

"MANY COMPANIES ARE IGNORING A VERY BASIC AND SIMPLE TECHNIQUE FOR INTEGRATING PEOPLE'S NEEDS INTO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ORGANIZATION."

# A NEW LOOK AT EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

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The dichotomy of what workers want most and what management must produce is an ancient contradiction. Perhaps total integration of the needs of the worker and the goals of the organization will never be accomplished. However, we tend to agree with Chris Argyris, who states: "the incongruence between the individual and the organization can provide the basis for a continued challenge which, as it is fulfilled, will tend to help man to enhance his own growth and to develop organizations that will tend to be viable and effective."<sup>3</sup> "Effectiveness" in terms of business organizations relates to profit. American industry has adopted a succession of modern techniques to attempt to satisfy people and profit goals.

Through our experience in all aspects of human resources management and organizational development, we have observed an

abundance of techniques applied by companies to satisfy workers' needs for self-esteem. The current popularity of programs which purport to enrich people and jobs is evidence that business is cognizant of what employees want. These programs appear to have a positive impact on worker morale. So they do satisfy workers' needs to some

In order to address this oversight, we examined several alternatives and concluded that there is a way to satisfy both the people and the profit goals of an organization. There is an effective tool for improving employee satisfaction, developing workers and contributing to organizational goals. That tool is *employee orientation*. This

article presents excerpts from a systematic approach to orientation which we have developed, tested and implemented in organizations. Results? It works!

In our experience with a well-planned and properly implemented orientation process, we

have found that orientation should be a personal experience between manager and employee. A sound manager/employee relationship provides the vehicle for satisfying many individual and company goals. An effective orientation program makes no assumptions about what the manager knows or does not know about establishing a workable relationship with a new

What workers want most, as more than 100 studies in the past 20 years show, is to become masters of their immediate environment and to feel that they themselves are important — the twin ingredients of self esteem.<sup>1</sup>

HEW Task Report, 1973  
*Work in America*

If management had a god, it would be Mammon — symbolized by a column of profits . . . every executive knows that profit is the name of the game.<sup>2</sup>

R. Heller  
*The Great American Dream*

degree. However, most of these attempts at enrichment begin after the employee has passed through the probationary period of employment — and that's a mistake. As a result of our observations, we became convinced that many companies are ignoring a very basic and simple technique for integrating people's needs into the objectives of the organization.

employee. Instead, it systematically guides the manager through the orientation process. This can be facilitated by a manager's manual, written in a step-by-step fashion, with specific examples, suggestions, forms recommendations and methods for evaluating progress.

An effective orientation program can result in the following mutually beneficial outcomes:

- It begins the employer/employee relationship on a positive note.

- It facilitates the learning process by reducing the personal anxiety commonly caused by a new or changed work setting.

- It provides uniform guidelines to training, which reduces EEO problems.

- It addresses needs of *all* workers in a changed environment, not only new employees.

- It balances company needs for productivity with individual needs for self-esteem.

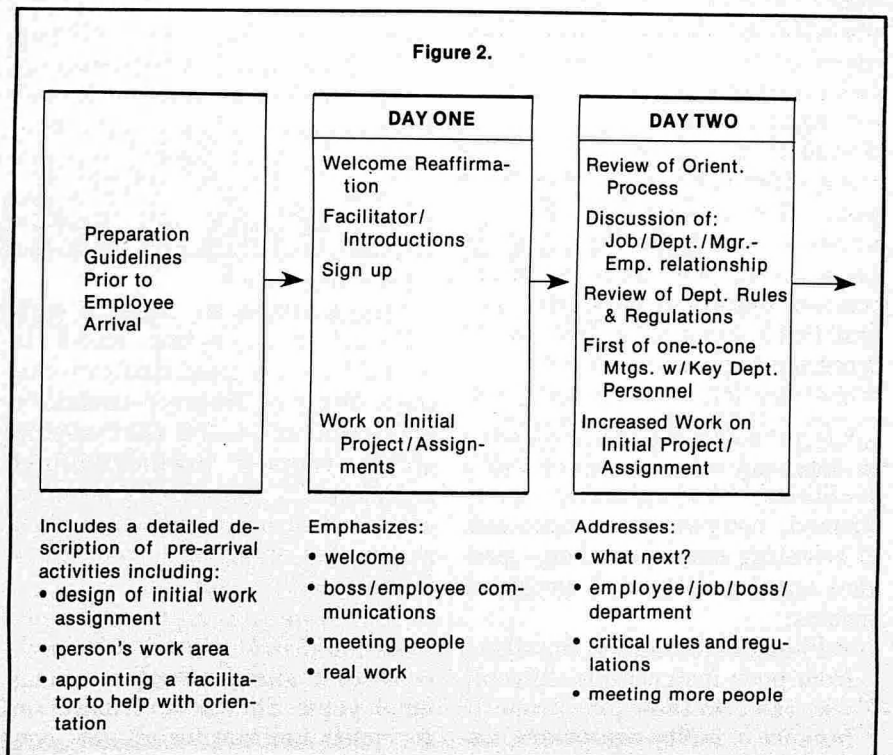
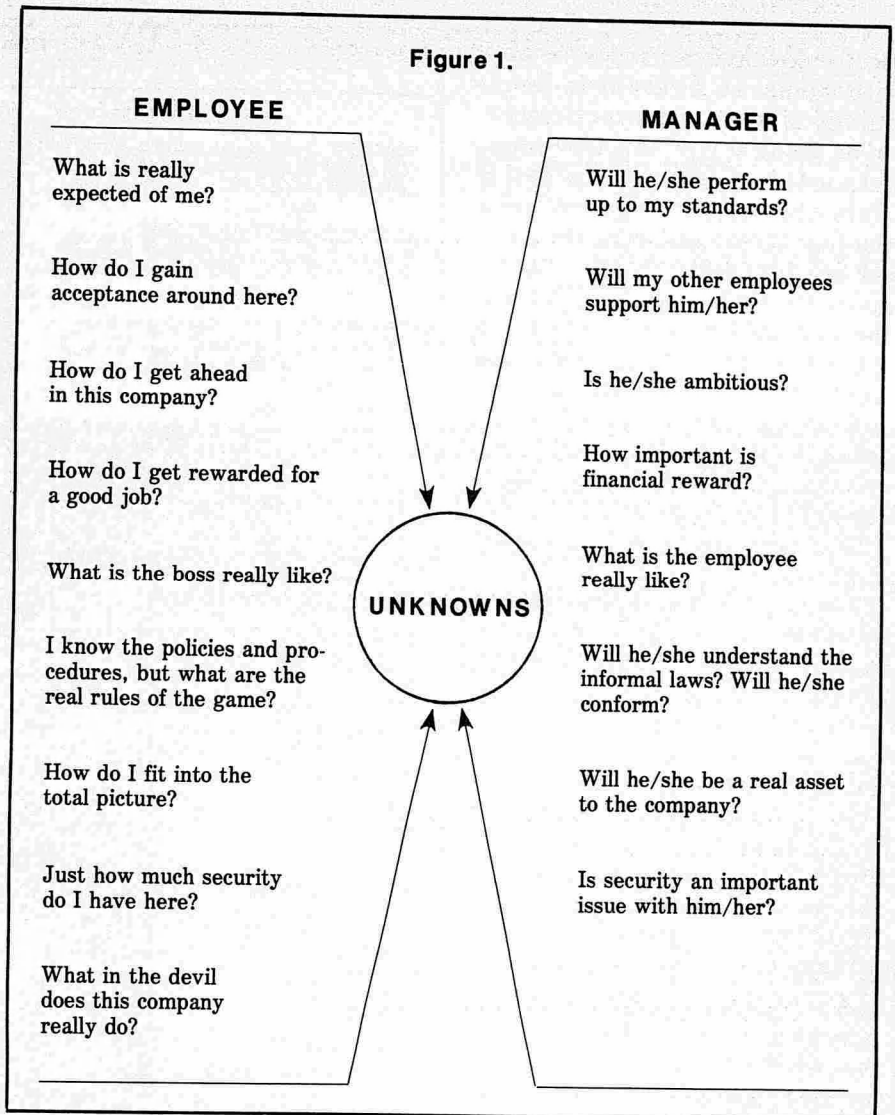
- It places the responsibility for the orientation process where resultant benefits will be greatest.

The discussion which follows describes *how* an effective orientation program meets these needs.

- *It begins employer/employee relationships on a positive note:*

The old expression "first impressions are lasting impressions" definitely applies to the joining up process. The initial contact is usually long remembered by employees. Unfortunately, many organizations do not recognize orientation as an opportunity to respond to the needs of the new employee and instead, "respond to their own need of self-aggrandizement."<sup>4</sup> Our approach to orientation is *not* to greet the person with a canned program saying how great the company is. Instead, the initial emphasis is on the one-to-one relationships necessary to give a person a sense of belonging. Later on is time enough for the "dog and pony" show about the company, benefits and other corporate topics.

- *It facilitates learning by reducing the personal anxiety commonly caused by a new or changed work setting:* Our approach to orientation is based on the premise that



people are anxious about new work situations. In a recent in-house survey of what employees expected on the first day, the newcomers responded as follows: "to get to know the boss," "to get to know the co-workers and subordinates," "to get to know the job," "to be given my first project," "learning the rules and regulations," "to be taken to lunch." The survey group works for a large multinational corporation in the areas of financial analysis, distribution, market research, law and production. However, their expectations do not differ from those of new employees in general.

The new worker is primarily interested in learning about his/her boss, job and co-workers. Yet most company orientation programs concentrate on telling people about the benefits, the company products, history and background first. This knowledge, although useful, does not help to alleviate the natural tension associated with dealing with the critical unknowns about the job, the boss, peers and subordinates.

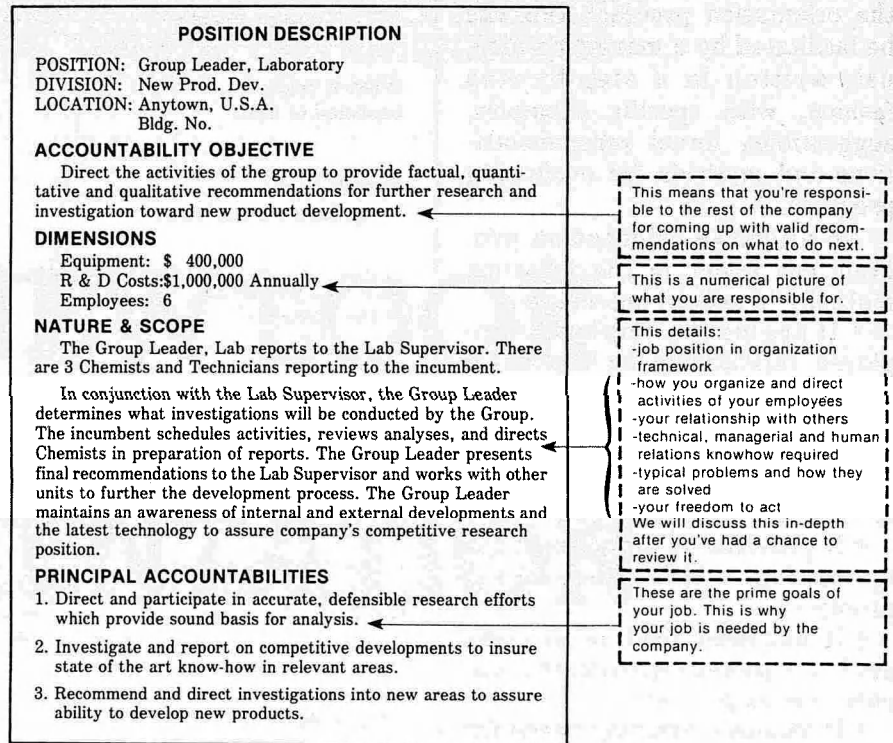
An approach to reducing the anxiety is to reduce the unknowns. One of the keys to a productive working relationship is the prompt clarification and integration of what the employee expects and what the manager expects. The employee and the manager enter the new or changed work situation with many different unknowns (Figure 1.).

An effective orientation program offers the manager specific recommendations for resolving the unknowns early in the employment process. Figure 2 illustrates the first three steps of an orientation process designed to reduce the apprehension felt by new employees.

- *It provides uniform guidelines to training which reduce EEO problems:* A systematic, well-planned, company-wide approach to orienting employees helps prevent equal employment problems such as:

- Poor performance resulting from poor instructions. "People who can't do their jobs properly because of faulty equipment, unclear instructions or lack of prop-

Figure 3.



er tools *know* they look bad."<sup>5</sup> The preceding statement is verified by the fact that most discrimination complaints filed with the EEOC come from minorities and women terminated during the probationary period.

- Supervisors falling into the old "school boy" syndrome. "In the absence of managerial guidelines, supervisors are in danger of falling into a very common and very human trap — the old school boy syndrome. (The tendency to favor those like us in background, race, religion, national origin, etc. and be more critical and intolerant of those least like us.)"<sup>6</sup>

"The best way to head of lawsuits and discrimination charges is to avoid those actions that provoke them. In terms of the probationary employment period that means giving yourself predetermined guidelines . . . objectivity must be extended to probationary as well as regular employees from their first day on the job."<sup>6</sup>

A systematic approach to orientation provides predetermined, consistent guidelines for training employees. The basic orientation format is uniform for all new employees. Each manager builds in

the specificity for his/her particular operation.

- *It balances company needs for productivity with individual needs for self-esteem:* The manner in which an effective orientation program addresses the dual needs of the company and the employee can best be illustrated with an example from the manager's guide that deals with the first-day meeting between boss and employee (Figure 3).

Such a program not only gives managers guidelines for telling workers *what* is expected, it also addresses the *why* and *how* the job fits into the total picture. It clearly spells out the setting of performance standards, how to communicate them, how to measure performance and the positive impact of high performance on employee reward as well as on company growth and profitability.

- *It addresses needs of all workers in a changed environment:* A total orientation process is not exclusively for new employees. It is a program which can be adapted to all categories of employees, as illustrated in the matrix in Figure 4.

- *It places the responsibility for the orientation process where resultant benefits will be greatest:*

"Concerned managers can initiate a change in utilization of human resources at a point where it will make the greatest impact — the beginning."

One of the prime reasons organizational orientation efforts have been unsuccessful is because the responsibility has been misplaced with Personnel. We say misplaced because the greatest benefits of orientation accrue to the immediate supervisor of the new employee — not Personnel. Just a couple of the orientation benefits accruing to supervisors of new employees are:

a. Employees reach acceptable levels of productivity more quickly. It is not necessarily true that "it takes a six month investment to train any employee so he's capable of handling assignments alone."<sup>7</sup> With pre-determined guidelines and a little planning, the learning period can be reduced dramatically.

b. The supervisor is recognized by superiors as fulfilling a key management responsibility. "There are certain policies and procedures that you can relate to your subordinates that are rather logical on their own merits . . . but, there are others that are new, different, and not pleasant to implement. It's so easy to

say 'this is our objective'. But, making it work, having the right mix of people, having them adequately motivated to implement those policies and procedures in the final analysis is the most critical challenge any manager has."<sup>8</sup>

#### Desire for Self-Esteem

As we stated in the beginning of this article, what workers want most is a feeling of self-worth and what organizations want most is profitable self-perpetuation. Employee desires for self-esteem are being expressed throughout America. "Industrial concerns are subject to increasing pressures seeking improvement in the work force and in the environment. . . . There are signs of crisis in almost every major institution. Many of these are centered around people — the desire of individuals for a richer quality of life in their everyday lives and on the job."<sup>9</sup> Organizations determined to meet both their own and their employees' goals need a method for systematically addressing the way they deal with their human resources. Concerned members of management

can initiate a change in their utilization of human resources at a point where it will make the greatest impact — at the beginning — with effective employee orientation.

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Figure 4.

