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## **Comprehensive Employee Onboarding Program to Build on Successes**

Everyone knows that first impressions count—and this is certainly true for employees joining a company. But welcoming a new employee is more than a one-day event. Shawn Mood, VP of Human Resources, explains that the employee orientation process, also known as onboarding, is “the total employee experience from the job offer to their first-year anniversary. Our goal in onboarding people at Abt is to help them navigate a complex organization and alleviate some of the stress of starting a new job.” He notes that a successful onboarding program can enhance employee satisfaction and productivity while helping them feel part of the organization.

Onboarding encompasses a range of activities from setting up e-mail and network accounts to ongoing informational sessions. Over the past few years, the HR department has implemented significant enhancements to Abt’s onboarding process. “We’ve developed a very focused program that starts by communicating with the new employee before their first day,” Mood says.

When an employee does begin work, having access to systems and an office stocked with supplies sends a strong welcome message. In 2008, HR worked with the IT Department to develop an automated onboarding system to help manage these logistics. The system alerts Corporate Services, Payroll, Benefits, IT and other relevant departments about a new hire, and provides checklists and real-time tracking of all set-up activities. Recent enhancements now enable the system to send the new employee an e-mail containing critical information such as their employee number, telephone numbers, and new hire buddy names.

New employees also participate in a series of orientation sessions. Basic information is provided on the first and fifth day of

employment. Additional half-day sessions at weeks 6 and 12 provide details on more extensive topics. Mood says that scheduling the orientation sessions over time helps people to retain what can be a substantial amount of information. “This schedule also complements the employee’s lifecycle at Abt,” he explains. “After spending some time here, they know what questions to ask and can put the information into the proper context. It allows the sessions to be more interactive and responsive.”

In addition to covering complex issues such as the cost tracking system, the later sessions also focus on broader organizational concepts. “Employees are much more effective when they understand the global structure of Abt,” Mood says, “so we take time to help them understand the bigger picture in terms of our mission, values, structure and leadership.” This is beneficial in helping people feel better integrated into a larger enterprise.

Mood notes that this theme of integration and cooperation also extends to the onboarding process itself. “Onboarding is everybody’s responsibility. It’s not just an HR function,” he says. “We are all internal ambassadors for the company, and every employee needs to play an active part in welcoming new people.” Whether it’s a more formalized role such as setting up a 401k plan, or simply helping someone find their way to a meeting room or suggesting a popular local lunch spot—every action to support new employees benefits the company.

The changes to Abt’s onboarding program have generally been well-received. Mood notes that many new employees have stated how impressed they are with the overall process and attention to detail. “Most incoming staff are amazed at how efficient we are on their first day in terms of having resources and systems in place,” he says.

Mood says that the company has begun to explore ways to build on the program's success, and recently concluded work with an external HR consultant. A key recommendation was to better address the needs of upper-level new hires as well as existing line managers. "Our initial focus for the onboarding program was to enhance the experience of all employees, and we've been quite successful," says Mood. "The next step is to begin tailoring some activities to help mid- and senior-level staff quickly access necessary resources and systems so they be more effective

from the start." HR will also be developing tools and strategies to help line managers feel more engaged and supported in onboarding their staff. Mood expects these new initiatives to be rolled out in the coming months.

Mood says that HR also welcomes suggestions for further enhancements from employees. "We all offer value to the company in many ways and are focused on a common goal," he says. "Any ideas to help improve our onboarding activities will further strengthen the entire Abt team."