

First Things First: Manager on-line magazine article published 28th August 2012



IAM Chief Operating Officer, James Turner, outlines an approach to creating an effective induction programme.

A good induction programme will ensure your new employee is effectively integrated into the organisation and is contributing to the bottom line as quickly as possible. And just as importantly, a well managed induction programme can ensure that any performance issues or surprises from the new recruit can be managed proactively to minimise risk and exposure to the organisation. Key principles for effective induction include the following:

Prepare for the new recruit before they start

Nothing sends out the wrong message more than a new recruit sitting idly on the first day while you find someone to take care of them. You have invested no small amount of money and time to find the right person – don't scrimp on the induction. If you have recruited well, the individual will be excited about working for you. They will be highly motivated and raring to go. Make sure you maintain this momentum and positive attitude by being ready for them immediately from day one.

Have a structured induction

Even if you feel that the employee can learn everything they need to in the first week, you should structure their induction over a minimum of 13 weeks. In more complex roles it is not unusual for a formal induction to last for up to six months.

Week one - what are the basics?

You will probably ensure the contract has been signed and understood, and that the employee has a clear understanding of relevant policies and procedures applicable to your organisation.

They will need to be introduced to all the key personnel and spend some quality time with their direct line manager exploring how they will contribute to their role during their induction period and beyond. This will naturally lead on to explanations of their key performance indicators (KPIs) and familiarisation with their workstation. Ensure you don't forget all that 'legal stuff' like health and safety, first aid, fire evacuation etc.

And make sure that you keep a record of all this training by having the employee sign to say it has happened!

At the end of week one ensure that the line manager – or the appointed coach or mentor – reviews this first week with the new recruit. How has it gone for them? Are there any questions? How have they performed in this first week? Record this review.

Weeks two to four – getting to grips with the role

With the basics all out of the way during week one, the next three weeks should be about the individual settling in to the role. They will be finding their way around the organisation, utilising what they gained in that first week, and you will have an opportunity to observe the potential you believe you recruited. Perhaps you are pleased with what you see - but if not, now is the time to act.

If you have any concerns discuss these immediately, but be prepared to offer objective evidence for the issues you have. Seek input and comment from the individual about how they see these issues. Agree the improvements you are seeking over the following four weeks of the induction programme, offering additional coaching and support where required.

While it would not be unusual – and is in fact good practice - to carry out some form of informal review at the end of each of those first four weeks, as a minimum sit down formally at the end of week four and review how this first month has gone from both of your perspectives. If you are happy with everything, confirm this and discuss the focus for the following four weeks of the structured induction.

Record the details of the review – both good and bad - and any areas for action. Depending upon the severity of the negative issues discussed it may be appropriate to remind the employee that their continued employment is subject to satisfactory completion of their induction period.

Weeks five to eight – starting to stretch

If you had issues that were discussed in the last period, weeks' five to eight are 'make or break'! Ensure you deliver the additional coaching and support you offered, and monitor weekly with regular reviews, offering honest but constructive feedback.

If everything was progressing well in the last period you should ensure that you stretch the employee further within the role so you can get to see how they handle the pressures of their particular role and monitor the quality of their work under those situations. If you have recruited well and inducted properly you should have no issues, and you will gain confidence in your new recruit's progress. Again, carry out a structured review at the end of week eight and record the outcome.

If you have any concerns discuss these immediately, but be prepared to offer objective evidence for the issues you have. Seek input and comment from the individual about how they see these issues. Agree the improvements you are seeking over the following four weeks of the induction programme, offering additional coaching and support where required. If the employee has not performed, you may have to accept that you made a mistake during recruitment and cut your losses. It may be time to confirm that the employee has not successfully completed their induction period, which will result in the termination of their employment, subject to correct payments in lieu of notice.

Please note: whether you are able to terminate safely is dependent on the offer letter, the contract of employment, your policies and procedures, and potentially any number of other unique factors. No action should be taken without competent employment law advice about your particular circumstances first.

Weeks nine to twelve – seeking to confirm employment

If everything has progressed well until now everything should be fine, but don't relax yet! You're looking to the employee to be contributing to the team and organisation in a serious fashion, and for all their nerves to have disappeared. The employee should have integrated well into the company and their potential should be obvious. This final period of the induction should focus on ironing out any small bumps, and preparing them for the full challenges of the role. So all that is left in this positive example of a well recruited and placed employee, is to confirm their employment having successfully completed their induction period.

A more formal - but short – post-induction appraisal would be useful at this point whereby you can receive feedback about how the employee feels their induction went, while also focusing on some immediate SMART objectives and medium-term training and development needs. This should sit nicely within your organisation's annual appraisal process, and demonstrate the importance your organisation places on performance review and development.

And if things haven't worked out? Maybe you decided to give the new recruit this last period of the induction to really make the improvement required to be able to confirm their employment? It just hasn't worked out though?

If you deferred the decision in the last period of the induction, now is the time to decide! Either you extend their period of induction, perhaps for a further three-month period, because you believe that this extra time is all they need to really demonstrate they are the right person for the role, or you'll call it a day. It's your choice, but at least you will have given the employee every chance to perform – and your decision will come as no surprise. Just read the following before taking the decision!

You should explicitly allow for the extension of an induction period in the offer letter/terms and conditions, and ensure that any extension you have allowed for is discussed and communicated in writing prior to the completion of the original induction period.

If you are choosing to terminate due to unsatisfactory completion of the induction period, whether you are able to do so safely will be dependent on the offer letter, the contract of employment and your policies and procedures; and potentially any number of other unique factors. No action should be taken without competent employment law advice about your particular circumstances first.