

Does Your New Employee Need a Buddy?



Providing a new employee with an official welcome greeting, orientation, tour and introduction on the first day is a typical way of onboarding new employees. But some organizations go a step further and assign a peer or 'buddy' to a new employee to help the new employee get comfortable and familiar with the organization.

There are two main goals for a new employee buddy program; the first is to help the new employee and the second is to help the organization.

Helping a New Employee Is Helping The Organization

A buddy program done well provides an opportunity for the new employee to have an easily accessible, way to find answers to day-to-day questions. A buddy can provide information on how the organization functions, how departments interact and operate and provide additional information on company expectations and culture.

Designing Your Buddy Program

As with most programs that involve people the best of intentions can sometimes lead to disaster. If you select the wrong person to be a buddy or do not clearly provide a structure and some expectations the opportunity to build a stronger team with a great onboarding process may turn into turnover or low moral.

To get started you should identify the goals of the program and then create guidelines. The program will be best served if you have a buddy program coordinator (this could be a member of the HR team or another employee who has a good knowledge of the entire organization).

- **Buddy Program Goals:**

1. Provide a welcome to a new employee.

2. Provide new employees with just-in-time answers
3. Assist a new employee with transitioning into the company culture and avoid potential isolation.
4. To provide a 'high touch' resource to a new employee

Note that a buddy does not replace the role of a supervisor and the buddy is not a go-between mechanism for complaints or resolution of problems.

- **Requirements and selection for the Employee Buddy**

Requirements

1. Employee for at least X (6-12) months, completed probation and in good standing
2. Well developed knowledge of the organization structure, policies and procedures
3. Understands and can maintain confidentiality
4. Positive attitude, good communications skills, resourceful

Selection and Expectations

1. Need not be the same role as the new employee. Ideally the buddy should be in the same department or in a department with high interaction with the new employees department
2. The Buddy role is a volunteer role and no remuneration is available to the buddy.
3. Each Buddy assignment will normally last 3 months. The buddy remains on the buddy list for one year and at the end of the year may opt to remain a buddy.
4. Buddies are expected to self-select into the role. However, a supervisor may approach an employee if he/she believes the employee would make an appropriate buddy
5. Buddy would spend approximately 1-2 hours in the first week and 30 -60 minutes a week over the next 3 months providing information to a new employee

- **New Buddy Program Coordinator Role**

1. Screens, selects, coordinates and assigns buddies
2. Trains Buddies on the expectations of the Buddy role
3. Informs new employee of the expectations for the Buddy relationship (frequency of contact, ways the Buddy can help and so on).
4. Coordinates the initial meeting between the buddy and new employee
5. Resolves complaints or concerns between the buddy and the new employee and may assign a new buddy if required

Typical Buddy activities

- Provide a new employee a tour of the organization on the first or second day of employment (this would be in place of or in addition to the initial tour offered by a manager or HR).
- Arrange lunch with the new employee and/or members of the new employees team on the first or second day or the new employees employment
- Provide the new employee with an email and phone number (for texting or calls) so the new employee can ask questions.
- Introduce the new employee to other members of the organization

- Show the new employee basic organization operations such as how to use the photo copier, set voice mail messages

As an option you could ask your new employees to select a 'peer' or 'buddy' program of one week with the option of extending for the full 3 months. This way if the match is not compatible there is an easy way out.

Is a new employee Buddy program right for your organization?

Not every organization or employee is right for the Buddy program but almost every one could use a person to connect with and ask questions during the first few days or weeks of a new job. If you have a small organization or very small teams of 2-3 people a formal buddy program may not be required. . Regardless of the formality of a buddy program or not, making the effort to introduce and support a new employee during the first few weeks of work sets an important tone for the future.