

Cleared for takeoff

How to accelerate the productivity of new hires **Interviewed by Paul R. Harvey**

When leaving the runway for a first-ever solo flight, nervous and excited flying students can only trust that their instructor provided all of the skills and knowledge required to fly the pattern. But even if you hired the best candidates, if you're not willing to be "in the plane" with them, teaching them everything they need to be successful, there's a good chance they're going to be in for a bumpy landing.

"When you hire peak performers, the tendency is to share with them what they need to do, and then leave them alone to go do it," says Dr. Victoria Halsey, vice president, Applied Learning, The Ken Blanchard Companies®. "This has an incredibly negative impact on new hires."

Smart Business recently spoke with Halsey to learn more about how to accelerate the productivity of new hires through coaching, creating effective relationships, and understanding how they best learn.

What early steps can help set up new hires to succeed more quickly?

What people don't realize is that new hires may be very excited to be there, but they are actually brand new at the bulk of what they're working on. In Situational Leadership® II language, we call them 'enthusiastic beginners.' To ramp people up more quickly, you need to rapidly focus them on the most important things they need to do and when, and then help them get with others who are also going to teach them how. They need a comprehensive on-boarding and action plan with examples of what a good job looks like, clear timelines and priorities. It's also important to help them develop the relationships that will accelerate their growth and share 'how we get things done around here.'

How do supportive and directive behaviors propel learners past the disillusioned learner phase?

New hires encounter a second wave a few weeks after the initial 'Bring it on,



Dr. Victoria Halsey
Vice president
Applied Learning
The Ken Blanchard Companies

I'm so excited' phase. They hit the wall thinking, 'Wow, this is trickier than I thought.' Now they need someone there to coach them through their flagging motivation.

When they are feeling discouraged, they need to know 'why' what they are doing is so important. They need praise for their progress and either reteaching or redirection to build competence.

What are the benefits of teaching the Situational Leadership® II model?

One of the benefits of teaching the Situational Leadership® II model to new hires is to have them see the stages of development they're going to go through as they learn to be proficient in their tasks and goals. They need to know that when they first take on a task, they're going to be excited, though may not know what to do — but then someone is going to give them very meticulous direction. They also need to know that they're going to become a 'disillusioned learner' and receive coaching. They need to know

they're going to reach a time when they can do what it is they're striving to do but not feel fully confident about it, so someone is going to help them with a supporting leadership style to help them step into their power.

Why should new hires learn to say, 'I need'?

You should be teaching new hires to come to you and ask for what they need. The Ken Blanchard Companies' research shows that 54 percent of managers tend to use just one style naturally before training, while 34 percent use two styles, 11 percent use three styles, and only 1 percent of the population use all four leadership styles. One reason new hires aren't brought up to speed as fast as people would like them to be is that leaders aren't giving them the specific direction they may need because it isn't the natural style of the leader. New hires can help managers to flex their leadership style to both directive and supportive by learning to say, 'I need.'

How can leaders diagnose others to best accelerate the development of new hires?

Developing optimal performance means knowing your people. Great leaders switch their attention from what they feel like doing when their people say, 'I need help,' to thinking about the person and the specific task or goal. Great leaders discover what people really need in terms of direction and support to move to the next stage, and then follow through by giving it to them. Finally, great leaders notice the good things people are doing, find what's unique in their people and call it out with specific, descriptive praise. What is their goal? To make people feel brilliant and have early wins. <<

VICTORIA HALSEY, Ph.D., is vice president, Applied Learning, The Ken Blanchard Companies in Escondido. Reach her through The Ken Blanchard Companies Web site at www.kenblanchard.com/halsey.

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