New employee orientation – benefits and strategies

Introduction

In one year studied by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, it was revealed that in private industries, 30.8 percent of all non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work involved employees with less than one year experience on the job (1). This is also confirmed in a study done by Travelers Risk Control, which revealed 38 percent of accidents and 42 percent of construction fatalities occur within the first 90 days of a new job (2).

With these statistics in mind, it is obvious that a strong new employee orientation program is a key step in establishing a comprehensive safety program. However, without appropriate pre-employment screening processes in place as well, it might be difficult to ensure that new hires have the qualities desired. As a result, orientation efforts may not be as effective or worthwhile.

The following information examines the importance of a thorough orientation program. It provides guidelines for developing an effective orientation program and the impact it can have on your organization.

Benefits of an orientation program

A strong new employee orientation program is very important since lack of knowledge and skill are contributing factors in many accidents. Orientation programs are where new hires develop their first impression about the company. It is the first opportunity for the employer to influence a new hire’s attitude toward safety and communicate that safety is a value to the company and will not be compromised.

Guidelines

It is important that an orientation program has clearly defined objectives. These objectives should include: applying safe job procedures, recognizing unsafe conditions, understanding appropriate countermeasures, and demonstrating understanding of comprehension.

There are many orientation items that need to be covered with new hires. A handbook or checklist can help ensure that you cover all items with new employees. The person(s) covering the topic, such as the immediate supervisor or human resources representative, should complete checklists.

Below are five concepts that should be utilized throughout the orientation process.

1. The basics

What’s on the mind of a new hire? Is it safety? Probably not. Effective organizations take steps to help new employees feel comfortable and allow opportunities for having their questions answered. Early concerns may include:

- When do I get paid?
- Who is my supervisor and what is he/she like?
- When is lunch?
- Where is the restroom?

2. Hit the books

There are safety items new hires must be taught before they are involved with production. By instructing new employees first, they will be better prepared and will be able to put these concepts to use when they move into hands-on training.
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Training might include:

**Safety procedures in general**
- Safety rules
- Housekeeping

**Personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- Work that requires PPE
- Proper fitting of PPE
- PPE training

**Fire protection**
- Emergency plan
- Location of fire extinguishers
- Use of fire extinguishers

**Hazard communication**
- Hazardous chemicals in the workplace/on the work site
- Location of Material Safety Data Sheets
- Chemical storage procedures
- Chemical disposal procedures
- Location of eye wash and emergency shower

**Biological hazards**
- Exposures to bloodborne pathogens
- Safety devices available

**Electrical/equipment safety**
- Orientation to electrical equipment on the job
- Extension cord use policy

**Back safety and body mechanics**
- Proper lifting technique
- Getting help with heavy lifts
- Symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders

**Risk management**
- Identifying and reporting work-related injury/illness
- Identifying and reporting hazards
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3. Assign a mentor

Newcomers are usually eager to please. Many will plow right into the job assigned even if they are unsure of hazards or how the work should be done. Consider assigning a mentor. A mentor is responsible for “showing the new hire the ropes,” answering those informal questions and offering general support. The mentor should be from the same work area and someone who has sufficient company and work experience, and who consistently demonstrates proper work procedures. The mentor should be able to observe their assigned person so they can offer coaching support. Personal traits needed for effective mentoring include good communication and planning skills seasoned with a power of persuasion.

4. Hands-On

Once the employee has received some basic instruction about safety and learned some of the general concepts needed to work safely, they are ready to put some of what they have learned to work. Hands-on training is crucial since individuals remember 10 percent of what they hear, but 90 percent of what they do. Work should not begin without assistance and oversight by his/her mentor.

In addition, the immediate supervisor or mentor should start covering items that make up the safety culture and climate that the company is working to achieve. Items might include:

- Participate in company safety goals
- Report all hazards
- Identify opportunities for safety improvement
- Responsibility for looking out for fellow workers
- Support the safety committee

5. Get feedback

Individuals will follow their own “learning curve,” but they must ultimately accept personal responsibility for safety. The new hire should take an active role in his/her training. Getting regular feedback from the new person will reinforce what has been learned and identify opportunities for additional training. By involving employees in the process, you ultimately increase his/her buy-in and commitment to safety and the organization.

During the first month or two, each new employee should complete written feedback on his/her progress. The immediate supervisor should meet with the new hire and review progress. Areas to explore could include:

- What training did you receive this week?
- Have you received equipment and proper instruction to perform your job safely?
- Have you been able to meet your scheduled work hours? If not, why?
- Do you have questions about your job? Is it what you expected?
- How could we make your job safer?
- What questions do you have about the company and your role in meeting the company’s goals?

Summary

It is easy for new hires to get lost in the shuffle. Supervisors should be aware that new employees are probably more likely to get injured (regardless of their work experience) than more tenured employees. The likelihood of a new worker avoiding injury can be reduced by proper safety orientation, regular safety coaching from an effective mentor, and regular two-way communication from their immediate supervisor.
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References
4. Hansen, M. Are you a mentor or tormentor?

For more information, log in to the Risk Control Customer Portal at [travelers.com/riskcontrol](http://travelers.com/riskcontrol). (Need help? Read our Registration Quick Guide.) You also can contact your Risk Control consultant or email [Ask-Risk-Control@travelers.com](mailto:Ask-Risk-Control@travelers.com).