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Features

3/1/2019

Bringing New Employees On Board

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Pictured: The Lurvey team in 2018.

We're elbow deep in our exploration of creating a green industry culture that not only inspires everyone to do their best, but also helps recruit the ideal team members and empowers them to do their best work. The recruiting process should help you find staff that matches your company values. Once they're on the job, training will help you determine whether they're actually a good fit to stick around.

Unpacking the Suitcase

"There are people who come to a garden center to work and they're pulling a suitcase behind them," notes garden retail consultant Sid Raisch, CEO of Horticultural Advantage. "In the suitcase, they have their dirty laundry—

mistakes they've made, misinformation they were given, habits that developed because they got no training. There might be some clean laundry in there, too, but it's all mixed in with the dirty."

Their beliefs and attitudes, some of which new team members might not even realize that they harbor, can be particularly difficult to overcome. And, despite your best recruiting efforts, you and your staff might not realize those underlying beliefs are there until you start training them. The beliefs can be helpful or they can be harmful, but they'll come into play once new team members start integrating with the company culture.

Take it From the Top

Lurvey—a garden center, landscape supply and turf company with multiple locations in Iowa—has outstanding reviews from current and former employees on Glassdoor.com, particularly when you consider the seasonality and hard work/working conditions of our industry. Scott Goczkowski, GM of Home & Garden, and Mike McKirchy, Head of HR, talked with me about their training programs—what works and what doesn't—to give everyone the best start and keep them growing with the company.

Mike says the culture at Lurvey starts firmly at the top.

"If you look at our values, you'll see the first one is 'Everybody Serves'—our clients and each other," Mike says, while Scott adds, "Since we developed that mission statement five years ago, it has come to mean many different things."

Drilling down further, their mission states, "We believe in the value of personal interaction with our customers. We genuinely care about understanding your needs so we can fully support them. We want your relationship with us to be much more than a purchase; we want you to feel good about your every experience with us."

Lurvey also includes their suppliers, stating in the mission statement, "We appreciate and value our suppliers and enjoy building long-term relationships with those who share our commitment to quality products and service. Our suppliers' success is paramount to our success."

Last, but not least, according to the professional development they offer, Lurvey's mission says, "We believe in our people—in their individual gifts, knowledge, passion and dedication to their work and to their customers. Lurvey is committed to supporting their needs by providing an enjoyable, rewarding environment and supportive place to learn and grow."

That's all nice, but completely useless if a company doesn't live it. Lurvey does.

"We make sure our employees feel empowered, no matter their job, to make some of those judgement calls to make the customers happy," says Mike. To drive the point home, during "Lurvey Jam," an annual company retreat, Mr. Lurvey speaks.

"He gets up in front of the 200 employees and says, 'Protect the brand,'" Scott says. "He knows that sometimes paying to right a mistake helps you build business for the future. He's not afraid to do what needs to be done and he's instilled that belief in us from the top down."

All Aboard

Training a new employee starts with onboarding. At Lurvey, there's an employee handbook that's reviewed with new employees.

Mike says, "Depending on type of position, there's also information security training, sexual harassment training and standard operating procedure training."

They've also created a series of binders, built on by the staff based on their experience. Scott says, "That has the

effect of someone who has been here a while training the new person coming on board. We keep developing more binders based on staff saying, 'Wow, I wish I had been trained on that.'"

An even more literal extension of existing staff training new staff is the buddy/mentor system.

"It's important that a new employee in particular be welcomed into a culture with an advocate who ensures they get a sense of belonging rather than the awkward 'newbie,' if not 'hazing' experience that occurs otherwise," Sid says. "Even those employees with one to three years' experience can have mentors so they feel they are learning from more experienced peers."

On-the-job training is another essential part of onboarding and moving someone up into a new position.

"Learning happens best when experienced, not just read or watched," says Sid. "This way, the person A) sees the function being done by the experienced person, then B) gets to do it with oversight and direction, and finally C) practices until proficient. I would add a D) they go through variations and nuances."

Fast Track

As employees evolve, additional training needs come to light and Lurvey will find supplemental training for employees that seek it out.

"We find the MRA (Manager's Resource Association) and Fred Pryor to be good sources of specific training. There's no set budget per employee per year. We've paid for entire horticultural degrees," Mike says. "You could think, 'What if we invest all of this money and they leave' Well, what I think is scarier is 'What if we don't invest this money and they stay?'"

Another program at Lurvey is the Career Advancement Program (CAPs), geared toward helping middle-of-the-pack employees move up in the company.

Scott says, "If we can grow more leaders, then we can open more locations and grow the company. Mike went through the program himself and said, 'It wasn't just focused on how you can develop yourself as a better employee at Lurvey, but also on personal and professional development.' It's more of a career enhancement program."

Sid says, "With respect comes expect." The two do go hand-in-hand. Respect team members enough to help them grow with you and provide the training and clear communication for them to do it. Expect more and you'll get more. **GP**

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