



December ,2011

| HUMAN RESOURCES |

HR's Diary – On-Boarding

— N E A Shibly

Within a couple of days following the social evening, Zahid received a professionally written welcome note from the Company, which also informed him of the name of the person available to discuss his questions or concerns. A nice gesture indeed! As if they didn't want to overburden him as the 'new employee' before the job began, or wanted to leave him in the dark about what to expect when he would join. He felt good that due assistance was offered with the forms that needed to be filled-out. He was explained about the type of the background checks that were necessary and how the information would be gathered maintaining confidentiality. He was invited to discuss any concerns he might have about the checks or screenings.

The Company HR made all necessary appointment with their nominated physicians for his medical checks, which was part of the recruitment requirement. Zahid was explained how this physical is important for his terms of employment including benefits he would receive. In the later years, in case of new employment, Zahid always felt that 'anyone coming into a new job is apt to have a lot of questions and possibly some anxieties about the new circumstances.' As the HR Head, he always used to take the necessary time to inform the new employee to ease his mind of all concerns so that joining became stress-free and ready to get started.



On-board

Zahid felt the warmth on the very first day. The impression was overwhelming as though people had been waiting for him eagerly. He was taken to all the key persons in the corporate office and everyone welcomed him with a broad smile on their faces. He could feel that a prior circular went around with his professional background and his new colleagues knew him already. Some of them accompanied him to a buffet lunch organized at the Sheraton. Zahid simply could not compare this first day with his first day in the government directorate. In that job, his first day was greeted with questions marks on everybody's face with smirk which could be translated as 'who are you ... why have you come here to spoil our promotional opportunity.'

In the management development sessions, Zahid now expounds, "once you have invested money and time in finding and hiring an employee, your goal should be to get the person on board and at peak productivity in the shortest possible time." The environment during the first few weeks gave Zahid an eagerness to get started. The stage was rightly set for him to get him up to speed to meet the new co-workers and his supervisor, which quickly gained access to the team. Now he knows that this process of accomplishing those things is called 'on-boarding'. A structured on-boarding created an opportunity for Zahid's supervisor to know him and develop a sense about his work and communication style.

A detailed orientation program was chalked out for him. He was made to sit down once a week for progress meetings and communicate through a structured reporting format. At such meetings, Zahid's supervisor was able to make the expectations clearer for him as a new employee.

His orientation program basically covered following three major areas:

The Company: He was made to learn about the company's mission and culture and an overview of products and services. He was to learn about the history of the company and who were the key players. He was also to get an overview of the customers and be versed on the company's goals and aspirations.

Personal Concerns: As a new employee what did he require to know about benefits, payroll, key policies, safety issues, and so on and so forth. He was also made to get forms filled out and signed and opportunities were given to get the answers to all the questions he had about the profession and the career. He was also made to learn the difference in operations (with his previous organization) and review matters such as lunch hours, flexibility in work schedules, and so forth.

The Department: Adequate time was provided to him to get introduced with colleagues. He was invited to informal and social events providing him opportunity for conversation and camaraderie. He also had to review the responsibilities of each department member, and discuss how the team best worked together, current projects, and his role in the department.

Balancing the welcome with the work

Zahid learnt through his own experience how important it had been to make him feel elevated while receiving the extra-ordinary welcome. However, along with the welcome also came expectations and clear statement of the job Zahid would have to undertake. As the orientation program was done properly, he became anxious to get started in his new position, meet the new colleagues and learn more about the company. His supervisor also helped ease the transition for him and got him up and running in record time. The following things not only made him comfortable as the new member of the team within the company but also helped him in achieving success subsequently as an employee.



A welcoming lunch was offered with strong encouragement for other key persons to attend the same. It was not that fancy, but a gathering like that provided him an occasion to meet his work mates in a casual nonthreatening environment. It also helped other key people to know him having him talked a little bit about him. As some information on his background was provided to others beforehand, other employees were encouraged to be welcoming.

A job-specific orientation plan was provided. A one-month long period was covered which was broken

down to hour-long segments with details about what he was supposed to learn and who would brief those. The Departmental Heads who would work closely with him went over the calendar with him so that he got an idea of the breadth and scope of the program.

A right person was chosen to walk him through the orientation program. Zahid remembers now the senior manager who was chosen in his case was a good communicator who had the time to train and orient him and exemplified the values of the company. He later found out that the last thing that should be done is to pair up any new employee with a present employee who is not happy with his or her job with the company.

Company's expectation was made to be known to him in clear term, quickly and upfront. In his case it was not assumed that he knew how the department operated. His required tasks were spelled out along with the goals of the department and who were the key customers (in-house) he was supposed to reach. The job description was reviewed without forgetting the housekeeping tasks.

The well thought-of orientation plan not only acclimatized Zahid with the new environment, it also reduced the amount of time necessary to become an effective member of the team.

Potential problems were nipped at the bud

Although Zahid was treated gently in an effort to make him feel welcome and at home in the department, some minor problems like he being little sloppy with the report were not overlooked. He felt little bit disturbed initially but understood later that letting 'little' things go by unmentioned simply reinforces the behavior, and in some cases encourages the employee to escalate those behavior. He understood very clearly that if there were no consequences for a sloppily prepared report, it might have seemed logical to assume that the management did not have very high expectations.

His supervisor made it a point to him to provide regular feedback on variety of topics. Whenever time allowed, he discussed with Zahid regarding issues or concerns that he might have had about the performance. He being new was open to suggestions at the beginning. He appreciated the advice/feedback and accepted those as support towards learning the job fast.

Zahid believed that correcting problems, or even identifying the potential problems as they occur, the management would risk setting behaviors into place that will be difficult to address and change down the road. It is very important that the new employee fully understands how the department operates and all the applicable rules. It is also important that the management convey the philosophies and values that help determine how the department runs. If customer-service is the number one priority of the department, for instance, and is considered to be more important than any other issue, it has to be ensured that the new employee fully understands that so that one is able to buy into the culture. In retrospective, Zahid reminisces that all these were practiced in his case at the time of his induction into this company.

He developed quickly a good working relationship with his supervisor which invariably minimized issues; therefore, whenever problems occurred, those were addressed quickly. Zahid now advises the HR practitioners that if such problems continue, management should document these in case of disciplinary action or even terminating the employment becomes necessary at a later time.

Making use of the orientation program

In his case, Zahid learnt later that the on-boarding began even before his first day of work. The staff of the departments were made aware in advance about his recruitment and responsibilities. His work station was organized, and all the pertinent policies, manuals and guides were made available. He remembers now even the arrangement for his parking was thought-of in case he had a car. Security considerations were also made like nametags, keys, ID cards etc.

Working towards a successful first day

Zahid felt that his first day was taken as a crucial stage. No mistake was made as to just showing him his new office and leaving him alone to read over a policy, manual or fill-out forms. Even though it was a very busy office, one senior manager took time personally to welcome him, showed him around and made him feel at home. Zahid now gives following tips to other HR practitioners:

Fill-in the new employee on the plan for the day and coming days. Knowing what to expect will help alleviate anxiety and put the new hire at ease.

Take time to go over contracts, benefits package, and other pertinent paper works. Someone from HR department should be there to provide instructions of the applicable areas.

Explain the conditions of employment, including information regarding a probationary period, employee reviews, and performance evaluation.

The new hire to be shown the organizational chart for his/her department and the basic responsibilities of each position to be explained.

If welcoming breakfast/lunch is not possible on the first day, at least it has to be made sure that the new employee has the company for lunch - either the supervisor or some colleagues.

Be sure to go over company and/or department policies and procedure regarding topics such as e-mail and phone use, chain of command, confidentiality, use of other resources, vacation time, sick leave, hours worked, and attendance system.

After the first day

In the following weeks, Zahid's needs were paid due attention. It was not just assumed that everything was going well - it was rather taken as dangerous to assume that everything was going okay with him as the new employee. The colleague who was assigned to orient him during the first few days was designated unofficially as the buddy to answer to his queries and assist in other ways. He felt more comfortable approaching the colleague with mundane questions than his supervisor. The supervisor also made himself available if a question remained unanswered by the assigned colleague. In those first weeks, Zahid's work was closely supervised to make sure he was advancing at an acceptable pace and not developing any bad work habits. Other employees were also given due attention to make sure that they were modeling good behaviors for him.

After all these years, Zahid has developed skills on knowing when to say "when?". There are cases in which no matter how hard the management tries out to bring an employee on board successfully, it may not just work. The new hire may not be good fit within the department - and everybody comes to know that. If the problems remain and things may not simply workout, the management need to let the employee go. As much as the management wants it to work, the management got to realize that the situation is not likely to improve, especially if the new hire is exhibiting discipline problems.

Features of good on-boarding program

Zahid experienced a very well structured on-boarding program while joining the MNC. Perhaps that was the reason he got himself rewarded with a very successful turning point in his career which he has been cherishing always. He analyzed the program a number of times and concluded with the following features that made his on-boarding a successful one:

The program was made interesting and interactive.

Speakers including the senior management team members were included.

The program was well organized and conducted professionally.

Right amount of information were presented for the allotted time.

Pride and excitement about the company was allowed to be conveyed in the on-boarding. Policies were shared in order to educate not threaten.

A good feel was given on the company's heritage and background.

Employee accountability was stressed.

He was oriented to the office and made to know how to find what he would need. He felt welcomed and honored to be a part of the company.

On-boarding in the first days and weeks thereafter was followed.

The on-boarding program that was offered was not disorganized, sloppy or poorly presented.

He was not passed off on a HR representative or another employee for "training"

He was not just expected to sit and read manuals or watch slide presentations.

Zahid keenly observed that the 'first impressions' that were so important to him during the interview process, also appeared equally important when he came to work for the first time. Being prepared and prepping other colleagues in advance about Zahid, went a long way to ease out his transition and creating a greater comfort level among the entire team.

(This is sequence 5: to be continued)

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