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Is the Honeymoon Over for Your New Employees?

When you were interviewing for a job, chances are someone evoked the old adage: “You only get one chance to make a first impression.” We’ve all heard the stories of the interviewer who makes up his or her mind in less than three minutes. So your clothes were pressed and words rehearsed.

On the other side of the table, companies have learned how important it is to make a good impression on a candidate during the interview. Some - realizing the pool of *qualified* candidates is small in most cases – take the time to *court* and convince a candidate that they’re the *only* place to work.

Once its “official” and the acceptance letter signed, however, most employers let the “honeymoon” period end, forgetting that a first impression for an employee usually lasts through the first 30 days, if not longer. According to the Human Capital Institute, 90% of employees make the decision to stay at a company within the first six months.

So why do so many managers let a new employee “wander the halls” the first week and month of their tenure when instead they could be establishing a relationship, instilling the

company culture, and imparting knowledge; in other words fully acclimating an employee while building a foundation that will pay dividends for years to come?

Lack of time and headcount is the excuse most often heard (“If I had time to spend with a new employee, I wouldn’t need the new employee”). Confusion over who “owns” the responsibility of orienting a new employee is a close second. More forgivable is few managers know the proper way to do so. Finally, and this attitude is unfortunately pervasive: “no one helped me when I started, why should I help somebody else?”

So what first impression does this make? Lack of commitment, poor communication, unresolved anxiety, and unknown expectations. Basically, the impression that the new employer is too busy or disorganized to care. In such an environment, how much effort can be expected from a new employee? How many contributions will he or she likely make?

There’s no need to lecture Human Resources Managers or Training & Development Directors about the benefits of a well-developed onboarding program. If asked, most would declare it’s one of their “to-dos”. It just keeps getting pushed down the list by sales training, new IT application rollouts, and the management training program du jour, whatever it is from whatever guru is hailed that week as the next savior of all things unproductive.

Again, there’s the lack of time and headcount, but there are other reasons onboarding seems to take a backseat – even though it is one of the few initiatives with a sizable *and measurable* ROI. A good onboarding program can take the shape of many forms: new employee guides, online portals, day-one orientations, executive videos, toll-free

hotlines, experiential events and the like. But a good program starts with good content and that forces an employer to answer tough questions: Who are we as a company? What is our culture? What is our mission? How does this new employee fit-in and contribute?

Companies with no formal job descriptions, employee handbook, competency structures, performance management system, or career ladders that map into a curriculum plan usually find the task even more daunting. Truth is, many companies don't know what to tell a new employee or are embarrassed by what might come out.

Bringing in an outside expert can help. You may be asking: *How can an outside person be an expert on my company?* They can't, but what they can do is help orchestrate the effort, bring an objective perspective, take all the content that exists in various forms and bring it together in a program that *empowers* the new employee through a *process* and an *experience*.

It's not all bad news or too late. Each new employee that walks through your door is excited and motivated to join your company, not to mention eager to learn. It's like getting a chance to make a first impression over and over and over again.