

## **HR and New Hire Retention – Bridging the Gap Between Talent Acquisition and Onboarding**

**By Rebecca McNeil**

A growing number of human resources (HR) teams in health care have discovered that their involvement with new employees should not end when the offer letter is accepted. Leading acute and long-term care organizations recognize that onboarding serves as a bridge between the talent acquisition process and new hires' transition into the workplace. Effective onboarding programs help employees succeed on the job, improve new hire retention, and enable HR teams to provide higher levels of service to their hiring managers.

Tomah Memorial Hospital and Newton Presbyterian Manor both use onboarding to set their organizations apart from the competition and enhance the new hire experience. HR leaders from these organizations recently shared three best practices that have strengthened their onboarding programs.

### **1. Emphasize culture and values as part of onboarding.**

Onboarding programs that focus on the organizational culture help employees understand the behaviors needed to succeed on the job. Tomah Memorial Hospital is a community hospital located in Tomah, Wisconsin. Its two-person HR team serves 304 employees and handles as many as eight to ten new hires each month. Brenda Reinert, Human Resource Director, and Britney Rewey, Human Resource Generalist, are committed to delivering an onboarding experience that has a personal touch and reflects the company culture. "We have an open and honest culture at Tomah Memorial and our orientation demonstrates that. We often get compliments from new hires that the onboarding experience was fun and they felt welcome," noted Reinert. Both Reinert and Rewey believe that the personal touch is important for new employees and that Tomah's warm environment sets it apart from other organizations.

Newton Presbyterian Manor, a continuing care retirement community in Newton, Kansas, has also realized the important role that culture plays in onboarding. It recently revised its orientation process. Instead of sitting in an eight hour meeting, new employees now participate in a one-on-one meeting with Melissa Koehn, the Director of HR. During the session, Koehn takes new hires on a tour of the building, introduces them to department directors, discusses the history of the community, and reviews policies and procedures. "This new approach to onboarding gives employees a more complete and personal view of the community," Koehn said. "We find that new hires ask more questions, gain a better understanding of what our organization is all about, and really see what will be expected of them on the job."

## **2. Use talent management technology to streamline onboarding.**

Automating onboarding offers two major benefits: it helps organizations provide a great new hire experience and it conveys a positive and professional image for HR. Before implementing an applicant tracking system, Tomah Memorial Hospital's onboarding program was comprised of manual, piecemeal processes. Some documents were emailed to employees ahead of time, but additional information was requested during orientation. Today, the process looks very different. After an offer decision is made, an automated package of forms is sent to new hires which they can review at home. Employees then bring completed documents and any questions with them on the first day of orientation. "By automating the administrative aspects of onboarding, we can focus more on the human element and provide a warm, personal touch during orientation," said Rewey.

The automated onboarding program at Tomah Memorial has also delivered several benefits for the HR team. Since Reinert and Rewey wear many hats, the applicant tracking system has enabled them to increase their efficiency and productivity. "With the software solutions we've implemented, we can handle all our tasks remotely," said Reinert. "We have better time management – processes don't rule us anymore, we rule the processes." These improvements have not gone unnoticed. Tomah Memorial's CEO observed that over the past three to four months there has been a marked improvement in the caliber and engagement of new hires. He attributes it to the technology.

## **3. Build an ongoing relationship between new hires and HR through onboarding.**

When designed properly, the onboarding process can bring a human element to HR and help develop connections between new hires and the Human Resources team. At Newton Presbyterian Manor, for example, Koehn believes that spending extra time one-on-one with new hires creates a good first impression. Employees feel that they have a place where they can turn with questions after they begin their work.

Tomah Memorial also has found that a positive onboarding experience forms the foundation for employee satisfaction and employee retention. "Recruiting isn't done just from outside," Reinert commented. "We also recruit from our employee base, so it's important that HR has a strong relationship with staff members." Even after the onboarding process is over, Tomah's HR team follows up periodically with new hires in an informal manner. This creates an environment of trust. As Rewey noted, "Our employees feel very comfortable coming to HR to ask questions. They know we are here to help."

By reinventing onboarding programs, it's possible for health care HR teams to create significant value for employees and their organizations. Through automation of administrative paperwork, HR is free to focus on more engaging information, such as the organizational culture and values, and to build long-lasting relationships with new hires that will increase retention.

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