

A guide to the care and feeding of new employees ...The first 90 days

"You may have the loftiest goals, the highest ideals, the noblest dreams, but remember this, nothing works unless you do." Nido Qubein

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey, AS

Adding someone new to your staff is very much like a first date. Both parties are a little anxious and eager to please, and sometimes it turns out the same way. However, there are a few guidelines that I have found timely and helpful, both as a manager and as a new hire.

As an employer, you have a lot riding on the decision to hire. Money and time invested aside, your reputation and company is on the line, along with the working relationships already established with your current team. **It can easily cost you up to six months wages to train an employee in the extra time spent supervising, training and in lost time or mistakes.**

As a new hire, you too have some risk, in the time invested to learn new products or services and build a new client base. Wouldn't it be a good idea to work at creating a partnership that allows both parties to win? With the major investment of 'time', I would hope both parties would be open to working together in making it a successful partnership.

One of my basic foundations for success in any partnership is to be clear and realistic in laying out your new role and its related responsibilities. Nothing frustrates as much as not knowing what to do or looking dumb when you have missed something that everyone else knows but forgot to let you in on the secret."

Being realistic in laying out a time-line for learning and assimilating" before establishing firm goals is important too. This needs to be tailored to the expertise and aptitude of each new hire. Employers, tough as it seems, "you treat them all the same by treating them different."

As the employer, you should establish an environment to encourage questions and asking for help. This saves time, frustration, mistakes and helps build a positive relationship that will make your partnership grow. To get the most out of your latest hire, follow these hints.

1. **Define the position carefully.** What are the new hire's responsibilities - in each area of their position? To be effective, what skills, knowledge and attitudes must be displayed? Be as clear and specific as you can. It will set the tone and foundation for eventual success for yourself and your new employee.
2. **Hire selectively.** Hiring people who have pre-training reduces your own time and resource investment. Investigate who trains people with the skills you need and call them.
3. **Be specific about where each employee needs improvement.** Can the lack of

performance be fixed through training? (Sometimes it's motivation or personal problems.)

Clearly communicate these areas and offer your support. Don't be afraid to spell out the consequences if the deficiency in their performance remains unchanged.

4. **Provide ongoing support and encouragement.** Assist employees in selecting and undertaking training and professional development. Investing in their growth often returns large dividends.
5. **Measure and communicate results.** Don't be afraid to hold your staff accountable for training outcomes, reasonable expectations and responsibilities that have been well communicated. Check to see if training has reduced or eliminated the employee's skill or knowledge deficiency and/or the employee is equipped to make a better contribution to your company. Do this in a timely and constructive manner. Set aside regular uninterrupted time to discuss training and performance issues. You don't have to wait until the 90-grace period has expired to ask for changes in performance or to offer critiques.

If you are selective in who you hire and are diligent in the time you invest together, you will see your investment pay handsomely in contributing productive employees who add value to your firm and use their new skills for everyone's benefit.

One training tip would be to standardise as much of your business, its procedures, systems and 'special challenges or activities.' This will be a great help in getting new hires up to speed. This is also a great way to keep existing employees current. **Make sure it is a work in progress.** Enlist your current staff in its creation and upkeep. This is a great way to build and maintain your working relationship and foster a sense of partnership.

But what happens if you are a seasonal employer and your training time is shorter? How do you make the best of your training time and maximise your investment? How do I hire good staff? These are important factors to keep in mind when you are interviewing. Making sure you pick those open to work and learn on the job is important; but, after they are on board then what?

Jeremy Pinder from Australia said, "Because I am in the recruitment business I get calls on a regular basis asking, "where can I find good staff". It annoys me, but I just tell them that they are asking the wrong question. What they should be asking is "how do I take the staff that I've got and make them better?" Good change of perspective with great results!

My friend and fellow speaker Bill Marvin, The Restaurant Doctor from Washington had this to say, "You already have the kind of people you need. If they are not performing up to your standards, whose fault is it? They asked for a job, you gave it to them! You need to look at who is responsible for performance? If you place the burden on the staff, you are at their mercy. It is not going to change until they change. However, if you accept that your job -- maybe your most important job -- is staff development, then training and performance become YOUR responsibility . . . and that you can do something about! "

My challenge to you as employers is to look at the cost of having untrained, or poorly trained staff in lost business, or unhappy customers. **How much is each customer worth to your business?**

In my customer service seminars I have my audiences work this out -- then I hit them with the truth -- based on proven statistics each unhappy customer costs you the value of sixteen. The unhappy customer doesn't return, he tells at least 10 people about his unsatisfactory experience and doesn't tell the 5 people about a happy experience as would be expected.

Spending time and money in protecting your investment and the reputation of your business is a good investment. It is tough to look at spending the time training people who may only be with you for a season. But if you are honest with yourself, you will see it is an investment that must be made if your business is to grow and flourish.

Taking advantage of training systems is a good investment. One thing I've learned is the importance of not reinventing the wheel. Check out what is available from local agencies and correspondence training programs. There are programs for employers and employees in various Industries.

For example, The Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council has developed a comprehensive series of training programs videos and materials. They are a great source of standardizing your training and staff skill sets. Contact them at (613) 213-6949 or cthrc@cthrc.ca for information on how you can access these materials or your local Tourism Education Council.

McGraw-Hill Ryerson has some good training materials as well. 1-800-565-5758
orders@mcgrawhill.ca

Looking for ways of working together would be a good idea too! How about working with owners in similar businesses to cooperate on staff training? I'm sure you can see reasons to justify joining forces in training staff in areas of common interest. It may be a bit of a challenge to get past the normal competitive urges.

Good luck in your training efforts -- your success depends on the decisions and actions you make in this regard. I hope this has been a helpful guide to making that success happen!

If I can be of assistance to you or you have some feedback or success stories to share, please email me at: <mailto:bob@ideaman.net> I'd be glad to hear from you.

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