4 Secrets to Showing New Hires They Belong



Having a new hire is exciting; it’s a chance to bring a fresh spark into the office. But, for that new hire, personally, the first day is stressful. He or she is an outsider trying to fit in while processing large amounts of information.

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This is why Piyush Patel, the Oklahoma City-based author of *Lead Your Tribe, Love Your Work*, was surprised when he found out more leaders don’t make the experience easier for new hires.

At Patel’s previous company, he’d provide a gift box for all new employees before their first day. Included was a company t-shirt, required HR paperwork and a history of the company. There was even a picture frame so new hires could come to work with a picture of friends or family to grace their desk. This helped people feel like part of the team from day one.

Yet, when Patel brought up his gift-box ritual at a business course, few leaders indicated that they’d follow suit. Patel said he felt disappointed by that disinterest.

“Being productive by day two isn’t the goal,” he told me in an email. “The goal is to help [new employees] feel belonging, affirmation and meaning at work.”

Want to promote those values at your company? Here are four ways to make incoming employees immediately feel like part of the team:

Pre-board.

Pre-boarding should involve educating people about your company even before they're hired. This means that these people get an in-depth look at your organization's values, mission, and culture.

Of course different companies handle this differently: At the North York, Canada-based medical cannabis company MPX Bioceutical Corporation, for example, "pre-boarding" actually starts during the interview.

"We feel like we have a great story to tell, so we want to tell it," chief operating officer Beth Stavola told me. "We give examples of some of our employees who started in a lower-paying position and have excelled in managerial or other pivotal positions. When the interviewee leaves the interview, we want them to feel that they could make a difference, and want to excel with us."

During the interview, talk about your company's five-year plan. See what resonates with candidates, then discuss how they could possibly help those goals come to fruition. This will help the candidate envision his or her own future with the organization.

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Set the foundation for relationships.

It takes time to learn names and faces. But, when a new hire is also trying to become familiar with company policies and procedures, the task is nearly impossible. Something falls through the cracks.

At the Fort Worth, Texas-based advertising technology

company Simpli.fi, each new hire learns about the team he or she will work with and the types of accounts to expect to have before that first day.

“Each new hire receives a handwritten welcome note from me, which includes a piece of advice and also a welcome packet,” chief customer officer Liz Brockey said via email. “They are also provided with a mentor to act as an anchor point, to build relationships and help navigate questions.”

As soon as possible, introduce your new hire to his or her mentor. Set up a lunch between the two on the first day – or even before. Encourage the new hire to ask plenty of questions. Also, have the mentor come prepared with information about the rest of the team. This can mean pictures, welcome videos or even short anecdotes. While the new hire won’t remember everyone, at least he or she won’t walk into an office full of unfamiliar faces.

Focus on personalities.

Often, new hires feel like outsiders because current employees already know one another so well. They have inside jokes and a unique way to communicate. This is why at Middletown, Del.-based online marketing firm eZanga, nicknames are part of the onboarding process.

“One of our company’s quirks is that each employee is given a nickname. Sometimes, a new employee’s personality stands out from the get-go,” CEO and co-founder Rich Kahn said by email. “They are given a nickname as soon as day two on the job.”

Granted, nicknames don’t fit every company culture. But, the practice shows the importance of acknowledging personalities. So, find a way to get to know each of your employees. Whether you do that through icebreaker activities or nicknames, the effort will reinforce team camaraderie from the very beginning.

Don’t beat around the bush.

While it’s important to always be appropriate, often new employees feel that need to walk on eggshells on the first day. They don’t want to do or say the wrong thing. But when leaders break the ice, new employees feel that they can act more naturally.

At the Dallas-based leadership consultancy College Market Institute, new employees spend the first part of their day having an honest conversation with leaders and co-workers.

“We ask probing questions. Our empathetic inquiries bring out the heart and soul of what they aspire to attain,” CEO Keith Martino said via email.

“As we collectively explore their perceptions on the topics of leadership, teamwork and communication, they reveal their true reflections on previous experiences. Emotions soar, laughter abounds and, most importantly, they build an immediate bond with their peers.”

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So, consider these other companies’ moves to make new hires feel like part of the team. And, don’t be afraid to discuss the weaknesses of your company and team.

Letting candidates see the whole picture, flaws and all, will make them feel included.

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