

The First 30 Days - Orienting New Employees

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Introduction

You have only one opportunity to make a good first impression on new employees. The first day that a new person is on the job provides you many "teachable moments." Nearly all employees want to get off to a good start. The good start depends more on orientation than on how much work the person does the first few hours on the job.

Help **every** new person get off to a good start. Orientation is as important for the part-time high school worker as for the new full-time employee. Even a relative or nearby neighbor known to you for years will benefit from careful orientation.

Most every employer anticipates some obvious questions. "Where should I park?" "What time do you want me here tomorrow?" "What do you want me to do?" Orientation should go beyond answering these obvious questions. Here is the opportunity to convince each new person that he or she is important to you and to the farm.

Orientation as Socialization

Orientation is the introduction of a new employee to the industry, the farm, the requirements of the job, the social situation in which he or she will be working and the farm's culture. The farm's culture includes its values (shared beliefs), history, tradition and norms of behavior expressed as dos and don'ts. Orientation is socialization. A new employee who is socialized understands the key points about a farm and its people and why things are done in particular ways.

Orientation should create an initial favorable impression. Key ingredients of the good first impression include sufficient information about when and where to report for work, paperwork handled efficiently and friendly people to guide new employees through the orientation.

Orientation actually starts with the advertisement of the position, the interview, and the job description given the new employee. Being businesslike in the hiring process is important. A written job description and written offer with the conditions of employment help set a positive tone.

Orientation should encourage acceptance by other employees. Introductions, informal interaction, a tour of the facilities with short stops to hear people talk about their jobs and history of employment at the farm, and opportunity for the new employees to ask questions all can help people gain acceptance.

Planning the Orientation

After a person is hired and before the first day of work, you need to decide:

1. Who will be in charge of orienting the new person?
2. What will be the content of the orientation?
3. How will the orientation mesh with job training?

Charge one person with planning and conducting the orientation. Other people, including employees, can be involved even though responsibility rests with one person. Orientation should lead smoothly to the start of job training.

The person responsible for orientation should receive training and guidance from the top managers at the farm. Dumping orientation on an already overworked person with instructions to “show our new person around” rarely leads to accomplishment of orientation goals.

Content of Orientation

The specific content of the orientation depends on the size and complexity of the farm. Following is a list of items for you to consider in planning the details of your orientation program:

1. Farm Characteristics
 1. History of the farm
 2. Mission statement and goals for the farm
 3. Management team
 4. Layout of facilities, buildings and land
 5. Overview of what the farm produces and production processes
 6. Key characteristics of the industry
 7. Farm’s culture
 8. Role of employees

Note→ The owner of the business and the new employee’s immediate supervisor handling these topics together can make a lasting positive impression.

2. Personnel Policies
 1. Policies and rules about such things as attendance, breaks, scheduling work, use of equipment and tools, and courtesy to other employees
 2. Probationary period
 3. Disciplinary practices
 4. Safety procedures

Note → An employee handbook can cover many of these points. Employees can be asked to read the handbook and to discuss later with their immediate supervisor any questions they may have.

3. Compensation and Benefits

1. Pay and paydays
2. Vacation amount and scheduling
3. Sick leave
4. Insurance benefits
5. Retirement program

Note→The details of some of these benefits are best left for discussion at a later date.

4. Introductions

1. To owner/operator
2. To supervisor
3. To coworkers
4. To people who often visit the farm, e.g., neighbors, service people, close relatives, veterinarian

5. Job Duties

1. Where the work will be done
2. Specific tasks
3. Safety first principles and the importance of safety equipment
4. Relationship of the job to other work on the farm

Orientation Tips

1. Have a detailed orientation plan, stick to the planned content, and start and end on time.
2. Put the new employee at ease before jumping into the heavy parts of the orientation.
3. Include the owner or one of the top managers of the farm to help impress on new employees that they are important to the business.
4. Encourage questions.
5. Keep first-day paperwork to a minimum. Postpone as much of the paperwork as possible until late in the first week of employment. A bored “paperwork sergeant” shoving pages and pages of forms at a new employee hardly creates a positive first impression of your

farm. Too many new employees are asked the first morning on the job to sign numerous forms they don't understand.

6. Provide a glossary of farm terms. Include the everyday words that have special meaning on your farm.
7. Save a few minutes at the end of the first day to encourage the new employee, ask for questions and again emphasize his or her importance to the business.
8. Save at least 15 minutes at the end of the first week for the last phase of the orientation program. Encourage questions. Review progress made during the first week. Outline what will happen during the next few weeks. Send the person home feeling good about being part of your farm.

Concluding Note

Your reaction to these suggestions may be, "It would be nice but.... I don't have time for this stuff because we got work to do," or "Only big farms need to worry about these things", or "I hire people to work not learn the history of my farm."

You will do better with happy, positive and enthusiastic people than with people who are just there to do a job and go home. Well-planned and conducted orientation helps people get off to a good start. It increases their chances of being happy with their jobs and positive about you and your business. That opportunity to make a good first impression never can be repeated.