

Getting Off on the Right Foot with a New Employee

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Now that we've gone through a search process, we've found the person we want to hire. Do I need a contract? What are my next steps? I'm concerned because we've seen turnover in the past, with people leaving, and with us having to let people go. I believe that we can do some things to get better at this.

The first year a new employee is with a company can be a challenging time, for both employer and individual. There are things you can do to make this year go more smoothly for both of you. Making the effort to do things right can help to improve the longevity of the employee, increase performance and output. Perhaps most important, handling the first year well can relieve stress and increase satisfaction for everyone involved.

An employee's first year starts with the offer letter, followed by an introduction to the company. Once you've hired, and the candidate shows up for work, your job of retention really begins! Review the job description. Decide on training – company overall and job specific. Training goes on intensely for anywhere from a few days to several months, depending on the technical nature of the position and entry level skill of the new employee. Schedule regular reviews to make sure you are both on track and communicating. Start with informal reviews at first

– followed by a formal 6 month review. Looking for more details? Read on.

The transition from hiring to employee starts with your offer. Do it well. This step sets the tone for the employment relationship, and speaks volumes about how your company will work with its employees. Convey authority, command and control, interest in the well being of the employee, decision making skill, and a sense of future possibility with your firm. The job offer needs to specify income, benefits, position for which the person is being hired, and starting date, at a minimum. Be formal enough in your offer that the candidate knows you take this seriously. Ask the candidate to sign a letter of acceptance, which further serves to formalize the relationship. Consider sending some promotional information on the company to the candidate. If there is a long gap between offer and start date, set up check-in points, where you and the candidate plan to talk. Use check-ins to keep the candidate interested, excited, and focused on the new opportunity.

You may want to consider a contract, especially for key employees. Contracts are generally put to use when things are not going so well, so be sure that you can live with whatever is specified. Use a contract to help protect the firm in the case of trade secrets, confidential client

information, prospect lists. If you want to have a non-compete agreement, be aware that it must be reasonable, and cannot prohibit the employee from making a living. The downside of a contract is that it can also make it more difficult to fire an employee who is not performing. Ask your attorney to review anything you draft, before you send it to the candidate.

When it comes to the first day on the job, be sure to have a copy of a job description in hand, and be ready to review it with your new employee. Discuss how the employee is qualified to do the job, reinforce your belief the employee can do the job, and talk about any training that might be needed. Ask the employee for input, and set aside time to answer questions. Reserve a few hours for employment paperwork, a tour of the company, and introductions to other employees. Include time to take breaks. Don't try and pack in too much, as any new employee is likely to be on overload, absorbing new information every time he or she turns around. Expect that over the course of the first couple weeks, you will have to repeat yourself. Remember, while you know the company inside and out, your new employee does not, and is trying to catch up to your level.

Define how training will unfold over the first few weeks on the job. Consider both formal and

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informal training. Pair your new employee with two or three other people, who you can trust to be mentors, sources of information, and general ambassadors for the company. Think through who the employee will go to for information, advice and direction when you are not available. Try to limit communication break downs, especially in the first week, as this is the time a new employee is vulnerable to second thoughts. Schedule time at the end of the day, and the end of the week, to check in on how things are going. Encourage an open discussion of what went well, and what didn't go so well. Use that information to fill in the next week's activities.

Focus new employees on the job they will be doing, as quickly as possible. Give them something tangible to accomplish, which is likely to build confidence, within a few days of starting. Evaluate how well the candidate does each day, and keep a written scorecard, with notes, that you can refer to as time goes on. If you see a candidate struggling from day one, and your gut says there is a problem, don't let it go on very long. It is possible that the information flow, or training program, isn't working, but the candidate can be salvaged if you make some changes. It is also possible you mis-hired, in which case you need to take action to resolve the situation quickly.

Within a few weeks of hiring, agree on the content of any

reviews. Think about how much progress is expected, and how much room for error there will be. Try to be specific and tangible with your standards. And keep referring to them, by scheduling time to check-in, at first weekly, then monthly, then quarterly.

Be ready to re-assure new employees that they are on track, and you are confident they will continue to get better – so long as that's the case. Review performance progress each month with your new employee. Make life better for new employees by recognizing what they are doing well, and talking about where they need to improve. Show your appreciation for the effort the employee is making, by taking an hour out of your day to give feedback.

Looking for a good book? Try *2600 Phrases for Effective Performance Reviews: Ready-to-use Words And Phrases That Really Get Results*, by Paul Falcone.

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