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Do Not Let a Good Hire Go Bad

By David R. Leng

“How can I stop hiring problem employees?”

This is a common question, and one that you might ask when a workers’ compensation claim “goes bad” and you never saw it coming.

Frustration does not begin to describe your feelings. You go through all of the necessary steps to find the ideal employee: one who has the skills, education, focus, and attitude to be able to complete his job safely and with high efficiency. You believe he is going to understand his job duties, that he is responsible, and that he can accomplish his duties without constant supervision. You feel like you’ve just won the HR lottery...until you realize you have misread one of the numbers on the ticket.

You look back and try to figure out where it all went wrong. It still looks like the candidate passed all of your tests. He looked like the perfect fit, but something went wrong.

Most likely, you threw him to the wolves too soon. Many good hires go bad simply because the company did not conduct a proper orientation to indoctrinate the employee into its safety culture immediately. The steps are simple.

Orientation

Begin indoctrinating employees through a proper orientation program, which is not just about the history of your company, paperwork, and meeting everyone. It is much more.

Safety begins at the point of hire, so your orientation also needs to start with and continually emphasize safety. OSHA requires you to provide certain trainings, such as hazard communication, to new employees before they actually start. The process, however, should go beyond this. New employees must understand the culture of your organization in order to do their jobs safely, not just productively. They need to understand that

you have a zero-injury culture, that no job is important enough to lose life or limb, and that accidents do not just happen. The orientation needs to convey that the employee is responsible for himself and his team, and that everyone must work in a safe environment.

Immediately after completing the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9, you should conduct the new employee’s safety orientation. Employees need to go through appropriate safety training before they even set foot on the job. This will elevate the goal of working efficiently and

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safely to being a main priority. Many employers make the mistake of waiting for the next safety meeting or the next safety training session to start this process. This can be a month, two months, or even six months away, depending on how often the company conducts trainings. It is like handing someone the keys to a Formula-1 race car before he knows how to drive.

Orientation should emphasize the culture of your organization, the employee's expectations, and what you expect him to do and how to do it. It should teach him who to report to, the proper chain of command, what he should be striving for and achieving, and how often you will conduct performance reviews. It also should spell out the process for immediately reporting any issues he identifies.

Post Orientation

Is it any surprise that new employees are more frequently injured than those working in their position longer than six months?

After you conduct your orientation, it is critical to train employees for any skill gaps they have related to their jobs. Many employers make the mistake of providing quick, on-the-job training or letting employees learn as they go without a clear process of delivering training and measuring progress. The quicker you close the employee's skill gap, the quicker he will be safe and productive for you. When you start an employee in his position or move an employee to a new position, train him for that specific job. Do not just show him once or twice how to do something or toss him a manual and leave him on his own. Consider starting a mentoring program, where a more experienced employee—one who does things the proper way—is able to monitor and make sure that the new employee:

- ① Conducts his tasks properly and safely.
- ② Does not slip into any bad habits that will be more difficult to break later on.
- ③ Does not have any skill gaps that need to be addressed.

The mentor does his part by:

- ① Working with the new employee for a period of time.

- ② Being responsible for monitoring and making sure that the employee knows what he is doing.
- ③ Assessing whether the employee is conducting the job safely and correctly.
- ④ Acting as a sounding board for the employee to ask questions while learning his new position.

The bottom line is this: The more rapidly you get employees to the point where they truly understand their job and how to conduct it, and have the nec-

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essary skills to perform it, the happier, safer, and more productive your employees will be. After you reach this point, be sure to provide periodic assessments and consistent reviews of their performance. On an ongoing basis, you should identify the areas where you can help them improve, and commend them for the good things they accomplish. Also, you should look for feedback on how they feel they or the company can improve.

You will be amazed how often your own employees will be able to identify safer and more productive ways to accomplish tasks, or have ideas on how the company can grow as a whole.

Through mentoring, monitoring, and retesting, you can determine if you have an employee who needs minimum training and education to complete the tasks of the job, or one who needs more help to be the employee you thought you were hiring.

Hiring a new employee and then not training him to fill skills and education gaps is a workers' compensation disaster waiting to happen. You might as well pull out the checkbook right away because, like death and taxes, higher premiums are a certainty. Even worse, though, are the lost productivity, a shrinking bottom line, upset customers, and a potential loss of life on the job.

Accidents do not just happen. Neither do problem employees—at least not if you take the time and effort to bring them up to speed on how to do their jobs correctly, efficiently, and, most importantly, safely. Now that is a winning ticket. ■

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