transparencies, written aids, or question-and-answer sessions, generally will cover:

- Organizational history, philosophy, values, goals and objectives, and management style.

- Nature of the business and its financial status (growth, funding, etc.).

- Company products and services, and how they are provided. . Customer or client profiles.

- Profiles of competitors and their products or services.

- Organizational structure, including reporting relationships, names and positions of personnel who are key to the employee's job, and names of top executives.

- Primary functions of divisions and departments within the organization.

- Traditions, customs, norms, and standards.

- Basic organizational policies, procedures, and programs, compensation practices (pay rates and ranges, overtime, holiday and shift differential pay, deductions, company discounts, job expense reimbursements, pay advances, etc.), and benefits (medical-dental, life, disability, and workers' compensation insurance, holidays and vacations, sick leave, training opportunities, counseling services, etc.).

- Decision making and problem-solving within the organization.

- Health requirements (for example, physical examinations or drug/alcohol testing) or services (for example, exercise facilities or first-aid clinics).

- Company-wide safety rules (procedures to report hazards or accidents, fire prevention and control, use of personal protective equipment, etc.).

- Employee relations (employee and manager rights and responsibilities, supervision, terms and conditions of employment reviews, discipline and grievance procedures, communications, nonunion philosophy, etc.). **[Note:** Some management consultants and labor law attorneys recommend that employers also use orientation to stress that the employer-employee relationship is "at will"; if this approach is taken, the purpose and meaning of the explanation should be clear, and oral or written assurances, promises, or guarantees should be avoided. For a detailed discussion of at-will employment issues, see the chapter beginning at 213:5001.]

- Physical facilities (first-aid stations, parking, employee entrances, food services or cafeteria, restrooms, supply rooms, etc.).

Introduction to the Job

This portion of an orientation usually is delivered by a supervisor. Its contents will vary from department to department and job to job, but generally will include information about:

- Department goals and priorities, organization and structure, and relationship to other departments.
- Office policies and operating procedures, use of office equipment, and supply requisition.
- Pay, hours of work, working conditions, terms and conditions of employment (overtime requirements, extra-duty assignments, breaks or rest periods, lunch time, etc.).
- General expectations and standards for performance and behavior.
- Specific job requirements and expectations based on current job description.
- Performance review requirements.
- Opportunities for training, learning, and advancement.
- Safety precautions.

A supervisor may also conduct a tour of the department, pointing out the location of restrooms, the fire alarm box, lockers, employee entrances or exits, supply rooms, areas for smoking, or other facilities.

Implementation Guidelines

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As a step toward successful program implementation, it's helpful to think of orientation as an ongoing process of learning and training that necessarily changes as employees' needs change. It's also helpful to remember that first impressions count, and that one way to create a positive impression is to treat new-hires as though they were new customers for company products or services.

Following are other helpful guidelines:

- Consider sending written orientation materials (for example, a schedule of orientation activities, benefits booklets, summaries of key policies and procedures) to new employees before they report for work.
- When program activities begin, break the ice by recounting your own first-day jitters

and anxiety; then help employees focus on key matters by telling them what they are expected to learn and retain from the program sessions.

- Divide the information to be covered into manageable, easily understood segments. Save details for another time.

- To prevent information overload, plan sessions to last no more than 90 minutes, and schedule a break or two to give employees a chance to consider what they've heard and formulate questions.

- Give first-line supervisors a prominent and active role in the orientation program, and give them assistance and training to perform that role well.

- Use a "buddy" or mentoring system to give new employees day-to-day support and help them feel at home.

- Supplement oral presentations with checklists, films, videos, transparencies, slides, and other orientation aids.

Use of Orientation Aids

To smooth the implementation of orientation programs, employers use a variety of aids - from checklists, to audio-visual media, to work-area tours, to printed manuals.

Orientation checklists can be useful for planning purposes, and help to ensure that the many details associated with induction and orientation are covered properly and not inadvertently omitted or duplicated. A checklist basically is a guide for implementing the orientation program; it indicates each activity to be performed, when each activity is to take place, and who is responsible for conducting the activity. Some orientation checklists also list paperwork to be completed or new-hire forms to be submitted to the personnel department; others contain a statement, to be signed by the employee, acknowledging that all the items on the checklist have been covered.

If checklists are used, copies with names and dates should be distributed to all participants (in the orientation program, including the new employee, who should check off each activity as it is completed. At the conclusion of the orientation program, copies of the completed checklist, which should be initialed and dated by the employee, should be sent to the orientation program administrator, the employee's supervisor, and the human resources department, which should place its copy in the employee's personnel file. [Note: For examples of orientation checklists, see the section in *SAMPLE POLICIES AND FORMS beginning at 5:701.]*

Films frequently are used in orientation programs, to show employees at work, explain work processes or products, or introduce senior management. Films and other audio-visual media, such as slide/sound programs, can communicate effectively - in words, pictures, and music-what an organization expects of its employees and what employees can expect of the organization. They can stimulate interest and generally create a positive atmosphere for learning

and adapting to the organization.

If used, films should be factual, not propagandistic. Slide/sound programs should be updated as necessary. Videotaped messages from top executives should be played during new employee orientations only if the company president or some other representative of top management cannot appear in person. A personal welcome always is preferable to a filmed introduction, which can make executives seem remote or out-of-touch.

Various printed materials- mostly handbooks and procedural or instructional manuals, but also insurance and benefits brochures, directories, and organizational charts-are distributed during orientation programs. Such handouts should not be used in lieu of, but to supplement, discussions of important orientation topics. If distributed as part of a large information packet, orientation materials should have a uniform format and style; the different parts can be color-coded for ease of reference during orientation sessions.

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If a policy and procedures manual is distributed and the company wants to make sure that new employees have read and understood the contents, the personnel department might want to have new-hires complete a brief questionnaire. Responses that indicate a problem in understanding can then be discussed.

Work-area tours, also known as "window tours," which may be conducted by a member of the human resources department, the new employee's supervisor, or a "buddy" or "sponsor" of the new-hire, can be helpful in orienting an employee to frequently used areas and in clarifying the relationship between the worker's job and other tasks performed elsewhere in the organization.

To be effective, a facility tour should be planned with touring employees' jobs in mind-that is, the tour should expose the new-hires to other work units with which the employees will come into frequent contact as they perform their respective jobs.

Besides keeping the needs of the new-hires in mind, the person responsible for planning and leading the tour should:

- Make sure that visitors' access to the areas included in the proposed tour is not restricted for security reasons.

- Identify the staff with whom the new employees will be working. Ask those workers if they can be present on the day proposed for the tour, and whether they can give a demonstration or help explain a work process or function. Call the employees several days before the tour to remind them of the tour date and time, and offer to assist them in preparing for their demonstrations.

- Become familiar with the tour route in advance, noting fire escapes, emergency exit doors, or exit stairways; employee telephones; mail boxes for employee use; or other

facilities that should be pointed out as the tour progresses. Also, take note of noise in the work areas, so that a demonstration or explanation is not scheduled in an area where it will be difficult to be heard.

- Keep the tour group small - five or fewer employees. Scheduling too many employees for a tour makes it difficult to meet the needs of particular members in the group. Too large a group also means too long a tour, during which disruptions and excessive noise are likely.

Orientation Preceding Start Date

Where the period between hire and start dates is lengthy, some companies get a jump on formal orientation by sending new-hires a variety of written materials, some of which ordinarily would be distributed on the first day of work. The materials may range from a welcoming letter from the new supervisor, to brochures on the company's founding and history, to organizational and departmental charts, to product and service descriptions, to copies of the employee newsletter, annual report, or policies and procedures handbook, to memoranda about current company activities. Often, a preliminary schedule of orientation sessions is included. Sometimes, a proposed schedule of job training sessions also is provided. If new-hires are transferees and unfamiliar with the area where the company is located, information packets may contain descriptions of local services (public transportation brochures or lists of libraries, shopping centers, parks, churches, hospitals, etc.) or community events. Information may be sent all at once or over a period of weeks leading up to the start date.

This pre-employment approach to orientation is beneficial in a number of ways. Regularly sending correspondence and other materials in advance of the start date can help keep new employees interested in the company; reassure the workers that the company is glad to have them on board; and help reduce anxiety about fitting into the organization. Employees are apt to feel more comfortable and at home when they do begin working and, because of their positive first impressions, are also more likely to stay employed by the firm.

First-Day Reception

PM:201:10031

The first day on the job generally is a day most employees remember, and it should be viewed as a special opportunity to create a positive, lasting impression of the company. To ensure that a good impression is made, attention should be given to the way new employees are received on the day they report for work:

- The company's receptionist should be notified that a new employee is expected on such-and-such a day. The receptionist should know to whom the employee is to report, and be able to locate that individual immediately upon the new-hire's arrival.

- The employee's immediate supervisor or the department head should be present to greet the employee and make necessary introductions to co-workers.

- The supervisor or the supervisor's designated representative should have planned the work day so that time is available to spend with the new employee. The supervisor should not be distracted by routine chores, meetings, or other concerns.

- Following introductions to co-workers, the supervisor should review activities planned for the morning and afternoon. It's helpful to have a general plan to guide discussion, which should focus on the department's responsibilities and the employee's duties within the department, as well as day-to-day procedures. The supervisor should be careful not to overwhelm the employee with details.

- If paperwork must be completed on the first day, the supervisor should personally escort the employee to the human resources department and introduce the worker to the appropriate staff member.

- At a minimum, first-day orientation sessions should cover basic but essential information - to whom the employee reports and with whom the employee will work; what the employee is expected to do; when the employee is to arrive at and leave from work; where the employee's work area is located; how forms, such as timesheets, are to be completed; how keys, security passes, or identification cards can be obtained; why certain procedures must be followed. In addition, information should be provided on the location of fire escapes, medical assistance, restrooms, health facilities, and the cafeteria; instructions on telephone use; paycheck procedures; appropriate dress; and information resources outside the department whom the employee can contact. Information sessions should be divided into segments lasting from 30 minutes to no more than 90 minutes, and technical presentations should be kept to a minimum.

- Lunch with a personnel department representative or the immediate supervisor and perhaps one or two co-workers should be arranged.

- Once the introductory sessions have been completed, the employee should be escorted back to his or her department and reintroduced to the supervisor. The supervisor should then conduct a wrap-up of the day's activities, summarizing the important points covered, answering the employee's questions, and reviewing plans for the next day.

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