Employee Orientation Programs

The benefits of having a solid employee orientation program for your municipal employees.

A Research Paper Prepared for the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks, and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) Municipal Management Diploma Program by Student # 100191

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Executive Summary

The primary objective of this paper is to explore employee orientation programs and determine if they are effective or not and look at who should be involved in the orientation process. It will explain the benefits that can be realized by both the employee and the employer when a new staff member has been through a thorough and well thought out and planned orientation.

I will also examine what should be included in the orientation manual and what staff members should be involved in the development of the orientation program.

The main purpose of an orientation program is to reduce start-up costs, reduce anxiety, reduce employee turnover, and to save time for supervisors. When employee orientation is done properly, new staff members should start to develop a sense of pride in your municipality.

One particular area important in our municipal world is training new staff members on how to deal in the public sector. Staff new to the municipal field should and need to be taught how to deal in a political world in the public sector. They should also be aware that the council sets the policies and their job as a staff member is to look after the daily operations of the municipality. It is imperative that new members of staff understand the nature of their position and that council is a policy setting role. New staff members should also be explained the expectations of council. Staff members are to provide honest and accurate information to council and embrace meaningful consultation with council and the public. New staff should also be aware that they need to be accountable and transparent and work together.
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Scope and Methodology

The primary objective of my research paper is to review employee orientation programs and from that, determine what is the best orientation program for our municipality, and who should be involved in the process.

It is also my goal to set out for our township an employee orientation program that covers all relevant information that a new municipal employee will need in a method that is not completely overwhelming. The scope and detail of the employee orientation program will depend largely on each municipality’s staff resources, financial resources, resource materials available and staff time.

Through my research I will describe the benefits of having an effective and thorough employee orientation program for new municipal staff members.

I have found numerous books and websites with articles and research on employee orientation programs. I found these resources and sites very useful for my research.
Introduction

Everyone knows that starting a new job can be overwhelming and frightening. From trying to decide what to wear, to getting to the new office on time, to finding a parking space and then trying to figure out where to go, that first day can be filled with uncertainty and anxiety. None of this uncertainty or anxiety experienced is even including the fact that you now need training for your new job. At least if there is a solid employee orientation program in place to train the new employee, that area of anxiety is covered and addressed for the new employee.

“The joys of job hunting are nothing compared with the fun of starting work at a new (to you) firm. For many people, self-confidence and enthusiasm about a new job give way on the first day to anxiety and confusion. (What am I doing here? What do they expect of me? Who can I go to for help?)

How long that mental mayhem lasts—an hour or a few months—can depend a great deal on the quality of the employee orientation.

Orientation is a process, not an event. It is part of the overall integration of new employees into an organization, by which it helps new employees adapt to the work environment and their jobs. Orientation is, in fact, a training opportunity to promote organizational effectiveness from the start of a person’s employment.

Successful orientation speeds up the adaptation process by helping new employees feel comfortable in the organization and by making them more productive on the job. The process approach to orientation also results in reduced employee turnover.”

For many years employee orientation has “applied to the narrow range of corporate activities related to sign-up’s and providing basic information. The goals of traditional orientation are relatively narrow: to get new hires on the payroll, signed up for benefits, and to provide a brief overview of the company’s culture, products and values.”

In today’s world most companies are recognizing that this type of simple generic orientation is not enough, a more complex employee orientation or onboarding process is required. In order to be the most effective this process must be started immediately on the first day, and continue

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1 Successful Orientation Programs – Brief Article. Available from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4467/is_4_54/ai_61949977/; Internet; accessed on 11 May, 2011.

over a period of months. I see the employee orientation process as a way to start municipal employees off on the right foot.

“Onboarding, also known as organizational socialization, refers to the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders.”

Many companies still have a one day orientation process, where the new employee is bombarded with policies and procedures and tons of dry, boring and tedious information. And at the end of the first day they are left feeling overwhelmed. “If a company’s orientation program stops at that point, tremendous opportunities are missed to build commitment, relationships, productivity, sales potential, and so much more. Rather than viewing new employee orientation as a paper work session, more and more companies are learning about the power of a well-designed, comprehensive program that works to train and retain employees in a competitive economy”

Most organizations focus on the recruiting and hiring process and seem to forget about the orientation or onboarding process itself. The first few days on the job will set the tone for motivating and retaining new employees. Organizations, including municipalities must begin to realize that the hiring process is only the first half of the process, and the second equally important half of the process is the employee orientation. Effective employee orientation saves employers money, by reducing employee turn over.

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Welcoming New Employees

A very important and first step in the orientation process is welcoming the new municipal employee.

One way to make new employees feel welcomed, even before their first day, would be to send flowers or a fruit basket to the employee’s home. This sends the message to the new employee right from the start that they are being welcomed, and will reaffirm their decision to join your municipality. Another thoughtful touch would be to have their business cards prepared and sent to their house in advance as well.

A notice with the new employee’s picture and bio should be circulated to the relevant staff members prior to the new employees first day. This will assist the current staff in recognizing any new employees, and possibly provide some common ground, if they have similar interests.

If you wanted to continue this exceptional welcoming theme – on their first day you could give them a company tee-shirt, mug, pen or pin. I personally like the idea of having lunch brought in for the department on the new employee’s first day. This would provide an informal setting for him or her to get to know their new co-workers. A very big mistake to make on the new employee’s first day would be to leave the new municipal employee alone at their desk over the lunch hour. Some workplaces go as far as to have a “welcome party” for new employees. This is similar to what some companies do when an employee is leaving, have a celebration.

“People spend a large amount of their lives at work, and forming strong and positive relationships with co-workers is critical not only for job satisfaction, retention, and effective teamwork, but also for one’s personal happiness. Employers who understand this include activities in the orientation program to foster the forming of employee relationships on the new employee’s first day.”

An ad or an article in the local newspaper, with a photo, welcoming the new municipal employee, is a nice gesture. Another advantage to this is that the ratepayers in the municipality get to know the new municipal employee.

When the new employee starts on his/her first day the supervisor should personally greet them. The supervisor should have already prepared an orientation plan outlining specific training. The supervisor and the new employee go over the orientation plan and they should each share their job expectations with each other on the first day.

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5 Ibid. p8.
The new employee should start to feel part of the municipality and part of the team as soon as possible. To accomplish this as quickly as possible, the supervisor should introduce them personally to all department members, on their first day, after the initial meeting with the supervisor.

At the conclusion of this first meeting with the new supervisor, and the introductions to important staff, the new employee should then proceed to the Human Resources Department.

Some of the Human Resources information can be handled prior to their first day. That is up to the municipality on how they want to handle this. The Human Resources Department would provide the new employee with a “New Hire Information Package” and cover the following areas briefly: payroll information, Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual, pension information (OMERS) and an outline of the benefit package. This Human Resources session should be kept brief, not exceeding two hours on the first day. The new employee may need to return to the Human Resources Department for additional information sometime in the first two weeks to ask questions or complete any additional paperwork.

Below is a flexible tentative schedule for the first two days for the new municipal employee.

Schedule Day One

8:30 am Employee arrives and meets with supervisor
9:30 am Tour of Office Building
10:00 am Introductions to co-workers and Department Heads
11:00 am Human Resources Department
1:00 pm Lunch with co-workers and supervisor
2:00 pm Introductions to more co-workers and any other Department Heads
3:00 pm Training with supervisor – Review detailed job description
4:30 pm End of first day

Schedule Day Two

8:30 am Greeting from supervisor and introduction to Health and Safety Training Officer
9:30 am Municipal Facilities Tour
1:00 pm Lunch with co-workers and/or supervisor and/or ‘mentor’
2:00 pm Training with fellow staff members and/or supervisor
4:15 pm Meeting with supervisor - to touch base with new employee
4:30 pm End of second day

I believe day two should start out with a greeting from the supervisor and then an introduction to the Health and Safety Officer, to go over the Health and Safety Policies and Procedures that
are in place for the municipality. Any related health and safety training required by the new employee should be scheduled and completed as soon as possible.

After the completion of this meeting, the supervisor should have a municipal facilities tour planned for the new employee. You want to ensure the new staff member has a feel for the municipality – what services the municipality provides, what facilities the municipality has, and more importantly where they are located. The new municipal employee should be shown: the fire department, the waste sites, the recycling transfer facilities, the arena, the recreational and community centres, the parks, the ball diamonds, the soccer fields, the tennis courts, the beach, the roads operations garage, the water distribution system, the sanitary sewer system, the library, and the dog pound, and any other relevant areas of interest for the township.

As soon as possible, the new municipal employee should be introduced to the Mayor and all members of Council.

**What Should Be Included**

The new employee should receive a welcome letter. This welcome letter can be included in a “New Hire Information Package” and mailed to the employee before their first day. The new employee should also receive a copy of the municipality’s Policies and Procedures Manual, a health and safety information package, an organizational chart, their job description, an outline of the benefit package, the municipality’s history, the mission statement, and any other relevant information. When this information package is provided to new staff members, is at the discretion of each individual municipality. It can be provided to employees before they start work or on the actual start date. If this information is provided to employees before their actual start date it will give them time to review it in advance, at their leisure. Their time at the Human Resources Department on the first day could then be spend with an overview and answering any questions that the new employee might have. Some workplaces prefer to offer this information either on-line or on their intranet, rather than in paper format.

The benefits of providing new employees with the history of the municipality and its mission statement, assists the new employee in understanding the big picture and how the municipality came to be. It also helps build a solid foundation for the new employee. We want the new staff members to know - where we as a municipality have come from and where we are going.

They should receive a municipal map outlining the municipal boundaries, including its ward boundaries, if applicable and a map of the County or Region should also be included.

They should be told who the municipalities ‘customers’ are, what services are provided, what each employees role is, and how all the employees contribute to the municipalities overall success.
They should also be given an orientation outline and a copy of the schedule for their personal orientation. They should also be given a tour of the building, building keys and a parking permit. During the tour of the administration building, the fire exits, council chambers, washrooms, staff room, kitchen, and the office supply room should all be pointed out.

One nice touch is to have an organization chart that includes photos of the staff. This makes it easier for them to recognize and to remember fellow employees and how they fit into the municipality. It would be very embarrassing for a new employee to ask the C.A.O. how to use the phone system, because they did not know who they were.

One small aspect, that is sometimes overlooked, is that prior to the new employee arriving at work on their first day their work space should be set up and ready. They should have access to adequate office supplies, their telephone voice mail account already activated, and their email address should be already set up too. Instructions should be provided so new employees know how to access their voice mail account, a list of relevant email addresses, and a company telephone directory with extensions. This forethought by the municipality will go a long way to reassuring the new employee that they made the right decision in joining your municipality.

Items or issues that are specific in nature to municipalities need to be explained to new staff members that have never worked in a municipality before.

The orientation manual should include copies of or access to the internal policies to provide the new employee with the values and objectives of the municipality. A Code of Conduct should be included in the Orientation Manual. That should include the following:

- Employee Behaviour
- Professionalism
- Harassment
- Principles of Conduct
- General Integrity
- Confidential Information
- Use of Municipal Property
- Conduct at Council Meetings

This is extremely important to ensure the consistent treatment of all issues. Key polices should be explained to new staff. Staff new to the municipal world should receive an overview of legislation relevant to municipalities, as well as a complete overview of the Township’s government structure and its relationship with the Upper Tier municipality. Relevant legislation would include, but not be limited to, the Municipal Act, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, the Planning Act, and the Ontario Employment and Labour Law.
New employees should have an overall understanding of how the municipality functions as a whole and how the various departments interact together to achieve this.

New staff members should understand professionalism. They should not publicly engage in demeaning descriptions of council, the public, or fellow staff members that would reflect adversely on the dignity of others. They should remain impartial and professional at all times.

New employees to the municipal world need to be instructed on how to deal in the public sector in a political world. They need to understand that Council members are elected and that the administration staff are hired for their expertise, and are to provide advice to council based on their academic training or experience. They need to understand the nature of the position of council and that Council is a policy setting role. It is the staff’s job to manage and perform the day to day operations of the municipality, under the direction and policies of council.

Municipal staff need to be open and honest, they need to listen carefully to both council and members of the public, and they need to develop a professional working relationship with council built on trust and respect. Municipal staff members should embrace meaningful consultation with the Council and the public. They need to be accountable and transparent.

By-laws, resolutions, and minutes should also be detailed and explained to new municipal staff members. In addition to this, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, copies of the official plan, the procedural By-law, the zoning bylaw, animal control by-law, the fees and tariff’s by-law and the current tax rate by-law, and any other relevant by-laws or information should all be explained to new staff members.

New employees in a municipality will be unaware of common terms, buzzwords and acronyms. To better prepare new staff, a list should be complied and provided to them to avoid confusion or embarrassment. Some common municipal acronyms include: MPAC, 357’s, FIR’s, OMERS, Prans, ANA’s, CVA, ARB, OMB, OP, MNR, MDS and PPS.

**Types of Orientation Programs**

There are three types of orientations: corporate or general orientation, department orientation, and job-specific employee orientation. All three types should be explained to the new employee by the appropriate staff member. The Human Resources Department should go over and review the corporate employee orientation. The supervisor should provide the department orientation and the job specific employee orientation or delegate the job to the appropriate staff member when and if necessary.

“Corporate Employee Orientation (General) - Information related to government as an employer, such as its vision, priorities, values, structure and culture.
Department Employee Orientation - Information related to the employee’s hiring department, such as its vision, priorities, structure and culture, in relation to the organization.

Job-specific Employee Orientation - Information related to the employee’s role and responsibilities, their immediate work environment and their terms and conditions of employment.  

The departmental employee orientation should include what the department is responsible for, what the department structure is and the department culture. The interrelationship between the employee’s department and other departments should be explained in regards to the flow of information and or work, as well as key contacts in other departments. The direct and indirect reporting relationships between departments should also be defined.

The supervisor should provide the employee with a copy of their job description. The job description would include details about the employee’s position: their responsibilities, daily duties, the qualifications required, their decision making levels and the judgement required. The supervisor should go over this job description in detail with the new employee and explain what it really means, and make sure the new employee fully understands what is involved. The employee should sign a copy of his/her job description to verify it has been explained and understood.

Who Should Be Involved

The Human Resources Department, the supervisor, and a ‘buddy’ or mentor should be involved in the orientation process. The Human Resources Department should handle the Corporate Employee Orientation, including the company overview and the benefit and payroll information. The employee’s supervisor should handle the department overview and the job specific employee training. A supervisor who is orientating the new employee should be aware that they are the one person who is making a first impression on your new employee. They are representing your municipality.

The new municipal employee should be assigned a temporary ‘buddy’ or a mentor for the orientation period. This experienced person should not have any reporting relationship with the new employee. This allows the employee to have a comfortable relationship with a least one member of staff right from the start. It also assists the new employee in feeling welcome

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and part of the municipality. This temporary mentor should be one of the municipality’s top performers. They can show them ‘the ropes’ and help the new employee learn all the little things and nuances that will help them on the job. The ‘buddy’ would be able to communicate the company culture and values to the new employee. The new employee should never be left in the hands of a negative or unhappy employee. A satisfied employee helps in building a good image and enhances the reputation of the municipality.

Since the first few days on the job are so important, the supervisor should take control of the process. While the Human Resources Department plays an important role in the orientation process, it is really the supervisor that wants to establish a good working relationship right from the start. A positive employee - supervisor relationship is critical to the employee’s future success at the municipality. It is in the first days when the new employee learns what the manager expects of them. New employees are fresh and open to learning and pleasing their new employers, and their supervisors should capitalize on their enthusiasm. Supervisors should strive to put their new employees at ease, and make them feel comfortable with their new co-workers and their new workplace.

Supervisors need to get prepared ahead of time for the orientation. The supervisor should determine what municipal training is needed and develop a municipal learning plan for the new employee. This should be discussed the first day with the new employee to make sure they are both in agreement. Courses of interest could include, but not be limited to, AMCTO’s Municipal Administration Program, the Municipal Accounting and Finance Program, and The Primer on Planning Course.

Supervisors must realize their new employees are in a sort of mourning. “Employees coming from another job naturally face a period of stress as they adapt to new demands and changes. Some individuals feel much more than stress at this time; they feel a sense of loss. The mourning they do is not necessarily for the job itself but for something they feel they’ve left behind: workplace friendships, a daily routine, even a familiar commute.”

New employees can also suffer from culture shock. “Trying to learn new work area layouts, procedures, and even computer systems during the first week can make some employees wonder why they left their old jobs. A dizzying change in work environment can produce culture shock - not, by the way, exclusive to new employees.”

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8 Ibid.
As long as a supervisor is aware of these issues and what the new employee may be going through, they can be prepared and address these issues better.

**Benefits of Effective Employee Orientation**

“Orientation programs are a form of employee training designed to introduce new employees to their job, the people they will be working with, and the larger organization. These training programs can play a critical role during socialization by providing newcomers with a variety of important information (Anderson, Cunningham-Snell, & Hiagh, 1996). Orientation programs may take the form of formal training programs, informal orientating activities by peers and supervisors (Louis et al., 1983), or a combination of both. Orientation programs also differ in the extent to which they provide information about the broader organization in addition to information about the job and immediate work environment.”

The benefits of having a thorough and well thought out orientation is that employee starts out on the right track. The mains benefits of the orientation program is that the new employee feels more comfortable more quickly and that results in the employee being more satisfied, and that in turn results in improved employee retention. Improved employee retention reduces recruiting and training costs. According to Catherine Dixon-Kheir, the Director of Organization Development at Alignment Strategies Inc., a management consulting company in Washington, D.C., if you reduce your ‘join up’ time you will reduce your employee turnover rate. Her research finds that one of the main reasons that new hires leave an organization is due to the fact that they feel they did not receive the proper guidance. A scary first few days on the job for a new employee may lead to the employee regretting their decision to join your municipality and choosing to leave.

If done properly the orientation process accelerates the new employees productivity and can assist new hires with team building and networking with co-workers. It also reduces stress and anxiety for the new municipal employee, and provides a realistic job preview. New employees tend to perform better when they know what is expected of them.

To follow up your orientation process and make sure it is a good orientation program, new staff should be given a survey at the end of their first or second week, and then again at around the three month mark to get their feedback and any ideas for improving the orientation process. They may have suggestions for what could be done to improve the orientation procedure for

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new staff in the future. Ask them how they feel you did with the orientation process. Ask them what they found informative, interesting, and effective or what they found the least informative, interesting or effective. Do they feel that they understand the organizational structure, culture, history, and overall function of the municipality, or was more training needed in that area. This should be used as a guide to tweak the program for new municipal employees in the future.

Your new employees should leave the first day orientation with a clear picture of your municipality, its goals and it challenges, and the direction the township is heading in.

**Employee Orientation Mistakes**

The first mistake some municipalities make is to overwhelm their new employees on the first day. If their first day is filled with dry, boring and tedious information this will result in the new employee being bored and overwhelmed. Spending an entire day filling out long and confusing forms can often result in a loss of interest in their new job. If this happens you may have new employees resigning in their first week, or even at the end of their first day.

Another orientation no-no is to have the new employee start work while his or her supervisor is away at a meeting or on vacation. Upon arriving at work for their first day, they should not be left forgotten with reception. It would be very unnerving for a new staff member to be arriving for their first day on the job and left sitting alone in the lobby while the reception staff tries to figure out what to do with them and they really have no idea who they are and why they are here.

It would also be a mistake to have a new employee start work when the supervisor is working on a career impacting project. If the supervisor is not focused on the new employee this could lead to problems. You may have a supervisor skipping the orientation process, only to assign a project to the new employee that is related to his project and has nothing to do with the new employees new job and job description.
Conclusion

The conclusions of this report, along with the research provided, supports the conclusion that the benefits of a good orientation program can be realized by both the employee and the employer when a new staff member has a well thought out and planned orientation. To have an effective employee orientation it must be planned out, delivered to new employees and followed up.

At the end of the day you know you have been successful in your orientation if your new employee feels welcome, understands the municipality in a broad sense and is clear about what is expected of them. You should strive to create a great first impression. Their first impression of your municipality is made on that first day, and how you handle yourself can have a significant impact on how quickly a new employee can become a productive member of your staff.

I believe the greatest problems municipalities face in relation to employee orientation is that their supervisors just do not have the time or the desire to complete the program. It is just as easy to leave the new employee with the Human Resources Department for a few hours or days then shuffle them off to their desk and throw some work at them. Most supervisors already have a full schedule and they feel that orientating a new employee is just adding to their burden. It is just ANOTHER job in an already seemingly endless list of tasks. Supervisors have to realize that while it takes time to provide a good orientation to new staff members, it is the supervisors that will reap the rewards in the end – a successful orientation program leads to improved employee retention and increased employee production - it is less likely that they will have to re-orientate for that same position again in the near future.

Supervisors should continue to monitor the employee orientation program on a regular basis to ensure that it is working properly and continuing to be an effective training tool for the municipality.

A good employee orientation program is a good employee retention program. Making your employees feel important on their first day on the job makes an amazing first impression with them that goes a long ways towards creating a productive employee.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Employee Orientation Checklist

Please check off each item when completed.

Before the First Day

_____ Send new employee a ‘welcome letter’ and “New Hire Information Package’.

_____ Order business cards and have them mailed to the new employee.

_____ Completely set up work space including office supplies, email account, voice mail etc.

_____ Circulate notice with new employee’s picture and bio.

_____ Send welcome gift to house ie: flowers or fruit basket.

_____ Prepare release for local newspaper introducing new employee - include photo.

Introductions & Interpersonal Relations

_____ Supervisor personally greets new municipal employee upon arriving for the first day.

_____ Provide new employee with a welcome gift – company tee-shirt, pin, or pen.

_____ Sharing of job expectations between employee and supervisor.

_____ Introduce the new employee to fellow workers, department heads and assign a ‘buddy’.

_____ Make arrangements to have lunch brought in on the first day at work.

General Information

_____ Review the orientation process itself and provide a copy of this document to the new employee.

_____ Tour the administration building. (Show location of coat room, rest rooms, official bulletin boards, kitchen, etc.)
____ Tour of municipal facilities.

____ Review Code of Conduct which includes: Employee Behaviour; Professionalism; Harassment Principles of Conduct; General Integrity; Confidential Information; Use of Municipal Property Conduct at Council Meetings

____ Explain how to deal in the public sector in a political world.

____ Explain who the municipality’s customers are, and explain what services are provided to residents.

____ Copies of municipal map, including ward boundaries. Copy of County or regional map.

____ Explain staff council relationship.

____ Explain township’s Government structure – how the municipality functions as a whole and how the departments function.

____ Provide copies of relevant by-laws and resolutions.

____ Tell where and how to enter premises (including explanation of after-hours procedures). Arrange for necessary keys. Review security processes and access codes.

____ Cover starting and quitting time, lunch period, breaks, shifts, and any weekend work assignments.

____ Explain timesheet completion - show how to report time worked and leave taken.

____ Tell when and whom to call when absence is necessary and how to request time off.

____ Review vacation and sick leave procedures.

____ Determine how to contact the employee during non-working hours.

____ Explain overtime policy, if applicable.

____ Explain Health & Safety policy and emergency exits.

____ Instructions concerning the reporting of all accidents and injuries (first aid facilities).

____ Explain the Township’s Policy concerning meals, gifts, travel and entertainment while away at conferences and seminars.
_____ Discuss communications (use of telephone, voice mail, e-mail, or pagers).

_____ Explain use of parking facilities and arrange for employee to obtain parking permit.

_____ Provide a staff/council directory.

_____ Review government contacts and resources.

_____ Review acronym dictionary provided.

**Work Assignment**

_____ Review position job description with employee and give him/her a signed copy.

_____ Explain the scope of the work and how it relates to the Township as a whole.

_____ Arrange for work assignment and step-by-step introduction to the job.

_____ Explain any security, confidentiality, or privacy issues related to the work.

_____ Schedule on-the-job training and any other required training.

_____ Designate a person to whom the new employee should go for help.

_____ Cover departmental standards and requirements (dress code, travel, personal conduct).

**Human Resources**

_____ Complete required payroll information forms. (ie.TD1ON, TD1)

_____ Explain payperiod dates and payroll schedule.

_____ Direct Deposit enrolment form.

_____ Explain & complete application for group benefits (health, dental, life, & LTD).

_____ Explain retirement package. (OMERS)

_____ Explain the probationary period.

_____ Give the employee a current organizational chart.
_____ Explain the Township’s pay grid - identifying the employee's current pay rate.

_____ Evaluate employee orientation program (end of first week).

_____ Evaluate employee orientation program (three month mark).

_____________________   _____________________
Employee’s Signature    Supervisor’s Signature