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MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

## **Leadership #17**

### **An Example New Employee Orientation Program**

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#### **Introduction**

Elsewhere we have described the value of a new employee orientation program that is consciously designed to enroll a new employee in the organization's desired culture and values<sup>1</sup>. We have also suggested guidelines and principles for the design of such a program<sup>2</sup>. In this article we will provide a specific, detailed example of such a program that can be used as a template, starting point, or source of ideas for a program for your organization.

Because we wanted to put the complete outline of the program in one document, this article is significantly longer than is typical of *The Inquiry*.

#### **Purpose of the Program**

The example program described below was initially designed to be part of a culture change engagement<sup>3</sup>, although the program remained essentially unchanged after the new culture had been established. The program's purpose was to enroll new employees into owning the target culture, and thus have them be supportive of the culture change. The program's design consisted of 24 elements divided into seven sections, implemented chronologically.

#### **Section 1: Program Development**

##### 1. Create the organization's vision, mission, and strategic plan<sup>4</sup>

The vision, mission, and strategic plan provided a business case and rationale for determining the desired cultural values. For example, a mission and strategic plan that called for customized products and extraordinary customer service would likely require a culture that emphasized service and integrity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Leadership #15: The Lost Opportunity of New Employees*

<sup>2</sup> *Leadership #16: Principles of a New Employee Orientation Program*

<sup>3</sup> This engagement is described in *Case Study #2: The Case of the Opportunistic Orientation*

<sup>4</sup> For more information on vision, mission, and strategic plans, see the Strategic Planning Series of *The Inquiry*.



## 2. Describe the target culture needed to support the strategic plan

As illustrated above, the target culture is derived from the mission, vision, and strategic plan. In the case of the example being used for this article, the company was an international franchisor whose strategic plan called for providing an extraordinary quality of service to the franchisees, and through them to their clients. To fulfill this plan the company's leadership determined that the needed target culture could be described as follows:

- *Integrity*: Tell the truth, do what you say, be true to yourself.
- *Unreasonable results*: The company is not going for ordinary or reasonable results, but is committed to producing something unreasonable - results not given by the past or by present circumstances.
- *Extraordinary service*: Everyone who is affected by the company, including employees, customers, vendors, etc., experiences being well-served.
- *World-class quality*: Good enough never is.
- *Fun*: People enjoy what they are doing.
- *Making a difference*: What the company does produces a significant benefit and legacy to the world, and every person associated with the company experiences that their life is making a difference.
- *Work as a team*: Everyone is equally important. The company's goals cannot be accomplished by any one individual.
- *Open communication*: Straight and clear communication is of primary importance. There is no gossip<sup>5</sup> or hidden agendas. Anyone can communicate with anyone about anything<sup>6</sup>.
- *Certainty*: Everyone interacting with the company experiences a maximum level of certainty about the future, e.g., what is going to happen, what people are promising, etc.

## 3. Determine the time span of the program

The example program began with the employee's first contact as a prospective hire, and continued through the selection process, to the offer letter, and to the end of the new employee's third day.

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<sup>5</sup> This was considered of such importance that gossiping was listed in the company's employee manual as a termination offense, even though it was well known that this was legally unenforceable.

<sup>6</sup> One of the actions the senior managers made to "walk the talk" was promising each other to "tell each other that which they didn't want to tell each other."



#### 4. Establish accountability for the program

The company had previously established a Management Committee as the entity ultimately accountable for the company<sup>7</sup>. The program was set up by directive of the Management Committee, with the President of the company as the titular project manager<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the accountability was designed to ensure that all senior managers, and through them all lower level managers, were supportive of the program.

### **Section 2: The Selection Process**

#### 5. Design communications messages for first contact with prospects

The program began with a prospect's first contact with the company. All company advertisements were written to attract people who would be drawn to the target culture. Recruiters were given the description of the target culture, along with the company's vision, mission, and strategic goals, to use in their selection process. Job descriptions were phrased not just as to-do's, but as accountabilities (specific results to be produced) and responsibilities (what larger results the job was part of)<sup>9</sup>.

#### 6. Communicate the program design to existing employees

During the first year of the New Employee Orientation Program, the need for the target culture (and the cost of hiring an incompatible person) was explained to existing employees as part of the roll-out and enrollment into the new strategic plan, which itself was part of the entire culture change program.

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<sup>7</sup> The establishment of the Management Committee was part of the culture change initiative itself, in order to broaden the sense of ownership by transferring significant role responsibility from the owners to the entire management group.

<sup>8</sup> One of the members of the Management Committee, a vice-president, was the operational manager of the project. He was accountable to the President, and the President was in turn accountable to the Management Committee, for the successful implementation and operation of the program.

<sup>9</sup> For example, an accountability of the Customer Service Manager was that all the company's customers be pleased with their interaction with the company at all times. The responsibilities of the job included (among many other things) the company making its sales and profit goals, and making sure that the company's culture was implemented.



## 7. Design and coach participants in the selection process

As part of this step, interviewers were trained to ask questions that could be used to uncover a prospect's compatibility with the target culture. Those involved in the hiring decision were enrolled in and coached in weighing cultural compatibility as highly as technical competence<sup>10</sup>.

## 8. Use self-selection methods during interviews

During visits to the company and in communications, prospects were frequently exposed to the target culture. For example, a prospect might be told "Only a very few people in the world would be happy here. We distinguish between results that people produce and the reasons why results weren't produced. We are very clear that you have either results or reasons, and we don't value reasons very much. We don't think that if you have 'good enough' reasons, it's as good as if you produced the results. That is not a fun way to work for a lot of people, although we love the clarity of it." During the discussion the speaker would watch the prospect. If their eyes glazed over, they were not hired. If they got excited, they advanced to the next stage of the selection process.

## 9. The Offer Letter

The offer letter was carefully written to reflect the target culture. For example, it warmly welcomed them to the company (reinforcing the value of *work as a team*), described their new accountability and responsibility (reinforcing the values of *making a difference*, *certainty*, *extraordinary service*, and *unreasonable results*), rather than a job description (reinforcing the value of *results* rather than the *how*), and included the proposed start day of their new job, their supervisor, exact directions to the company and the destination building from their home, including where to park, typical company attire, and who to ask for on arrival on their first day (reinforcing the values of *certainty* and *extraordinary service*).

The letter also told them that they would have no responsibilities during their first three days of work other than to learn about the company (reinforcing the value of *certainty*).

All interactions before the employee's first workday were designed to communicate the particular values of *certainty*, *open communication*, *world-class quality*, *work as a team*, and *extraordinary service*.

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<sup>10</sup> Jack Welch gave this approach great emphasis in his autobiography *Jack: Straight From the Gut*, Warner Business Books, New York, 2001, see pages 188-189 for description of 4 types of managers, grouped by two dimensions, whether or not they meet commitments and whether or not they share the company values.



### **Section 3: Preparation for the First Day**

#### 10. Assign the Managing Contact

One person, called the Managing Contact, was accountable for the success of each new employee's first three workdays, which were entirely spent in the New Employee Orientation Program. This was the person whom a new employee was to ask for when he or she arrived at the company on their first workday. The Managing Contact was accountable that all preparations were made, for shepherding the new employee through the program, and was the single contact for all changes, questions, etc., during the program. This is in contrast to many first day situations where the new employee often experiences confusion about who to contact and how to get his or her questions answered, leaving the new employee to fend for him or herself.

#### 11. Prepare the first three days' schedule

The schedule of their first three days (as described below in Activities 13-23) was established and participants assigned and confirmed. People were prepared for meetings and rigorously stuck to the time schedule (a late meeting would have severe impacts on other meetings, and was considered one of the "unbreakable" rules). Simply put, the intention was to treat the new employee exactly the same way the company desired them to treat their fellow workers and the company's customers.

#### 12. Preparation before the first day

Security personnel at the entrance were notified a new employee would be coming, were informed of his/her name and general description, and were coached to welcome them. You can imagine the impression resulting from this preparation, versus that generated if the new employee had been forced to wait at the entrance gate because security was not alerted and they didn't know who to call to get authorization.

The program had a few "unbreakable" rules (violations of which were brought to the attention of the president) whose intention was to communicate "*you're already on the team*" and the specific values of *unreasonable results*, *quality*, and *work as a team*. Specifically, before the new employee arrived for their first day, the following had to be completed:

- The new employee's desk and office/cubicle had to be cleaned and fully furnished, ready for use, including paper, pencils, computer (with software loaded), stapler, telephone, calendar (open to their first day), etc.
- A physical mailbox had to be assigned and labeled with their name.



- The company phone directory (whether paper or electronic) had to be updated with the new employee's name. Before electronic directories, the rule was that just distributing the new list of extensions was not sufficient. Any directory list taped to a phone anywhere in the company had to be replaced with the new directory list. Many new employees expressed amazement to see their name already on the telephone list.
- The new employee had to be assigned an e-mail address and the e-mail box activated and tested.

## **Section 4: The First Day**

### 13. Arrival at Security/Reception

Since security and reception had been alerted in advance, new employees were often greeted by name, and personally welcomed aboard. From the first moment new employees started getting the idea that this was a different kind of company.

### 14. Meet the Managing Contact

The Managing Contact was the person accountable for the success of the new employee's orientation, and the person the offer letter told the employee to ask for when he or she first arrived. During the meeting the following was covered:

- The Managing Contact is responsible for the three days and is the contact for anything concerning the program.
- During the three days of the program the new employee would have no other responsibility other than to learn about the company.
- Reviewed the three-day schedule. The employee was given a copy of the schedule with names, titles, telephone numbers (and photos if possible) for everyone with whom he or she had an appointment. Almost all of their time was scheduled, including lunch with people whom the new employee might not normally encounter. The schedule also included training in how to use all appropriate facilities, including the telephone. While the sequence might change based on personnel availability and other circumstances, Activities 15-23 (the typical first three day schedule) are listed below in roughly the desired order.
- Reviewed each person the new employee would meet and what would be covered in the meeting.
- Provided the new employee with a list of the people in the department, coworkers, subordinates, and superiors, often including a company organization chart, so he or she didn't have to remember names.
- Provided the new employee with a map of the offices and buildings so they could locate themselves during the program and tour.



### 15. Brief meeting with new employee's manager

The employee's manager was typically not the Managing Contact. This meeting gave the employee an opportunity to be welcomed by his or her supervisor. Managers were coached to treat the new employee with importance and clarity (and, because they had previously "bought-in" to the target cultural values, they did so willingly and naturally).

### 16. Tour

Even though the employee may have been taken on a company tour as a prospect, the tour was conducted again because he or she would experience things much differently as a new employee. Ideally the individual's supervisor conducted the tour, but in any case the guide had been assigned and the tour path reviewed in advance.

A typical tour included the new employee's office/cubicle, introductions to the people around his or her office and to the people in his or her group, and major locations such as the rest rooms, copier, fax, mailroom (including their mailbox), cafeteria, employee entrance, etc.

Ideally employees had their names on office doors or desks for easier reminders later. The company realized that it was embarrassing for a new employee to later have to admit he or she didn't remember someone's name to whom he or she had previously been introduced during their first few workdays.

Since their mailbox typically had been set up a number of days in advance, there often already was mail in their mailbox (this reinforced the communication that they were already on the team). This also showed that the company thought enough of them to think ahead, plan for their arrival, think what they would need, and provide it before they asked. The company wanted them to treat its customers in the same way.

### 17. Legal Items

Legal material was typically handled by the Human Relations Department, including tax forms, health benefit forms, vacations, etc. As much as possible, documents were already set up and ready, e.g., health benefit information, maps, etc. To the extent possible, decisions the new employee had to make immediately were minimized. For such decisions, material was sent out in advance, with available consulting to help prior to the first day.



## 18. Administrative Items

This portion of the program covered administrative aspects, such as how to run the fax, copier, telephone, policies, procedures, written, verbal, and electronic communications methods and protocols, personnel reviews, employee manual, administrative support, parking cars, what to do in case of emergencies, etc. In many companies such training often is conducted on an ad hoc basis, and thus frequently contains erroneous information, which is in turn passed on from employee to employee.

## 19. Lunch

During each of the first three days the new employee was taken out to lunch, at least two of the three days to a restaurant in the area rather than the company cafeteria. They were taken out by 2-3 employees from an area of the company with which they would probably not normally interact much as part of their job. The level of the hosting employees was similar to that of the new employee. Thus many employees who would not normally get a chance had an opportunity to take another employee out at the company's expense (which enhanced their morale). All participants were requested to be fully open - ask any question, answer straight. The host employees were NOT coached on what to say or how to act during lunch. All arrangements, including transportation, time, restaurant, reservations, were handled in advance.

This activity had the following purposes:

- It began to build bridges between infrequently interacting departments and continued to communicate the value that everyone was on the same team.
- It gave host employees a unique experience of taking someone out to lunch on the company, and helped them feel important.
- The new employee felt important by being taken out.
- The restaurant was chosen carefully to reflect the company culture, e.g., formal or informal; expensive, inexpensive, or good value, etc.
- To demonstrate the importance of relationship.

## **Section 5: The Second Day**

### 20. Extended meeting with new employee's manager

The new employee spent time with his or her manager to discuss the new job, interactions with others, etc. Managers were coached to insure that the cultural values of *teamwork*, *open communication*, *service*, and *unreasonable results* were woven into the meeting discussion.



## 21. Meet other managers

In addition to meeting with their superiors, peers, and subordinates, a goal was that all new employees meet with all managers in the chain of command above them. (Depending on the size of the company, this has to be adjusted, but an attempt should be made to have a new employee meet managers at least a few levels higher.) In addition to answering any questions the employee may have had, different aspects of the company's culture were covered by different managers, emphasizing how the cultural values translated into daily behavior and pointing out that this was how things really worked. This also communicated that all managers were on the same page regarding the company's culture.

For example, the target culture included the value of *integrity*, one aspect of which is putting a high importance on keeping your promises. One manager always covered the concepts of making requests and promises, and particularly covered what to do if you felt keeping your promise was in danger and you wanted to operate with integrity<sup>11</sup>.

## 22. Training

Often there was a need for formal training. This sometimes was accommodated during the first three days, but not at the expense of the cultural components. Sometimes the training itself went into some aspect of the company culture, e.g., customer service, in more depth.

## **Section 6: The Third Day**

### 23. Meet the president

Every new employee, within three weeks of his or her first day, spent at least 2 hours with the president, where the employee's role in fulfilling the long and short term future and strategic plans of the company were discussed<sup>12</sup>. During these meetings the president created the company's vision, mission, future, etc., with the intended result of having the new employee see themselves in that future. While often this was done in groups, many employees spoke of the impact that meeting had, where they could look directly into the president's eyes, hear the tone of the president's voice, and experience first-hand how personally

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<sup>11</sup> This will be the subject of a forthcoming article in the Producing Results section of *The Inquiry* articles.

<sup>12</sup> As much as possible, these meetings were conducted with groups of new employees. The president enjoyed these meetings so much that they often exceeded their scheduled time (which, after a while, was allowed for in the schedule).



committed he was to the future he was describing. Also, employees said they realized that they were important components of that future because the company president took the time to speak directly to them.

## **Section 7: Post Program**

### **24. Assessment**

The final activity of the program was the employee writing an assessment of the New Employee Orientation Program itself. Besides giving the company valuable feedback for future changes in the Program, this gave the new employee time to reflect on and bring to a conscious level what they had experienced during the program. This activity also communicated that the company considered their opinion important.

### **Turning This Article into Action**

You may want to consider some of the following questions. What are the intended results of your organization's new employee orientation program? How do they compare to the intended results of the example program? Should some intended results be dropped, modified or added? Does the program support creating and maintaining the organizational culture needed to reach your organization's long-term goals? How might you use some of the activities suggested above to achieve the intended results of the program?

### **Summary**

We have given an example of a New Employee Orientation Program that is designed to rapidly and reliably integrate a new employee into a targeted company culture. All aspects of the program are designed to be clear demonstrations that the cultural values the company espouses are active and real in the company. The program was considered of major importance to the company, and was used to maintain enrollment of existing employees as well as to integrate new employees.