

STARTING NEW EMPLOYEES ON A POSITIVE FOOT: GETTING ORIENTATION RIGHT

**Sarah Watson
FarmRight Limited**

What is orientation?

Orientation of new employees (or induction as it is often called in other industries) means “to lead in”, that is to lead or introduce a new employee into the business. This is done to ensure the new employee can become familiar with the workplace and their role and quickly become an effective member of the team.

Orientation is the process of introducing new staff to:

- Your farm
- Your goals, values, targets
- Other team members and people associated with your operation (eg. farm consultant)
- How things are done in your operation (operations manual if you have one)
- Any hazards that your employee may be exposed to
- Your health and safety policies and procedures
- Your farm rules
- The job and responsibilities
- Accommodation if provided

When does orientation start?

Realistically orientation starts from the time you place the advertisement and first have contact with a potential new employee. Your first phone discussion with them provides their: first impressions of you as an employer, are you organized, professional and prepared to answer their questions or are you uncommunicative, evasive, etc, are you on time for the interview, organized and well prepared? These things may not be part of the formal process of orientation but they are an important part of the whole process.

A well planned orientation programme will set up your new employee to succeed from the start of the relationship. Do little things like hooking up the phone and power at the accommodation before your new employee arrives. Make sure the accommodation is clean and tidy and that there is firewood in the shed. These all go toward making sure they feel welcomed.

Why should I have an orientation programme for new employees?

As an employer you have a number of obligations to your employees. But this isn't the only reason you should have an orientation programme.

You need to lead by example. If you want to see your employees showing commitment to your business and attention to detail then you need to show those values to your employees.

A great way to start is with a good orientation. Not only will you start your new employee with the tools they need to get up and running quickly, you will be building good communication and strengthening the relationship with them. They will be more likely to understand your values and goals. And most importantly they should be able to make a positive contribution to your business from an early stage. Another advantage of building a strong relationship with your employees is that you are more likely to be able to work through problems if they arise in the future.

This will take the pressure off other employees as there will be less need to 'carry' the new person, and less need to spend time teaching them the basics (it will already have been done).

It is good to remember that from an employee's point of view their priorities when starting a new job are to:

- Meet the people, i.e. manager, other employees
- Find out when and how they will get paid
- Find out about their job, what is expected of them what they will be doing for a start
- How the roster works
- Find out about the layout of the farm, where things are they need, etc.
- How to keep safe
- Any key rules and regulations
- Information about the business history is not seen as important in the early weeks of a new job.

How do I put together an orientation programme?

There are a few "rules" when it comes to preparing an orientation programme.

1. Do your preparation well before your new employee starts.
2. Write yourself a checklist of things to cover, see checklist for examples.
3. Plan what you will cover and when and who will cover it with your new employee, see checklist for examples.
4. Make sure you have enough time to cover what you need to cover.

5. Break down information into smaller pieces, so you don't try to cover everything at once – creating information overload.
6. Identify how you will determine what specific training is required and plan for this training separate from the orientation programme.

Remember – your new employee will have heaps of information to take in during the first few weeks, so spread out the process as much as possible.

What needs to be covered by my orientation programme?

Your orientation programme will be specific to your operation because every farmer and their farm is unique. You can use the following checklist as a starting point. Giving a new employee too much information in the first day will overwhelm them, so a well thought out orientation programme is important to ensure new employees get the information they need when they need it.

How will this save me \$?

Starting new employees with an orientation programme can save you money by:

- Reducing the incidence of jobs having to be done twice because they weren't done right the first time.
- Having someone supervising a new person full-time for weeks because the new person doesn't know where to find things.
- Keeping current employees happy and motivated because they are not carrying new staff.

Orientation Checklist

Before 1 st Day	First Day	Within 2 weeks	Within 2 months
-------------------------------	--------------	-------------------	--------------------

Before new employee starts:

- Employment Agreement & Job Description
- Introduction to the area
- Introduction to the farm business
- Prepare accommodation and other tools farm supplying

Initial Reception:

- Documentation
- First introductions

Workplace:

- Farm layout
- Where tools kept
- Where to find important items
- How and who to contact if need arises

Position Expectations:

- Job Description
- Expected standards

The Business:

- Targets – production and business
- Values
- Other Key people involved, eg. Shareholders, consultants

Employment Terms and Conditions:

- Timekeeping
- Pay system
- Check understanding of terms

Health and Safety:

- H&S Manual containing rules and policies
- Workplace Hazards
- Protective equipment

Before	First	Within	Within
1 st Day	Day	2 weeks	2 months

Rules and Procedures:

- Discipline
- Expected behaviour and conduct
- Grievances and complaints

Communication:

- Who to contact when

Performance:

- Performance planning and review

Training and Development:

- On-job skills/knowledge
- Off-job courses
- Career development

References

Richard Rudman, "Human Resources Management in New Zealand" Longman Paul, 1992.
 HR Toolkit, Dexcel 2004.