

Who Is On Probation?

It's Kelly's first day on the job. Her manager tells her that company policy requires new employees to be "on probation" for three months. While she's not surprised, she is also thinking "We'll see how this goes. If I don't like the work or if they don't treat me right, I'll be looking for something better." From Kelly's perspective, her new employer is on probation too.

Probation is best seen as a trial period for an employee and employer as they both determine whether the job and workplace are good fits with the employee's skills and talents. The length of the probationary period is determined by provincial employment standards regulations, by collective agreements between unions and management and by company policy.

During probation employees should receive a comprehensive orientation. Managers who take the time to properly orient new hires will reap the rewards of improved employee satisfaction, better customer service and fewer employee mistakes. These factors lead to decreased employee turnover, saving employers thousands of dollars a year.

A quality orientation includes the following:

- Outline the job duties in a formal job description or a point form list.
- Involve a few current employees in developing written orientation guidelines.
- Ensure supervisors know *it is their job* to provide each new employee with a comprehensive orientation.
- Ensure supervisors are given time in their workday to coach and provide feedback. Parts of the orientation may be delegated to skilled employees who are designated as "trainers".
- Provide training to supervisors on how to be a good coach and how to give positive and constructive critical feedback.
- Provide a variety of orientation activities including supervised on-the-job practice, reading and video/computer presentations.
- At the end of the probationary period, the employee and supervisor should meet to discuss employee strengths and areas for improvement.

So, take a few minutes to consider ways in which your organization could improve how new employees are trained and supported. Better orientation leads to improved morale and better retention. Best of all, the money saved goes directly to your bottom line!

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