

Successful Supervisor Part 43

Onboarding Tips

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Think back to the day you took your first job. It makes no difference what the nature of that job was. You had to go through an acclimation process when joining the new entity. If you are like me, you remember a lot of detail about those first few hours. It is similar to when you meet a new individual for the first time; you make an initial judgment very quickly.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Blink* describes human ability to put together a mosaic of “Thin Slices” of data to form an initial conclusion about a new environment. Malcolm says people can form an initial judgment in three seconds.

The first few hours of a person’s employment are pivotal for good contact and information sharing. It is really up to the supervisor to manage the transition process so the employee gets off to a great start. The remainder of this article contains some tips that may be helpful for supervisors to consider.

1. Outline duties and goals

The new employee needs to know precisely the goals of the organization and what he or she is expected to do. It is amazing that many supervisors give kind of a vague description of what is done in their area and expect the new employee to pick up his or her specific contribution almost by osmosis. A hands on tour and discussion with existing employees is often helpful right at the start.

2. Make it a formal process

Since the new person is, hopefully, going to be an important part of the future of the team, it is worth it to invest in some organization of information for the start of this relationship. I do not advocate scripting every word that is said or making a video introduction by the most senior person, but it is good to think through and outline the points to cover during orientation.

3. Don’t be Boring

So many organizations make the mistake of sitting new employees down in front of a “trainer” for several days, and the trainer works off a script or set of PowerPoint slides. After about the first 30 minutes, the new employees are bored to tears and not paying

any attention to the information being given. What a horrible way to begin a new relationship with employees.

4. Describe your culture and the most important points to remember

Culture is how the organization thinks and acts as a whole. Make sure the new employees fully understand how they will interface with their new peers, customers, suppliers, and management. You might even make up some brief role play activities that illustrate these important concepts.

5. Encourage questions and be transparent

New employees are usually a little shy about asking questions. They don't want to appear to be dumb by asking questions that would be obvious to seasoned employees, so they may be a bit hard to draw out. Having a set of "Frequently Asked Questions" is a good way to get some information transferred and to get the new employees to open up and realize that the only dumb questions are the ones they are too shy to ask.

6. Explain the Values

The most important thing for the new employee to pick up is the values for the organization. I know several organizations that spend significant emphasis having the CEO explain the values in detail and share some stories on how the values are put into practice in daily activity. I think it is also helpful for the supervisor and some other employees to share what the values mean to them personally.

7. Do Some Experiential Training

Don't let new employees sit around all day listening to a stream of managers. Build in some time for people to interact with other workers and just talk. The general rule is to have not more than 30 minutes of training time without some kind of a mental break. Include practice time outside the classroom to break up the time and give people some variety.

8. Ask the employees what additional points they want to cover

Getting the trainees involved in selecting the content is a great way to keep them engaged in the process. Since the trainers are intimately familiar with the jargon of the organization, it is not uncommon for new recruits to be in a total fog with the unique acronyms that seem obvious to the trainers.

I recommend that each new employee be given an alphabetized list of acronyms used by the organization. Once you start listing the acronyms, you will be amazed how many there are. I recall joining one organization and was quite confused about what they were talking about for several months.

9. Include on the job, hands-on training

It is one thing to sit in a conference room and listen to the functions being described by a trainer and something completely different when actually performing the tasks. I like to assign a “work buddy” for several days or weeks so the employee can perform tasks under the watchful eye of a seasoned veteran.

Make sure the new employee not only knows the goals of the organization but is familiar with how progress toward those goals is measured. Have the new employee sit in on a formal progress review, if possible.

All of these suggestions seem pretty logical, but you would be amazed how few organizations do a great job with bringing new talent onboard. Since the employees, and how they perform, are really the lifeblood of any organization, skimping on their initial education makes no sense at all.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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