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Grabbing The First Opportunity

TIME and time again I hear horror stories about how companies continue with dated, inappropriate or ineffective new employee orientation programmes. These stories are particularly disturbing because new employee orientation is often one of the first – and best – opportunities that you have to reach and engage your employees.

This is not an understatement. There have been several studies that indicate that the time between when employees accept the offer to join a new company and when they actually start at the organisation is when their pride, excitement and commitment are at the highest during their tenure. So why not maximise this with a programme that bridges their enthusiasm for the organisation with their employment experience?

Orientation is often one of the first official interactions an employee will have with the company. Remember the saying “first impressions matter most”? This is your first chance at making a positive and lasting impression on your employees. The ways in which you structure an onboarding programme can also be an important step in increasing employee engagement, and minimising the time it takes employees to ramp up for contributing to organisational success. And finally, companies should use orientation as a chance to strengthen their reputation as a company and an employer of choice. When an orientation programme maintains (or even increases) the employees’ enthusiasm for the company, they are going to talk about it with their families, friends and others who may one day seek to join your company.

So if you are contemplating refreshing or changing your approach to orientation, consider these 10 tips for strengthening your programme:

1) *Do not just focus on HR information:* Admittedly there is often much HR-related paperwork that needs to be shared on an employee’s first day, but there is arguably, much more important information that can be included.

First Impressions Matter Most

According to Allen Putman (Senior Vice President, Insidedge), new employee orientation is often one of the first – and best – opportunities that you have to reach and engage your employees



FEW THINGS ARE MORE BORING THAN SITTING THROUGH A never-ending presentation; effective programmes utilise variety

2) *Get the basics right:* New employees will be making many assumptions about your organisation and how you value them by what they experience in those first critical hours or days on the job. Make sure your session embodies the culture of your organisation, and that any folders or other products are aligned with the look and feel of your brand. Things like building access badges and computers are a given to have in place, but try to have other, less expected things like business cards, notepads and other things ready when they get to their desk. These little details reinforce that you value the employees and their joining your organisation.

3) *Make sure your senior leaders are visible:* Ideally you would have senior

leaders present at some point in the orientation to reinforce their commitment to new employees and introduce new hires to the people leading the organisation. This may not always be possible, so consider creating videos that feature the leaders welcoming employees and highlighting what they think is most unique about working at the company.

4) *Educate new hires about the business:* Highlight your history, successes, innovations, products, marketplace positioning, competitors and business plans.

5) *Orientation should not be “one moment in time”:* Try to resist this temptation. Certainly there is one session that will be the bulk of your activities, but try to find ways to extend orientation. Have ongoing events, lunch sessions and other

activities that continue educating your people about your business. This way they are continually learning about the organisation and increasingly becoming better ambassadors for the company. Also, work with the employees’ managers and teams to build additional onboarding activities that help them better understand their day-to-day duties and expectations. At our company, we organise a series of one-on-one and small group meetings over the employees’ first two weeks to help them better under-

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to help employees better understand the business, opportunities and competitive threats. Do not be afraid to include these types of programmes to support product quality and compliance as part of your orientation. If you have already spent the money and put in the time and effort to create a strong programme for existing employees, think about the new people who join down the road and will not have the benefit of those learnings.

8) *Make it interesting:* Few things are more boring than sitting through a

never-ending PowerPoint presentation. Effective programmes use a variety of media (videos, web and product demonstrations) alongwith elements like plant/facility tours, group exercises and leader-led discussions.

9) *Listen to employees:* If you are thinking of making changes to your programme, the best place to start is with your existing employees. Pull together small focus groups and ask people about their experiences in orientation and what

recommendations they would have to strengthen your efforts. You should also ask for immediate feedback from new hires as they complete the orientation process. This can be conducted by a brief survey at the end of orientation or a few weeks after their start date in hopes of understanding how the programme benefitted them and what they would recommend improving or changing.

10) *Use buddies and mentors:* One of the best ways to extend the reach and influence of an orientation programme is to assign new hires a ‘buddy’ - someone they can easily turn to with questions or requests. Even the best orientation programme cannot make a new employee 100 per cent effective from day one, so having a buddy helps minimise angst and increase comfort. If the buddy is from another part of the organisation or on a different team, that may be better since he/she is removed from that employee’s day-to-day reality. And finally, one of the best ways to retain employees after orientation is to make sure they feel as though someone is helping manage their career – an assigned mentor can serve this role and will certainly be appreciated by the employee.

What does your orientation programme say about your organisation? Are you helping employees understand your culture by telling stories about employee successes and contributions? Are you sharing your organisational history in a way that builds pride? Are you highlighting your executives in a way that increases their visibility and builds confidence in the leadership team? Are your employees working with their managers and teams to quickly get a grip on their role, that of the team and how each contributes to the company’s success?

If you just answered “no” to any of these questions, it may be time to rethink your current programme and look at new ways to maintain the enthusiasm new hires have and increase their engagement from day one.

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