

# Great Expectations: Tips for Preparing New Employees for Long-Term Success

By Linda Butkovich

**Imagine this:** You have accepted a new position and are excited about beginning this new chapter in your professional life. You arrive bright and early on your first day and greet the receptionist. She has no idea who you are. As she is attempting to contact the person who hired you, she gives you some forms to fill out. An hour later, you are told your supervisor is on vacation and will be back in a week. You are taken back to an empty office and given a stack of binders filled with policies and procedures and told to read them. Most of the information in these binders has little to do with the job you were hired for. You are not introduced to other employees, given a tour, or told when to take a lunch break.

**I don't have to imagine this scenario. I lived it!** It may come as no surprise to know that soon after this day, I began my job search again. Less than 9 months later, I was off to a new position. As a result of this experience, when I have hired new staff, I have made it a priority to provide a warm welcome for new employees and to try to create a much more satisfying orientation experience. I know how much time, energy, and resources go into hiring an employee, so I try to do everything in my power to ensure this new staff person will be excited about working in our organization and will continue to learn and grow with us for many years to come.

## HERE ARE A FEW TIPS I HAVE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:

### **Provide a warm welcome.**

Keep in touch with the new employee before the first day. Let him or her know you are looking forward to working together. Provide basic information about the work schedule, parking, dress code, and anything else that will help the first day go smoothly. Be sure someone is there to greet the new employee. A personal note, flowers on the desk, or a banner created by children help to contribute to making the new employee feel welcome. Begin with a tour and introductions to co-workers.

### **Consider orientation a process.**

Often the supervisor's time is limited and it is tempting to try to cram a lot of information into the little time you may have available for orientation. However, it's important to be realistic about how much of this information will actually be retained. It's helpful to think of orientation as a process. Take some time

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to prioritize what is important for the new employee to know in the first few days on the job. Be realistic and keep this information to a minimum. What does the new employee need to know in the first week? What information can wait until the employee has been with you for a month? What can wait for 2-3 months? Try to find interesting ways to share this information, using a variety of modes of communication (e.g., videos, hands-on demonstrations), rather than relying on boring lectures and manuals.

### **Match the new employee with a “buddy.”**

Ask one of your more seasoned staff to help with orientation. Perhaps this “buddy” can take the new employee out to lunch on the first day. Have him or her periodically check in with the new person to see how things are going. Make sure the new employee knows he or she can contact this person with any questions.

### **Get to know the new employee.**

You have spent some time during the interview process to get to know the new employee. Continue to learn more about this person during the orientation period. How can he or she contribute to your organization? Does he or she have any hobbies, skills, or special interests that can enrich your program? What type of supervision will work best for the new person? At the McCormick Center, we have all new employees complete an online version of the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#). We also use the book [Now, Discover Your Strengths](#) to learn about the strengths of each employee. We then add this information to a grid, which includes the typology and strengths of all of our employees and share this with the new hire so that he or she will learn more about his or her colleagues.

### **Give and receive feedback.**

During the probationary period, meet with the new employee to check in to see how things are going. It’s also important to take some time during this period to provide specific feedback based on observations of the new employee’s performance. Let him or her know what is going well, and also provide suggestions for improvement.

### **Begin with the end in mind.**

You may recognize this phrase from Stephen Covey’s book [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#). This seems particularly appropriate to think about as you welcome a new employee into your program. What “end” do you have in mind? Are you envisioning a long and successful partnership, in which the new employee continues to grow in his or her professional life and your organization is enriched by the unique strengths he or she brings? If so, consider the end of the orientation or probationary period as a beginning, rather than an ending. Meet with the new employee to set goals for professional development for the rest of the first year. Be sure to ask the new employee for honest feedback about the orientation process. What went well? What would he or she suggest to make the orientation even better for the next new employee?

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By keeping these six tips in mind, you will provide a meaningful and positive foundation for your new employee's long-term success. If you are interested in learning more about how to improve your orientation process, check out [The Right Fit: Recruiting, Selecting, and Orienting New Staff \(Director's Toolbox\)](#) by Kay Albrecht.

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