

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT FOR MANAGERS



Welcome to the firm. Here's your employee manual, that's your desk and this is John, your cubicle mate. If there's anything else you need, be sure to ask. See you around.

That's the orientation drill for new employees in many Canadian organizations and it's destined to leave rookies feeling unsure, out of place and significantly more likely to start looking for another employer, a Canadian study has found.

"The take home message for managers who are under pressure to retain talent is that if you don't have formal onboarding practices in place you won't have employee engagement," said Jamie Gruman, an organizational behaviour professor at the University of Guelph.

The study, in collaboration with human resources management professor Alan Saks of the University of Toronto involved 140 university students on a co-op work term.

It found that more structured on-boarding tactics made employees happier and more confident, and more likely to believe they fit both the job and organization. In turn, those who went through a structured program were significantly more likely to feel engaged and loyal to their employer than those that didn't the researchers estimate

"In most organizations, they think of the on-boarding process as primarily imparting information, which is necessary, but that's not enough," Prof. Gruman said.

Additionally they need to create opportunities for employees to quickly develop a social network, establish where to get information and support, provide work that's engaging enough to make them feel they are making a contribution and feedback that they are valued, the researchers found.

The researchers backed up their findings with a review of more than 200 previous studies done around the world of on-boarding, which they used to create a chapter in the upcoming Oxford Handbook of Socialization.

Here are some practices that they say are most likely to make new employees highly engaged with their organization:

**Start before entry**

The boss or manager should make contact before the first day on the job.

**Create connection immediately**

The human resources manager or supervisor introduces the newcomer to other members of the department and organization, and covers a wide range of topics in an orientation.

Even better, the newcomer is assigned a mentor.

**Develop social resources**

Social events such as a barbecue or company party or sports event are arranged to encourage newcomers to get to know other employees on a more personal basis.

Co-workers make an effort to offer rookies help and assistance.

The direct supervisor checks in and stays available to offer assistance.

**Provide work support**

The boss clearly lays out goals and expectations.

The organization provides the training and materials needed to do the job as soon as the employee starts work.

Tasks assigned are challenging from the start.

The boss provides ongoing feedback and co-workers complement the newcomer on work well done.

**Follow up**

A regular schedule of checkups are done on how well the new hire is adjusting.

The newcomer in turn is asked to provide feedback about how helpful the orientation has been.

*BY: WALLACE IMMEN, Globe and Mail Thursday, Jul. 14, 2011*