



ONBOARDING YOUNG WORKERS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

A Guide For Business Managers

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This information was researched and developed from the following:

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INTRODUCTION

There are an abundance of skilled new and young workers in our population and today's 20-somethings are eager to work (Felipe, 2016). Rather than continually hiring people who have similar experiences, developing new and young workers allows for a continuous supply of qualified, motivated people and elevates the employer's reputation in their community (HR Council, 2016).

The dynamics of workplaces and workers are changing – we are more technologically influenced and leadership driven than we once were. Technological skills and drive are two qualities that are prominent to our young workers. Furthermore, due to our aging population young workers are about to be the biggest part of our workforce. Using Ontario Ministry of Finance data, the projected shortfall in the availability of workers is shown to rise to at least 200,000 (and to as high as 1.8 million by 2031), therefore taking advantage of hiring young workers now is beneficial to your organization in the long term (Miner, 2010). The HR Council (2016) suggests that succession planning will ensure an organization remains effective and sustainable.

Training young workers not only means showing them tasks and job duties but also explaining how to integrate themselves into the workplace culture. Training on job tasks, as well as workplace practices “is one of the highest-leverage activities a manager can perform and establishes a basis for performance management” (Horowitz & Horowitz, 2010). This guide will outline skills that are specific to young workers, thereby displaying their value, while explaining how managers can train these employees to ensure retention and limit unfitting workplace behaviours.

This handbook has been developed as a general guide only and St. Lawrence College will not be held responsible for any misrepresentation of this guide. Any feedback you can provide would be greatly appreciated as we will be updating this handbook periodically.

For additional information or questions please do not hesitate to contact St. Lawrence College Career Services or Employment Service at one of the following locations.

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71 Bank Street, 5th Floor
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UNDERSTANDING YOUNG WORKERS

Today's young workers require a certain amount of adjustment when entering into a workplace that employs established workers. Due to their experiences with a recession, growing up in an intensely technological age, and having been raised with values distinctive from generations before them, the onboarding process for workers in their 20's is different from previous generations (Weinmann, 2011).

Young workers also think differently than older and more experienced employees – they tend to take more risks, prefer to work collaboratively and may be reluctant to ask questions for fear of appearing unknowledgeable (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2015).

With people in their 20-30s poised to make up most of the consumer base in our industries, adding younger staffers to your team is crucial. Below are some skills specific to young workers that can assist your business.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- **Technology** – accustomed to cutting-edge technology and with an innate ability to master it (Weinmann, 2011)
- **Collaboration** – matured during a time when collaboration and cooperation are valued (and typically this happens via technology)
- **Realistic** – grown up with a bleak job market and, in many cases, have already faced joblessness themselves in their young careers, therefore they are aware of the hardships faced by businesses and workers alike in a tough economy (Schawbel, 2011)
- **Flexible** – traditional workplace is not necessary and a sizable chunk (roughly one-third) of young workers would prefer a pay cut if it meant increased flexibility at work (Schawbel, 2011)
- **Resourceful** – often ‘think on their feet’ and propose creative solutions when needed because they have not had the experience in the field that others have had

ONBOARDING YOUNG WORKERS

Keeping in mind that your new or young employee may not have had much exposure to an office environment or a worksite in their career thus far, you can train them on how to integrate themselves into your workplace culture by giving them specific examples of acceptable and unacceptable workplace behaviour.

SPECIFIC TOPICS TO INCLUDE IN TRAINING

UNWRITTEN RULES

There are often unwritten or unspoken rules in any workplace and when an employee counteracts those it negatively affects employee morale and productivity. These *unstated* rules can be difficult to navigate; explaining some of the most common situations such as not emailing from your cell phone during a work meeting or staying home with a cold to prevent circulation of germs can be beneficial in eliminating these errors.

ATTITUDE

Interpersonal interactions are highly important to professional success in a lot of businesses. Young employees likely value interpersonal relations but may not display this in the same manner you do – they may text or share a message where you find it most appropriate to have a face-to-face. Jazvac (2016) suggests employees at all levels are responsible for redefining their strategies and aligning their practices with the values and objectives of the organization. Explaining to young workers how their actions are portaged in terms of their attitude will support growth-oriented professional development.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Young workers are often keen to learn and can bring new ideas and energy to your workplace, however they may not recognize health and safety hazards promptly and may hesitate to ask questions regarding job safety. New and young workers are much more likely to be injured on the job (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2016). Consider discussing protocols for common situations and clearly outline your expectation of the employee to follow health and safety rules, as well as how they are to report any concerns to their supervisor immediately.

You may also need to evaluate whether all employees are setting the same example for young workers because it is misleading if more experienced employees demonstrate actions outside the written policies and procedures.

ATTIRE

There are a variety of terms used to describe dress code in a workplace: casual, corporate casual, business casual, smart casual, resort casual etc. Explain what you mean by the term you use with specific examples of appropriate attire as one employer's definition can be different than another's.

SHARING AND OVERSHARING

It can be challenging or awkward to have conversations with your staff members about what is appropriate to talk about at work. But alternatively, it may be more awkward after the fact to tell your employee they are 'oversharing' inappropriate information for the workplace. Consider giving your employees some hypothetical situations they should not share with their co-workers such as:

- use of alcohol or drugs
- relationship matters
- religious activities and beliefs
- personal finances
- medical issues

WHERE TO DIRECT QUESTIONS

As young workers are trying to impress their employer and co-workers they may not want to draw attention to their questions or concerns. State who their questions should be directed to, the best time to approach that person and the form in which they should contact them (telephone, email, in-person).

To avoid having employees commit other faux pas in the workplace it may be helpful to partner new employees with experienced workers who can mentor and assist them in navigating the workplace. In turn the mentor develops leadership skills and gains a personal sense of satisfaction from knowing that they've helped someone (MindTools, 2016).

OTHER TOPICS TO COVER

- Hours of operation and common practice for employees such as arriving 15 minutes early to begin their shift
- Areas for eating or taking breaks
- Special office events – birthdays celebrated, donations collected for lotto pools etc.
- The protocol on presenting business cards to prospective clients
- Cubicle and/or kitchen etiquette
- Visitors or friends at work – if this is acceptable, how frequently and when?

Try to remember when you were new in a role and how difficult it can be to navigate all the written and *unwritten* expectations. These can also be different based on the manager or senior staff member directing the new employee so it's best practice to use mishaps as learning opportunities rather than assuming the young worker deliberately went outside the standard procedures of your business. Using specific incidents from the past can give the employee a clear idea of the kinds of situations they do not want to get involved in.

DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG WORKERS

Training young employees to perform the job duties within their role is a portion of the overall onboarding process. Teaching about workplace appropriateness in terms of safety, attire, attitude, conversations, breaks etc. is part of their overall growth as an employee. Engagement is becoming more important than ever as the pool of employees lessens, and talent retention can act as a key competitive advantage for businesses. With the high costs of employee turnover, peaking at up to 150 percent of the employee's annual salary, engagement and retention initiatives done properly will have a significant impact on an organization (Gilbert, 2011). Giving viable feedback on the things you like and dislike about their work indicates you are vested in their progress and further encourages their commitment to your business goals (Jazvac, 2016).

- Younger people are especially hungry both to learn and to receive affirmation that they are doing a good job - motivated by incremental education and acknowledgement rather than by a modest bump in salary
- Generally speaking, young workers enjoy decision-making authority
- Assign tasks or short term assignments to gauge the employee's abilities
- Once they have completed the objective, give clear feedback immediately as post-mortems are critical accelerators of their learning process
- Transparency is also extremely important as they like to understand the big picture, young employees like to connect the dots of what they personally are working on and how it fits in the big picture
- Younger employees are often shyer than their counterparts, so invite interaction not just with yourself, but with others throughout the company – this encourages others to interact and support young employees
- Ensure that longer term employees are passing along their positivity and helpful experiences and not the negative

(Fertik, 2011)

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