How to Avoid the New Hire Blues

By Andrea Novakowski

Either you've hired someone and they're struggling, or you're afraid to do any hiring because you're worried it won't go well. It's a reasonable concern! Several of my clients have new employees, and all of them have run into problems. Here's what I'm hearing:

> "I just hired Barbara and now I want to fire her! She was great in the interviews. She was upbeat and seemed to have all the skills I needed. But she's proven to be nothing but a disappointment. What have I done?"

> "I explicitly told James what I needed him to do. He agreed to turn in the report on Thursday. Here it is Thursday morning, and I haven't heard a word from him since I gave him the assignment. Will the report get here or not?"

> "Katrina is supposed to be running one part of my business so I can focus on other areas that need my attention. But I just checked her progress and nothing is happening with her work. What little she has managed to get done is filled with errors."

I'm sure you'd like to avoid running into these kinds of problems. **Here are 7 ways you can set yourself up for productive working relationships with newcomers to your company:**

1. **Share your vision.** Where does the new person fit into your organization? If you let them know the role you want them to play in your company's success, both of you will be thinking creatively and will be on the lookout for opportunities.

2. **Set expectations.** Prevent last-minute panic and uncertainty by making sure you're both clear on completion dates, number of check-ins, and what your hire should do if they need help. Establish guidelines at the beginning, and then over time you can release the reins.

3. **Fight the urge to dump and run.** People are not mind readers! If you want the work done in a certain way, you need to explain how to do it. It's worth investing the time to communicate clearly what you want - that way, there are no surprises.

4. **Resist micromanaging.** Once you give the direction for the task, set milestones for completion, and discuss expectations, you can let go knowing you have a plan. By building in check-ins, you'll automatically be able to track progress.

5. **Dare to delegate.** It can be tricky to decide which responsibilities to shed and which to hold onto, especially if you're used to doing everything yourself. Identify the best use of your time. Are there tasks that only you can do? How can you free up your time so you can focus on them? Ask yourself: is this a matter of competence, or control?

6. **Know your communication style.** What's your preferred way of exchanging information with others? If you don't know, take some time to think about it or work it out with a coach. Perhaps you'd like an email at the end of each day, a phone call at the start, or a face-to-face meeting once a week. Set up a way to test it out and see how well it works.

7. **Use the right leadership techniques.** According to Ken Blanchard in *Self Leadership and the One-Minute Manager*, you should tailor your style of leadership to your employee's level of expertise. *Directing* is an appropriate strategy when skills are low. *Coaching* is called for when the skills are there, but additional motivation is needed. *Supporting* is best used when the employee has skills, but their confidence is not strong. And *delegating* is for those employees who score high on motivation, ability and confidence - they can do it on their own.

By now, you may be starting to suspect that new hire issues are, more often than not, actually communication issues. If you take the right steps and make your expectations known, your employee will have a good chance of being able to handle more and more responsibility while continuing to learn and grow. I hope this list helps your new hire start firing on all cylinders as soon as possible!

YOUR CALL TO ACTION: Do you have a recent hire whose performance hasn't turned out to be as stellar as you'd hoped? Before you give up on them, consider whether they have a clear idea of *what* you need them to do and *how*. You may not be 100 percent certain yourself - maybe you were just hoping they would make your life easier! Ask yourself why you hired that person and visualize exactly how they can help your company. Now, take the time to share this with your employee and set up an improved way of communicating.