

ACHIEVING CULTURE CHANGE THROUGH YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

The Secret Tool of Organizational Change Management

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An effective New Employee Orientation (NEO) ensures the engagement, retention and acculturation of new employees. It also serves as a crucial lever to attaining cultural transformation in an organization. If your company has embarked on a culture change or recognizes that the culture (and consequently, the behaviors and attitudes of employees) must change to drive better business results, it is best to focus on employees at the beginning of their tenure, when they are most impressionable. It is during these first days, weeks and months with a new employer that employees decide whether they will be champions of change within the company, become disgruntled and leave, or stay and become toxic by upholding the “old” culture.

Regardless of where you are along your cultural change journey, NEOs are a critical opportunity to instill new employees (who have yet to drink the “old culture” Kool-Aid) with the culture your company aspires to represent to the world. Once acculturated and educated, these employees become key influencers of change, spreading throughout the company as OCM foot soldiers of your mission. In other words, they become ambassadors and importers of the positive values, behaviors and norms that will help your company evolve and grow.

Achieving Cultural Transformation Through Your NEO

NEOs are a once-in-a-life-time occasion, during which a captured group of employees is able to assemble without interruption to learn something. Do not waste this valuable time inundating them with employment information, compliance PowerPoints, or talking heads. Instead, use your NEO for strategic change management purposes. To do this effectively, follow these three strategies:

1. Communicate the business case for change. During your NEO, review the current internal and external environments that are changing the way you do business – and why you need your new recruits to help you evolve or grow as a business. Understanding the bigger picture allows new employees to buy in quickly to your need for change and their role in the transformation. This is a particularly important onboarding strategy for Millennials, who are appreciative of receiving this larger vision and an understanding of their place in it

2. Focus on milestone transformations in the employees' own lives. Build in exercises that allow employees to reflect on transformative moments in their own lives -- college graduations, having children, overcoming a major obstacle, learning a new skill -- during which they personally experienced meaningful change. Then, tie those experiences back to the company's changing culture and business environment. This allows employees to relate and understand the significance of the "before and after" your company is trying to achieve.
3. Enlist new employees as change agents. Explicitly ask your new employees during the NEO to be catalysts of change, and equip them with the knowledge and skills to do so effectively, professionally and safely. Case studies and role plays are excellent methods for illustrating difficult and realistic situations that new employees may encounter -- situations in your workplace that represent the values or behaviors that you are trying to discourage or to support -- and how to respond in a way that does not jeopardize their own professional status and working relations.

The Long View

Your NEO should empower, engage, and equip your new employees to navigate and lead your company into the next century and beyond. Do not miss the opportunity that the NEO provides in starting your new employees off on the right foot for themselves and for your company and its future.



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