

## *Pivotal Moments in a Career*

### **Acclimating Newcomers to the Office**

By [JANE PORTER](#)

For most managers, finding the right person for an open position is the biggest hurdle in hiring. But getting new hires on solid ground is key to making sure they will be effective on the job, says Karen Lawson, president of Landsdale, Pa.-based Lawson Consulting Group Inc. and author of, "New Employee Orientation Training."

Here are some steps managers can take to make the transition smooth:

- **Inform your staff.** Even a simple email will help put staff at ease when an unfamiliar face shows up at the office. If the new hire is part of a structural change, Ms. Lawson recommends managers be as open as possible with existing staff to avoid tension. Host an informal meeting or send a memo detailing how the new employee's responsibilities will fit in with other roles.
- **Make space.** It's important for new hires to have an office or cubicle space to call their own off the bat. While it sounds simple enough, securing a desk, computer, phone and email address for a new employee can become a logistical nightmare when left to the last minute, says Ms. Lawson. Without it, a new hire's first few days on the job will be unsettling—and it is something most people don't forget, even if a joke is made of it later on.
- **Find face time.** It's tempting to send an assistant to bring in a new employee from the reception desk or to have your new hire ask a neighbor where to go for pens or coffee, but taking the time to greet new employees in person and show them the ropes makes a critical first impression. "This is not something that can be delegated," says Ms. Lawson. "It really sets the tone." And be sure to also include those people who may be out of sight, but who are critical to know. The shipping clerk in the basement might be the person everyone needs to know, but rarely sees, says George Bradt, author of "Onboarding: How to Get Your New Employees Up to Speed in Half the Time." Mr. Bradt advises managers keep in mind the social network of the office, for example, pointing out the person in charge of the softball team. It is important for a new hire to have someone on his or her level to turn to for help. Assign a "buddy" to help make a new hire feel more connected to colleagues.
- **The unwritten rules.** Every office has rules you won't find in the HR manual. Be sure on the first few days to point out those subtleties to new employees. Think about daily routines while giving a tour of the office—the coffee pot everyone on staff is responsible for, the lunch room, the places where bosses tend to congregate—and highlight those so that a new hire can feel familiar with the office culture. "I've seen people have really bad experiences because no one ever told them what the unwritten practices are," says Ms. Lawson.
- **Set goals.** Once a new employee is settled into the office, it is important to sit down to discuss and establish a short- and long-term plan. Early on, employees should have a clear understanding of management's expectations and how they will be reviewed. From there, Ms. Lawson suggests holding weekly one-on-one meetings for the first month or so. "Bringing an employee on board is a process that needs to take place over weeks and months," she says. "It's not just a one-time event."

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*Comments on the article:*

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Expanding on the thinking behind getting to know the shipping clerk (an excerpt from our book):

"The point is that it's not about the quantity of interactions. It's about the quality of the relationships. As the University of Virginia's Robert Cross makes clear, it's far better to build mutually valuable relationships with a relatively small set of central connectors and brokers, than to build acquaintances with a wide range of peripheral players.

**CENTRAL CONNECTORS:** Leaders, experts, old timers, gateway roles, or political players. Often bottlenecks and vulnerabilities. (Directly connecting with information or resources).

**BROKERS:** Leverage ability to drive change, diffusion, or innovative. These people can also fill liaison or cross-process roles (linking with others who have information or resources). [The shipping clerk is an example of this].

**PERIPHERAL PLAYERS:** Less well-connected or less interested in helping with access to information or resources.

...Don't expect your new employee to be able to figure out who the people with valuable knowledge and skills are. Don't wait for him or her to discover the most valuable people. Point out key brokers and central connectors, and make the connections.

George Bradt - PrimeGenesis Executive Onboarding and Transition Acceleration

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Expanding on the thinking behind pointing out the person in charge of the softball team. (An excerpt from our book.)

#### BEHIND-THE-SCENES NETWORKS

We can almost guarantee that you are part of at least one behind-the-scenes network. These don't show up on any organization chart anywhere. Yet, they often explain seemingly unexplainable information flows. Think about people exchanging information in car pools, bowling alleys, on trains, softball fields, golf courses, hunting trips, recruiting trips, at volunteer events, school events, church events...

Almost every employee in almost every organization finds him- or herself in some situation outside of normal work hours with someone else from the organization. Inevitably they talk about their organization. These are the behind-the-scenes networks where relationships build over time.

...We're not saying behind-the-scenes networks are good or bad. They exist. The faster you can get your new employee tapped into some of them, the faster your new employee can start to build relationships and learn. Obviously, you won't be able to inject your new employee into all the behind-the-scenes networks. What you can and should do is connect your new employee with groups or individuals with common interests or hobbies. It's not hard for you to do, and it potentially has a huge impact.

#### REALITY CHECK

Don't force this one. Making a connection where there's an existing common interest is a good thing. Pushing people to accept a newcomer in an area where he or she does not naturally fit can be counterproductive.

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