

# Super Size It: Don't Skimp on Supporting Your New Hire



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On her third full day in a new city, my daughter began her hunt for a part-time job. After surviving a stressful group interview, she was thrilled when she was offered a position at her favorite retail outlet. But after two weeks on the job, her enthusiasm—for the job and the brand—were sapped. She described her experience this way:

“None of the managers here were willing to give me even an hour of their time to train me how to do the job. The manager on duty my first night at the store said, ‘You’re handling merchandise returns tonight. Figure it out.’”

Hearing her frustration, I wanted to reach across the miles to wring the necks of the thoughtless managers at my daughter’s place of employment. She applied for the position with great affection for the store’s brand, and with hopes of being a valued member of the team. How dare they treat her—or any new hire—so shabbily? How could withholding even an hour’s worth of training be good for the store, or the brand?

I love working with new staff who are curious problem-solvers, who are willing to try something for the first time, and who humbly risk stumbling, or failing. But asking your optimistic, energetic new hires to ‘figure it out’ without training is mismanagement at its worst. No new employee—regardless of their age, education or experience elsewhere—knows how to do or perform the job you have in mind. The first few weeks at your nonprofit shouldn’t be like an episode of “Naked and Afraid,” the TV show where contestants are expected to fend for themselves—without clothing, food or shelter.

Great supervisors wear multiple hats and move through several stages in their relationship with an employee or volunteer. The relationship should always begin with trainer-trainee. The nonprofit sector’s best supervisors evolve from trainer to coach, mentor and even role model. But like any multi-stepped process, the steps represent a progression; you simply can’t skip from new boss to respected role model without spending time and energy developing and supporting your new hires.

In her recent Risk eNews, [Drinking from the Hose](#), Erin Gloeckner explores valuable lessons from Presidential onboarding, relating these lessons to the critical process of executive onboarding. While it’s true that executives are important assets (or necessary evils, depending on your experience!), great nonprofits recognize that each

and every employee and volunteer in the organization is an essential link to mission success. Each person has the potential to support mission advancement, or to cause costly and permanent damage to your reputation.

Instead of skimping on new hire orientation and support, resolve to super size it. Consider these tips to ensure that new hires are treated as the VIPs they are—and that your mission deserves:

- **Start with the basics.** Before his first day, ask: what are the tools or resources the employee will need to use and understand to be successful on the job? If the list is lengthy, consider breaking down the 'show, tell and teach' sessions into shorter segments taught or demonstrated over five or more days. Sometimes the basics can become a bit dry, so mix up the duller training segments by giving new employees opportunities to participate in team discussions and activities—even if the individuals are still orienting themselves to your programs and services.
- **Invite curiosity.** Make sure that that bulk of your information network is readily available to all new hires. Invite each person to review documents and materials that will help them understand the context in which they are working. For example, ask members of your team to compile documentation from a few specific projects that the new hire can review to learn your A-to-Z approach to project management.
- **Make connections.** In her blog, "[5 Training Tips for New Hires](#)," Jessica Taylor suggests making introductions more 'strategic' by "making a list of key contacts to meet." She also suggests providing background on the key contact with common ties, interests and other info included—all in writing. Whatever your approach, ensure that new hires feel welcomed into your nonprofit's family, and have the opportunity to meet your other all-star staff members and valued volunteers. I've heard horror stories of people starting jobs at workplaces where the organizational chart is kept confidential, and communication with folks outside your immediate team is discouraged. Don't box in your new hires like that! Any employee will perform better if she can see how her role fits into the organization, and if she understands how her colleagues fit in as well.
- **Model the commitment to assist others.** Remind everyone in your nonprofit that if a new (or longtime) employee asks for help, helping a co-worker with an answer, direction, or explanation should be viewed as a top priority. Asking for assistance puts the asker in a vulnerable position, so teach staff that they should be flattered and gracious when asked for help by a colleague. Make sure you're modeling that culture trait when you're asked for help—even when you feel busy. Encourage staff to follow-up their answers with, "Is there something else I can help you with?" and "Don't ever hesitate to come to me for help." 'Good begets good' and an internal culture of service will amplify your nonprofit's mission on the outside, too.
- **Be gentle.** New hires might express ideas that seem out-of-the-box or even wildly unsuited to your nonprofit. Remember that your new hires need ample time to 'learn the ropes' of their roles and the nuances of your business. During the initial period of employment, when a new hire is enthusiastic but possibly inexperienced, be gentle with feedback and always aim to uplift the employee. If a new hire presents an outlandish idea in a meeting, don't jump to correct him too quickly. Consider his suggestion as a fresh perspective that might help you move past 'we've always done it this way.' Positive encouragement is critical throughout an employee's tenure, and provides the employee with confidence that—even if his ideas aren't always implemented—his participation and viewpoint are always valued.

During the first few weeks of my daughter's new job I found myself struggling to offer tips for coping with her uncaring, arrogant managers. When she acknowledged spending each mid-shift break crying in the back room of the store, I wanted to call the store and give 'management' an earful. After a month of part-time work, she tells me she finally 'gets it' and can capably handle the tasks for which she is responsible. Although the process has been painful, she has learned an invaluable lesson about the vital importance of new employee training and the terrible cost organizations and employees pay for uncaring managers. My hope is that this powerful but painful lesson will serve her well in the years ahead when she has the opportunity to train and nurture others.

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