

New People on Board

07/30/07

I've just hired 4 new people. How do I get them up to speed, and not go crazy in the process? 1 will be in sales, 2 will work in the office, and 1 will be out in the field working directly with clients. I'm concerned that I may have bitten off more than I can chew. Help!

Four at once is a lot, especially since they're in all different areas. You need a solid game plan, in order to do this well. Remember that the price of doing this poorly is spending a lot of money short term on a new person, who doesn't work out, and who leaves before you make your money back!

You want to increase each person's chance of success. Job descriptions, accountabilities and outcomes, training and process manuals, schedules of activities and next steps, assignments to specific accounts, clarifying reporting relationships and lines of authority, and a method for each person to report on progress will help. Let's get started.

There are some things you're going to want to clarify upfront, in order to increase your new hires' understanding of what's in front of them. Put in writing what the job entails. Define milestones, such as what they should be able to do, or produce, or what they should understand, within 3 months, 6 months, 9 – 12 months.

After 3 months they should know the names of customers, be able to accurately describe the company's products or services and benefits, complete basic work accurately without supervision, and name all of the people with whom they work. After 6 months, they should function semi-autonomously most of the time, know who to go to in the company any time they have questions, get work out the door correctly without supervision, and look for additional ways to contribute. In most cases, they should be at or above breakeven, meaning they contribute enough to revenue and profit that they pay for themselves. After 9 – 12 months, they should have mastered most, if not all, of their job, and should be making a strong positive contribution to cash flow.

Give each person a job description, to get them started. If you haven't had job descriptions in writing up to now, you can get started by asking the last person who did the job to jot some things down. Review and add to the list, knowing how you want the job to change going forward.

I find it's easier to write job descriptions in outline form. Think in terms of what the person has to produce as a result of what they're doing. Once you have an outline on paper, give it to your new hires and ask them to suggest changes at the 3 month, 6 month and 9-12 month reviews.

Their feedback will give you information on how they see the job, and help you figure out if they're on track.

If you don't already have training and process manuals, put together a shell that you can give new people when they start. Ask new hires to assist with the manuals, as they go through training. Process manuals describe how your company does what it does. Training manuals describe the steps people go through to learn how to do their part. Start with both in 1 document, then split them into 2 documents if they get too big and complex.

On a weekly basis you're going to want to be on top of what the new people are doing. Ask them to prepare a list of next steps that they're working to accomplish. Put due dates on each next step, and check off when things are done, or re-date items that are past due. The person's direct supervisor will want to meet with each new employee weekly to review and add to / update the list. Keep copies in a notebook, so that progress can be tracked over time.

Make sure new hires understand reporting relationships. Give them an organization chart. Be sure they meet regularly with their direct supervisor. If there are problems or questions, keep an open door to your office, but be careful not to undercut the authority of their supervisor. If



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everyone reports to you, rethink your model. The more people who report to you, the more work on your plate. You can only effectively manage 6-8 people.

Use job descriptions as a foundation for reporting on progress. Have a formal, sit down, written review quarterly. A good review can be completed in 30 – 60 minutes and provides a written record, with specific feedback, that everyone can refer to later. Include suggestions for improvement, recognize where mastery has been accomplished and agree on where to focus next.

Looking for a good book? Try *New Employee Orientation: Bringing People On Board Successfully* by Charles M. Cadwell.

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