Scott R. DiMarco

Practicing the golden rule

Creating a win-win new employee orientation

The things you do and the impressions you create at the start of your tenure can shape the way your new colleagues think of you for years to come.[1]

Every institution has its own culture, policies, and procedures. An orientation plan that takes this into account will make a new employee's transition to your organization less stressful for all involved. By creating and maintaining a plan that concentrates on all the needs of the new employee, the chances of later "misunderstandings" diminish.

In the small world of academic librarianship, it is not beyond the realm of possibility for an individual who had a bad experience at one institution (either in interviewing or working) to tell his or her network of colleagues and acquaintances about it. This in turn could be retold until it becomes the factor that discourages an outstanding candidate from even applying to a specific university or college.[2]

The cost of replacing employees is high—various studies offer ranges of between 25 and 150 percent of the annual salary of the position (position benefits not taken into account).[3] Considering the financial and time commitment of hiring a candidate, not to mention the loss of productivity from a vacant position, it makes good sense to keep a quality employee around as long as possible.

While several of the points that will be examined here may seem like housekeeping or things that are taken for granted, when viewed together they can be integral to the overall "initiation" of a new hire into a library.

Developing an orientation plan

The process of developing an orientation plan can be as important as the plan itself. Some tips are below.

• One person should coordinate the orientation plan for the library. Get help from a committee, it is much easier to plan with a group to share the work.

• The coordinator should work with other offices on campus to get the necessary forms and meetings organized well in advance.

• Be specific when providing information in the orientation plan. The devil is in the details. Never assume anything.

• Think of the whole person when developing an orientation plan. Professional and personal life should be considered. Employees won't have peace of mind at work if they are worried about home.

• Communicate the plan to all library employees and other appropriate institutional offices. By sharing the plan before the new hire starts, potential problems and issues can be anticipated and even fixed.

• Write it down! Always write every aspect of the plan down. Not only will it help with lapses in memory, but it is very useful for future reference. By writing it down, it is not necessary to "reinvent the wheel" every time someone is hired.

• Use checklists when possible. These are a great asset in keeping track of where you are and what is left to do.

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Putting the plan into action

To ensure an easy transition, plan on supplying the new hire with key information prior to his or her arrival.

- Living accommodations. Offer the names of realtors, rental agencies, and homes that are for sale. This is an important stress relief tool for a new hire who is also relocating.
- Points of interest in the area. List insurance agents, stores, dry cleaners, car repair, and the like. This includes all the little everyday areas of life that are seemingly small, but are important.
- Directions to campus/library. Being able to find work on the first day could be viewed as an important step in the career ladder.
- Temporary parking pass (if necessary). This can be used until a permanent one is obtained. Also, a pass removes the stress of receiving parking tickets.
- A copy of the agenda for the first week. Knowing what the new hire will be doing and who he or she will be meeting with the first week does provide some sense of structure in what otherwise might be a strange and difficult period.
- Contact information for any questions. In the event that the new hire needs to contact an individual at the library prior to starting, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses should be provided.

The coordinator must coordinate

The orientation coordinator should make sure that arrangements have been made for all of the paperwork and activity to be completed by a new hire on his or her first day. Basic information related to computer and phone use should also be provided.

- Plan a walking tour of the library and campus. This is a great opportunity for the coordinator to introduce the new hire to his or her co-workers. Don't forget restrooms, copy rooms, fax machine, and break areas.
- Prepare a workspace. This area should be clean and supplied with what is necessary to get the job done: computer, office supplies, telephones, etc.

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- Make keys or key request form available. These should be ready to be distributed to the new hire as soon as possible. Nothing makes a person feel as welcome as giving them the keys to the office. This also encourages the new employee to stay late or come in early.
- Coordinate with human resources. By having the paperwork that must be completed and turned in ready, the new employee can have time to do it properly. It doesn't hurt to remind the new hire to bring the necessary documents.
- Organize the college or university identification process. Providing the forms to be completed and the location of the distributing office can allow this process to proceed much faster and smoother.
- Prepare college or university computer account request forms. By having these forms done prior to the start day, the new hire can have an account even before the first day.
- Provide basic telephone information. Simple things, such as long distance codes, important telephone numbers, voice mail directions, make the use of this important communication tool easier.

Some key reference materials should also be made available.

- Telephone directory. Having a directory in the new hire's work area is very useful, especially in a larger institution.
- Academic/college or university calendar. The calendar can be helpful in understanding the ebb and flow of the college/university.
- Library annual reports. This provides an understanding of what the library has been doing and how they see/rate themselves.

Information is key

Information related to the overall structure and organization of the institution and the

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library should also be provided, along with basic information on day-to-day operations.

• Structure. This provides the new employee with an idea of where the library and the employee's individual position "fits" within the overall college/university, in general, and the library specifically.

• Strategic Plan. This allows the employee an understanding of where the library and college/university are going and why.

• Strategic goals and objectives. These inform the new hire what the library wants to achieve and how they want to get there.

• Organizational charts. These are similar to the structure, but specific to the library.

• Services that are offered to patrons. Merely a brief overview of library services.

• Internal/external customers. This simple section provides the new hire with a concrete list of who the library views as its customers (students, faculty, community, other departments).

• Hours of operation.

• Relationships on campus. These are usually unofficial and unwritten. They let the new hire know who are the library's supporters and those who are more distant.

• Busy/slow times. Also, unofficial and unwritten, this helps the employee get into the "flow" of the position.

• Department/Library meeting schedules and minutes of past meetings. By having a sense of where the department has been and the issues they have faced, a new hire can get assimilated faster. The schedule for the future allows for planning.

• Department activities/responsibilities. Simply, what the department's mission is and how they work to achieve it.

• Key contacts in the library/department. This is not to be confused with an organiza-

tional chart. It is a responsibility directory-Who's really responsible for what?

• Individual meetings with all in the department/library. This is an outstanding chance for the new employee to meet and get to know his or her new co-workers.

• Library/department policies and procedures—This is the official positions: "The way we do things here."

In addition to making sure that a new hire's computer services account is set up in a timely manner, information on other technology-related areas should be provided.

• Discussion lists. Suggested lists and how to get signed up really is a help, especially for the newer professionals.

• Training. It should be standard practice to have the new employees trained in the institution's existing system.

• College or university Intranet. This resource contains much useful information that is too often overlooked.

Ensure knowledge of the job

Finally, it is important that the new hire understand the responsibilities of the position and how opportunities for review are handled by the library.

• The responsibilities of the opposition. Often the duties one is actually expected to perform differ from the position advertised. A discussion between the supervisor and the new hire should make these duties clear.

• Explanation of how this position helps meet library goals and objectives. This is a great opportunity for the coordinator or supervisor to show the new hire how they fit into the "big picture" and how they can help the library achieve its strategic goals.

• Performance expectations. This is a discussion of what is expected of the employee and this is a nice chance to see what the employee expects from the position, in the short-term and the long-term.

• List tentative dates to do follow- ups for the first year. Meetings at one month, three months, six months, and one year. Too often an employee "jumps right into work" and, without periodic interaction and questioning,

the Library administration won't really know how the new hire is adjusting.

• Performance appraisal. Clearly state what the criteria for evaluation are going to be so there are no misunderstandings later. An actual copy of the appraisal form is an excellent tool for the employee to refer to so there will be no surprises.

In librarianship, while poor orientation experiences most likely outnumber good orientation experiences, it is a factor in employee longevity and morale. "An employee that has not experienced a 'real' orientation may feel alienated and resentful; they might even leave the organization when a serious opportunity arises. Another problem, if they stay they may become a disrupting/negative force within the staff."[4]

Although what has been provided in this article is by no means a comprehensive list, items listed will help in the successful transition from new hire to long-term contributing employee. The use of a checklist is advisable due to the numerous details one must remember.

While it is difficult to find a good candidate and then hire that individual, it is very easy to ruin what may be a long and productive professional relationship in the first few days by innocently forgetting some small detail. The investment of making a new employee feel welcome will help them to identify with the institution, the orientation process often stresses the why.[5]

Notes

1. Jean Dowdall. "Off to a good start: Thoughts on the first weeks of a new job," *Chronicle of Higher Education* Monday, July 1, 2002. chronicle.com/jobs/2002/07/2002070101c.htm.

2. Stacey E. Kimmel and Scott R. Di-Marco, "Planning an interview: What do candidates want?" *C&RL News* 58, no.4 (1997):249–50+.

3. The Society of the Plastics Industry. The high cost of employee turnover. www.plasticsindustry.org/business/programs/orientme.htm (accessed March 19, 2004).

4. Joyce Gioia, "Use Orientation Process to Bond with New Employees" *HR Focus* 76, i6. (1999) iS9.

5. Randall L. Robbins, "Orientation: Necessity or Nightmare?" *American Salesman* 47, i9 (2002):29. ꜟ

• **Graphic Novels in Libraries (GNLIB-L).** This unmoderated community is limited to professionals in the book trade and librarians and is specifically aimed at young adult and adult services public librarians. GNLIB-L is a space to share reviews, ideas, and resources for the selection and development of graphic novel and comic book collections. Membership is not required to view the archives. *Access:* http://www.topica.com/lists/GNLIB-L.

• **Librarians in Comics.** Maintained by Canadian librarian Steven Bergson, this site contains an annotated bibliography of books, comic books, and graphic novels in which a librarian or library plays a role. A bibliography for librarians in comic strips is also available. *Access:* http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/2161/combks/combks.htm.

• **No Flying, No Tights.** Created and maintained by library technician and MLS-holder Robin Brenner and friends, this resource contains three comic book and graphic novel review sites, one each for kids, teens, and adults. Each includes core lists of recommended and reviewed titles divided into various topics, with some aimed at librarians and teachers. Aside from genre divisions, indexes for creator, title, and publisher offer great search tools for finding reviews. *Access:* http://www.noflyingnotights.com. ꜟ