

Roll Out the Red Carpet: Employee Orientation Tips for Activity Professionals

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An orientation program is a systematic approach that is used to welcome new employees and provide necessary information for the employee to become familiar with the department and organization. Providing a thorough and informative employee orientation program is an important responsibility of the Activity Director. Orientation truly sets the standards and lets the new employee know what is expected, what the policies are and how to perform their new position. Many times, activity personnel are scheduled to facilitate programs on their first day without proper training and orientation. In this article, I discuss the importance of an orientation program, along with some tips on how to facilitate an educational, complete, and even fun program.

An orientation program is important for many reasons. First off, it is proven that providing orientation can actually reduce the turnover rate of your employees. Many Activity Directors have stated that their department turnover rate is so high that they just don't have the time to provide the orientation. If employees are informed of the policies, receive hands on training and are aware of their job description prior to actually working independently on the unit, you can actually lower the turnover rate. In fact, employee orientation is a time saver for managers and trainers. By taking the time to train early on, the employees will be better prepared for their job and will be more receptive to future training sessions as well.

Employee orientation programs also lower risk management for the facility. Activity professionals must be educated on the many precautions associated within the facility such as fall prevention, special diets, resident rights, infection control, abuse prevention, restraints, fire and safety and so on. In many states these are required orientation topics as well as annual in-services. Without this training, the facility can be held accountable. It is the role of the Activity Director to lower the risks associated with working in the facility and the department through orientation and training.

Employee orientation is also known to increase staff effectiveness. Employees will provide higher quality services and have a better understanding of their role as an activity professional. This also increases the employee's motivation and can even reduce the employee's anxiety, while increasing job satisfaction.

When developing and facilitating your employee orientation program there are some important things to keep in mind. Your orientation program sets the stage for the employee so you need to be certain that it is a positive experience for the employee, rather than an overwhelming, chaotic, or unorganized one.

The following are some Do's and Don'ts of employee orientation:

DO...

- Be prepared-have all systems and programs in place

- Ensure the employee has a locker, desk, “or space” for their belongings and/or a work area
- Be sure the employee knows the location of the phones, bathrooms, food/cafeteria, exits, parking, time clock, etc.
- Introduce the new employee to staff and residents
- Involve co-workers and other departments
- Give an assignment
- Make yourself available
- Ask questions such as, “How is your day going?”, “Do you have any questions?”, etc.
- Have lunch with or arrange a lunch date! Remember your school days and how important it was to have a place to sit with friends in the cafeteria?
- Involve other departments and co-workers. No one wants to listen to just one person all day.
- Utilize an employee manual and checklist to guide you. Have the employee sign when topics are completed.
- Make the first day fun!

DON'T ...

- Show boring videos
- Provide long, boring lectures
- Stay in one location lecturing. Use a hands-on approach.
- Over stimulate with too much information. Break up your topics into shorter segments.
- Create a day that is unproductive and chaotic
- Be unavailable
- Do it all in one day. Your orientation program will be more effective if it is spread out over the course of time. It can be a few days or weeks-that’s up to the manager.
- Give the employee an enormous amount of materials to read independently. That is not orientation!

Another thing to consider is the fun factor. When an employee leaves the department or the facility, we often have a party; give flowers, a gift, a cake, etc. Why don’t we do the same for new employees? Here are some fun things you can do to welcome aboard your new employees:

- Have a party or luncheon
- Send flowers/give a gift
- Establish a resident Welcome Wagon (residents can make a card or create a gift for the new employee and personally welcome the individual)
- Establish an employee Sunshine Club (a program in which employees contribute a couple of dollars each month for gifts, cards, cakes, etc. for employee recognitions birthdays, anniversaries, babies, retirement, etc. This is great for new employees too!
- Utilize icebreaker activities as a way for everyone in the department to introduce themselves. Play fun games.
- Give menus for takeout food.
- Give freebies like a company shirt, mug, pad and pen, etc.
- Establish a Buddy System-you do NOT want the new employee to be alone (especially facilitating activities) during orientation.
- Provide a letter from the Administrator or President of the Resident Council

Each Activity Department should have a well-designed, structured, thorough orientation program in which all new activity personnel must complete. When designing your department's orientation program, the following are some areas that you should include in your program:

- Tour of facility or important areas in which the employee will be working
- Introductions (residents, staff, department heads, administrator, etc.)
- Review of Job Description (have employee sign that they have read their job description and allow them to keep a copy for their records as well)
- Department Personnel Procedures (calling in sick, dress code, benefits, work hours, etc.)
- Introduction to the Activity Department (the role of the Activity Department, philosophy, mission statement, benefits of activities, etc.)
- Safety and Precautions (diets, pushing a wheelchair, fall prevention, resident rights, fire and safety, residents with dementia, infection control, etc.)
- Service Delivery (adapting activities, residents with dementia, parallel programming, sensory stimulation, person-centered activities, one to one activities, facilitation/leadership skills, etc.)
- Working with Other Departments (dietary, nursing, volunteers, housekeeping, social services, therapy department, etc.)
- Mandatory Education (review your facility's mandatory orientation program as well as your state regulations) and include these in your program. It may be that the facility has an all-day orientation program that all new employees attend. Be sure to then provide department specific orientation after that.
- Documentation Training as needed (assessments, progress notes, participation records, MDS, care plans, etc.)

Developing the Activity Department orientation program can be very time consuming but it is necessary. Not only will your residents receive higher quality services and programming, but your employees will be happier and have a better understanding of their new role. Don't forget to have the employees sign off on everything that is taught to them. This will help you keep track of their training and demonstrates that the employee was indeed informed of the policies and expectations. This in turn will help with employee evaluations and disciplinary actions as well. So, what are you waiting for? Roll out the red carpet and welcome those new employees!



Recreation Orientation Program

A comprehensive orientation manual and checklist for Activity and Recreation professionals in LTC

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Why re-invent the wheel? Re-Creative Resources Inc. has created a wonderful 19 page Recreation Orientation Manual and the accompanying checklist. This manual covers everything from personnel information, programming, techniques, working with other department, infection control, safety, supplies and equipment, and more. You receive this manual as a word document so that you easily alter it to suit your department's specific needs and guidelines. For more information on this comprehensive orientation program, visit <http://www.recreativeresources.com/recreationforms.htm>