

# Start 'Em Out RIGHT

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Second in a three-part series

**T**hink back to your first day on the job. You most likely remember vivid details of the day's events.

Unfortunately, recollections of the first day on the job are often more negative than positive. Instead of finding ways to make you feel comfortable, your employer most likely handed you a stack of forms and left you alone to complete them.

Bernard Erven, professor of agricultural economics and Extension specialist at Ohio State University, realizes the effect employers can have by making the first day a positive experience for new employees.

That's why he emphasizes the need for an orientation and training period for all new employees on farm operations. By doing so, employers can help every employee get a good start. Erven urges employers not to underestimate the effect they can have on the first day.

"The second day cannot

replace the first day," he says. "It's the most teachable moment in their career with you."

## Think it through

"Orientation is the introduction of a new employee to the industry, the farm, the requirements of the job, the social situation in which he or she will be working, and the farm culture," Erven says. An employee orientation is something that should be thought out by the employer before the employee reports to work the first day.

"The length of the orientation period depends on the job description, complexity of the organization, number of key people involved, previous experience of the employee and number of people being oriented. The orientation could range from less than an hour to at least one full day," Erven says.

He emphasizes that, regardless of the amount of time an

employee may be working for you, an orientation is still important. He also advises that relatives working on the farm be oriented.

In planning an orientation program, the employer must address three important considerations:

**1.** Who will be in charge of orienting the new person? Will someone within the employee's department have this responsibility? Will orientation always take place with the supervisor? An agreement could be made in which the responsibilities are divided among several people.

"Depending on the size of your operation, adjust your needs," Erven recommends.

**2.** What will be the content of the orientation? The owner should plan this part of the orientation to retain control over the information given

to the new employee and allot the appropriate time for the information to be given.

**3.** How will the orientation mesh with job training? "Orientation and training are often confused," Erven says. Employers should look at orientation as socialization to the organization and to co-workers. Training, on the other hand, is preparation to do the job for which the person has been hired.

## What to include

Erven suggests certain topics be taken into consideration when planning an orientation program. These topics include introductions, farm characteristics, personnel policies, compensation and benefits, and job responsibilities. Employers should use them as a guide for planning an orientation program, adjusting each area depending on the operation.

Introductions are vital to the orientation process. Erven suggests introductions be scheduled first. Remember to introduce the new employee to the owner/operator, supervisor, co-workers and people who often visit the operation. These may include neighbors, service people, close relatives or the veterinarian. "Make sure they meet anyone who is talked about often," he suggests.

Early in the orientation, explain specific job responsibilities. If the employer clearly explains the employee's duties from the start, confusion about job responsibilities can be avoided. Show the employee where the work will be done.

Explain specific tasks for which the employee will be responsible. Remind the employee of safety guidelines that should be followed on the operation and explain what can happen if they are not obeyed.

The employer also should help employees see how their jobs relate to the responsibilities of other employees in the



**Bernard Erven, professor of agricultural economics and Extension specialist at Ohio State University, realizes the effect employers can have in making the first day a positive experience for new employees. Erven spoke at the Employee Management for Animal Agriculture conference sponsored by Kansas State Research & Extension.**

operation. "New employees don't know who does what," he says.

Erven recommends creating a job board showcasing every employee's picture, name, title and job summary to help all employees become familiar with their co-workers' responsibilities, especially in a larger operation.

Various farm characteristics should be explained so the employee understands the operation. The history of the farm is an excellent place to start. Explain to employees how the farm began and how it has evolved over the years. The mission statement and goals for the farm also should be explained.

### Management input

It is important to include the management team in the orientation. In addition to introductions to each manager, which may have been done earlier, the employee should be given a specific idea of the managers' responsibilities.

Include a tour of the facilities, buildings and land in the orientation. If buildings are named, explain the names. Discuss the types of livestock and crops the farm produces and the production processes that are used. Be careful not to take for granted that the employee already will understand this information. Key characteristics of the industry also should be discussed.

## Hints for successful employee orientation

1. Be prepared. Have a detailed orientation plan, stick to the planned content, and end on time.
2. Put new employees at ease before jumping into the heavy parts of the orientation by offering them a soda or coffee.
3. Include the owner or one of the top managers in the orientation.
4. Encourage questions. Keep in mind that new employees won't be prepared to ask any instantly. Give them time to think of questions.
5. Keep first-day paperwork to a minimum.
6. Provide a glossary of farm terms. Include the everyday words that have special meaning on your farm.
7. Save a few minutes at the end of the first day to offer encouragement, to ask for questions and to emphasize again the employee's importance to the business.
8. Save at least 15 minutes at the end of the first week for the last phase of the orientation. Encourage questions. Review progress made during the first week. Outline what will happen in the next few weeks. Send people home feeling good about being part of your farm.

In addition, information about the farm's culture may be included in this part of orientation. It allows the opportunity for the owner to clarify the values by which the farm operates.

### Presenting policy

Personnel policies are important to include in an orientation program. Although policies are extremely important for the employee to understand, it may be too overwhelming to share this information on the first day.

"Don't tell these things to your employees the first day because they won't remember. Instead, give them an employee handbook," Erven says.

Policies to discuss include, but are not limited to, attendance, breaks, work schedule, use of equipment and tools, and courtesy to other employees. If your operation has a probationary period, make sure the employee understands the policy. Include an explanation of pay and paydays when you come to this point in your orientation. Explain vacation, sick leave and benefits to the employee, too.

If legal documents must be signed before employees begin certain job responsibilities, take care of that right away, and save the other forms that can wait until they have settled into their jobs.

Make a handbook of

personnel policies available. Once the employee has taken time to review the policies, encourage specific questions.

Although the thought of creating an orientation plan may seem overwhelming at first, taking time to implement one can improve any operation in the long run. By carefully considering how to familiarize employees with the operation before they begin training, they will feel more comfortable in their work environment, ultimately improving the operation overall.