

The 5 Firsts: How to Improve Productivity and Profits in Five Easy Steps

Let's face it, when it comes time to face the daunting prospect of starting a new job, most of us feel like little kids again, but in grownup bodies. That's why kindergarten teachers are trained to be sensitive to what's on every kid's mind the first day of school:

- What's the teacher like and will she like me?
- Will I have friends here?
- How hard is the work?
- How will I be graded?
- What if I have to go to the bathroom?

And every new person you hire wonders the grownup version of the very same things. Unfortunately, few employee orientation and training programs answer these basic questions and even fewer make new hires feel welcomed as valuable new members of the team. In fact, the contrary is more often true.

Case in Point...

Several years ago, my firm conducted an employee turnover study for a Midwestern convenience store chain and contacted approximately 1,000 former (mostly hourly) employees who had left in the previous year.

When asked if they would consider a return to the company, about 20 percent said they would and the majority of those were the people who had recently left. Most of the 20 percent were in their first or second week of starting a new job.

As most everyone in the workforce has experienced firsthand, the first few weeks in a new job are usually confusing, overwhelming, and stressful. Who wouldn't wish they could have their old job back?

This is why we have developed and fine-tuned *The 5 Firsts* – a simple, straightforward employee onboarding and retention program that can help any organization keep new hires engaged, productive and happy – as well as improve the bottom line.¹

Its design took into account the results of a long-term research study which concludes the most profitable business organizations in North America share three things in common: (1) the lowest employee turnover in their respective industries, (2) their employees are highly engaged and (3) they aggressively promote women to executive positions.²

In order to build on the correlation between lower turnover, higher profits, and the relationship skills women bring to the workplace, *The 5 Firsts* consists of five simple steps designed to create a personal, emotional connection between the employee, the job, and the company that reduces turnover and improves profits.

Every time I discuss the importance of the first impressions employers make on new hires, many meeting participants are anxious to volunteer stories of their own nightmarish first days on a job they soon left – or later

¹ If you'd like to learn how to attract quality applicants and select the ones who will be the best on the job, read my earlier book, *Hire Tough, Manage Easy*, because effective employee recruiting and selection are the foundation of the employee retention program detailed here.

² Research conducted by Roy. D. Adler, PhD, Pepperdine University annually since 1990.

wished they had left sooner. You'll find several of these scary *New Job Hell* stories throughout these pages.

The tragedy of all *New Job Hell* stories is that the only people who get frustrated and turned off by an unprofessional, disorganized, boring, haphazard, first day or week on the job are the ones who are energetic, enthusiastic and who want to be productive as soon as possible.

Few hiring managers seem to realize there is a direct link between the impression they make on the employee during the new hire's first few days on the job and subsequent employee turnover.

New hires report for duty excited, nervous, anxious, and eager to please. What happens during the course of the first day will determine whether he or she leaves excited, happy, and proud, or disappointed, confused, and frustrated. And you can bet that even before that new employee gets home from work, a friend or family member will ask, *So, how'd it go? Do you like it? How's your boss? Do you like the people you work with?*

That's why the first two steps of *The 5 Firsts* help ensure no matter what transpires during that first day, the new hire's answer is: *Great! I love it. The people are super and I can't wait to go back tomorrow.*

The way things stand now, about 50 percent of new, hourly employees quit in the first six months and most of those leave during the first month. And then there are those who mentally quit during the first week, but stay around a lot longer. These folks often get the impression that either they and/or what they do are not important, so they never become fully productive. (These are

the more than 70 percent of the American workers polled by Gallup who describe themselves as either not engaged or totally unengaged³ with their jobs.) Then there are those who feel it would look bad to leave too soon or who want to put off the pain of looking for a new job, so they just mark time for six months or a year and then leave you in the lurch.

How much pain do you feel when you realize you have to fire someone? Ask yourself how much pain you have to create to cause a new employee to leave. No one likes to look for a job; no one takes a job planning to quit; no manager wants to look for a new employee. So, what do you suppose happens between the time the applicant eagerly accepts the position and the day that person quits?

³ Uninterested, bored, going through the motions while watching the clock.

To put it bluntly, the employer blows it.

After spending all the time and money it took to recruit and select a new hire, consider the many ways employers destroy any potential return-on-people-investment:

- The new hire wasn't able to work the first day because there was no uniform (no desk, no computer, no phone, no trainer, etc.).
- The first two days were spent in an orientation devoted to filling out forms, reading policy manuals, safety drills, rules and regulations.
- The new hire was thrown in without any orientation or training at all and told by either actions or words to "sink or swim."
- The hiring manager did not tell the new hire the full range of his or her duties and responsibilities and/or about the unpleasant tasks required.
- The hiring manager made promises about opportunities for advancement and raises that could not be kept.

Other common misrepresentations include a failure to tell applicants about more or fewer work hours than stated and when and how raises and promotions are awarded.

When the hiring manager glosses over the tough parts of the job and reality doesn't match what the new hire expects, there's bound to be another costly breakup.

When employers make these kinds of mistakes, how long do you think it takes for new hires to feel they're in the wrong place?⁴

⁴While our main focus here is hourly employees, this kind of first impression disconnect happens at every level --- all the way up to the boardroom.

And what a waste. Wasted time and money recruiting.
Wasted time and money screening and interviewing.
Wasted time and money training.

And what a shame. Especially when, once the right person is hired, there are five simple steps anyone can take to ensure the new hire's experiences reinforce their decision to join the team.

The 5 Firsts program is designed to help you efficiently establish a positive, lasting relationship with every new hire and is keyed to these important events:

1. The first hour
2. The end of the first day
3. The end of the first week
4. The first paycheck
5. The end of the first 30 days

To learn how to leverage the power of first impressions, minimize costly employee turnover, and maximize profitability, read on...

The 5 Firsts suggested herein can easily be adapted to protect your organization's investment in exempt and non-exempt employees alike.