

**Retaining Employees in a Behavioral Health Treatment Business**  
**Making a Difference with Your Staff Members**  
**Part Three of Four**



**Element Three: Make New Employees Feel Welcomed, Valued, Prepared, and Challenged.**

One of the ways to start out right with your new employees is to assure that they feel welcomed, valued, prepared, and challenged. A good way to start is making sure that their work area is prepared for their arrival. A small thing such as a card, signed by staff members, is an inexpensive but thoughtful welcoming gesture. Like all relationships, first impressions can be very important!

If you know why the person wanted to join your company in the first place, there may be a specialized item that affirms their reception. New items, still in their boxes, like staples or file folders, can help them feel as though you are happy they have chosen to work at your organization and want them to feel prepared to do their job.

Who hasn't hired someone with experience and given a sigh of relief figuring our job is done – let's just get to work! Despite the person's level of experience, focused preparation for their work at your organization should be given an immediate high priority; their experience may also have given them some ideas that won't work well in your setting – best to find that out right away.

To assist in preparing a person for work at your organization, develop a comprehensive orientation. This orientation should include not only a general orientation to your organization but also a directed orientation to their specific job responsibilities. You may want more than one person to conduct this orientation: an Executive Director for the general welcome and overall view and a supervisor for the day to day focused elements.

Delegation of tasks should be staged in a thoughtful way. Don't have the expectation that the individual can figure it all out for themselves, regardless of their experience level. Careful delegation and observation will give you and them more information about job expectations and their level of expertise.

If the person appears to have the job clearly in hand then challenge the person to tell you how they might do something differently or better. Provide close supervision and mentoring in the first few weeks, accompanied by regular feedback on both positives and negatives regarding job performance. Waiting for three months to give a person feedback on their performance, such as at the end of a “probationary” period, is a recipe for misunderstanding.

A new employee is often the best person to give you feedback about what’s not working in your system. Another way to challenge them is to ask for candid feedback and accept it without defensiveness. This helps to set a tone of openness and shows that you are willing to listen to feedback, even if negative.

You may be wondering at this point where you will get the time to do what’s being recommended. You could start by prioritizing your time, remembering that properly orienting an employee pays off in the long run. Your investment is in the overall smooth running of your organization as well as reducing your liability. Risk managers will tell you that one of the primary threats in a social service organization is employee problems. Your knowledge of the employee and their knowledge of the job and its limits help mitigate these threats.

Plan to make a difference with your employees. Review your “First Day” process and insure that new employees get a welcoming, clear, and comprehensive orientation that builds from their first day and continues throughout their employment. In fact, you might want to revisit some of your orientation materials - such as safety procedures - on a regular basis with all employees.

About the author:

**Sherry Kimbrough, M.S., NCAC II**, is an experienced program consultant, counselor and educator. She holds an M.S. in Psychology and was first certified as a Chemical Dependency Counselor in 1977. Sherry taught chemical dependency courses at several colleges and is an active international surveyor for CARF. She has direct experience as an Executive Director, Clinical Supervisor and counselor in both inpatient and outpatient treatment agencies. In addition to authoring a textbook and assisting in development of Patient Planner™, she has developed and maintains [TxDirector.com](http://www.txdirector.com) - a resource for chemical dependency professionals. Sherry is the Vice President and co-founder of Lanstat Incorporated and a co-founder of Training Partners, a NAADAC approved education provider.

### **Resources and Websites**

Keeping The People Who Keep You In Business Leigh Branham

Built To Last James C. Collins and Jerry Porras

Books by Robert Bacal

<http://www.work911.com/>

<http://www.managementhelp.org/>

Perfect Phrases for Setting Performance Goals Douglas Max  
Calculate the Cost of Early Employee Turnover:  
[http://www.advantagehiring.com/calculators/calc\\_turnover.asp](http://www.advantagehiring.com/calculators/calc_turnover.asp)

**Part Four: Support and reward employees to maintain their  
commitment**