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Don't Let a Good Hire Go Bad

Avoiding workers' compensation claims

By David Leng, Vice President, Duncan Financial Group

"How can I stop hiring problematic employees?"

This is a very common question that tends to follow when a workers' compensation claim "goes bad" and you never saw it coming.

Frustration doesn't begin to describe your feelings. You go through all the necessary steps to find the "ideal" employee who has the skills, education, focus, and attitude to be able to complete his or her job with high efficiency, while doing it safely. You believe he or she is going to understand the job duties and responsibilities and accomplish them without constant supervision.

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

Most likely, you threw them to the wolves too soon. We see many good hires go bad for the simple fact the company does not conduct a proper orientation in order to indoctrinate the employee into their safety culture immediately. The steps are quite simple.

The Importance of Orientation

Begin training employees through a proper orientation program, which is not just about the history of your company, paperwork, and meeting the other employees. It should be much more inclusive.

Safety begins at the point of hire, so your orientation also needs to start with and continually emphasize safety. The Occupational

Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires you provide certain trainings to new employees before they start, such as hazard communication, but the process should go beyond this. New employees must understand the culture of your organization



in order to do their job 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 don't "just happen." The orientation needs to convey that the employee is responsible for themselves and their team, and that everyone is working 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 safely to being the main priority.

Many employers make the mistake of waiting for the next safety meeting, or the next safety training session to start the process. This can be a month, two months, even six months away, depending on how often the company conducts trainings.

Orientation should also emphasize the culture of your organization, the employee's expectations, and what you expect them to do and how to do it. Educate them on the management and reporting structure, chain of command, employee expectations, and performance reviews. You should also spell out the process of reporting any issues they identify – *immediately*.

Why Post Orientation Matters

Is it any surprise that there are a higher percentage of new employees injured in the first six months compared to those working in the position longer than six months?

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After you conduct your orientation, it is critical to train employees for any skill gap they have that relates to their job. Many employers make the mistake of providing a quick “on-the-job training,” or letting the employee learn as they go, without a clear process of delivering the training and measuring the employee’s progress. The quicker you close the employee’s skill gap, the quicker they will be a safe and productive worker.

When you start employees in their position, or move employees to new positions, train them for that specific job, rather than showing them once or twice how to do something or simply tossing them a manual, before leaving them on their own. Consider starting a mentoring program instead. This means that a more experienced employee – one that does things the proper way – is able to monitor and make sure the new employee conducts his or her tasks properly and safely; does not slip into any bad habits that will be more difficult to break later on; and does not have any skill gaps that need to be addressed.

The mentor does his or her part by working with the new employee

for a period of time; being responsible for monitoring and making sure the employee knows what they are doing; assessing if the employee is conducting the job safely and correctly; and acting as a sounding board for the employee to ask questions while learning their new position.

The more rapidly you get employees to the point where they truly understand their job and how to perform it, and have the necessary 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 not only the areas where you can help them improve, but also commend them for the good things they accomplish. Also, look for feedback on how an employee feels he – or the company – can improve.

You would 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.

By mentoring, monitoring, and retesting you can determine if you actually have an employee that needs minimum training and education to complete the tasks of the job, or one that needs a little more “heavy lifting” in order to be the employee you thought you were hiring.

By hiring a new employee, and then not training him or her to fill skills and education gaps, it’s a workers’ compensation disaster waiting to happen with loss of productivity, a shrinking bottom line, upset customers, and a potential loss of life on the job.

Accidents don’t “just happen,” but 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 job correctly, efficiently, and, most importantly, safely. Now that’s a winning ticket. (B)

About the author: David R. Leng, CPCU, CIC, CBWA, CRM, CWCA, is author of *Stop Being Frustrated & Overcharged* and vice president of the Duncan Financial Group in Irwin, a member of Keystone Insurers Group. He is also an instructor for the Institute of WorkComp Professionals (IWCP) and can be contacted at dleng@duncangrp.com. For more information, visit www.StopBeingFrustrated.com.

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