



## Today's Topic:

# Joining the Team: Getting Oriented at QUALCOMM

**Guest Speakers:**

Stephanie McMurrey, Learning Center Manager, QUALCOMM  
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**Facilitator:**

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**A new employee's orientation is significant in the first impression of the organization.** A company's sincere efforts to include and inform its new hires helps to build a foundation of trust that will support the employee in the future. Stephanie McMurrey and Tamara Gregory, both of QUALCOMM, joined Jennifer Robin, a consultant with Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. to discuss the company's August 2006 launch of an improved onboarding program that was based on employee feedback. QUALCOMM, a San Diego-based wireless business solutions provider with approximately 11,000 employees worldwide, has been recognized on FORTUNE's *100 Best Companies to Work For*® list since 1999; this year, the organization is ranked at #14.

### Planning for a Change

In November 2005, Stephanie had recently taken the lead on orientation and onboarding, and her vice president asked how international offices were handling this part of hiring. The discussion prompted the entire orientation team to examine the practices at the headquarters in San Diego to ensure that the program was effective. By surveying 150 employees with a maximum of three months of tenure, the team gathered information on the current program regarding resources they needed and their experiences up to that point. In January 2006, the team processed the data and, as Stephanie described, "We found out that we really needed to improve our orientation experience here in San Diego before rolling it out internationally." Based on the survey results, the team shaped the improved orientation on several objectives:

- To enhance employees' speed to productivity
- To give employees access to critical resources and information in their jobs
- To provide employees opportunities to learn more about QUALCOMM's business, technology, and services
- To create opportunities for employees to make connections with leaders and colleagues
- To generate excitement about working at QUALCOMM from the day a new hire signs the offer letter

Additionally, Stephanie emphasized an underlying goal of creating a consistent message during the onboarding experience. The team's main metric for measuring success was a decrease in voluntary turnover in the first year of implementation.

## An Improved Model of Orientation

Stephanie explained the three phases of QUALCOMM's improved onboarding program: pre-arrival, orientation, and ongoing.

- **Pre-Arrival**
  - This phase begins as soon as the new hire signs the offer letter, which triggers a series of other actions. Within the next 24 hours, the employee's manager will call to make contact, offer congratulations, and make a strong impression on behalf of the organization. The new hire also receives a welcome e-mail that contains helpful first-day information such as directions, where to report, and dress code. The new employee will also find a link to QUALCOMM's orientation website, which features a welcome video from the CEO, Dr. Paul Jacobs, background context about values and culture, an agenda for the first day, and a full benefits orientation. Stephanie explained, "We heard from employees that this was one of the most important things that they want to know about, so we figured, 'Why not give it to them before they start so they can have their questions ready when they come in?'"
  - A unique aspect of the pre-arrival phase for a new hire is the personal phone call from a member of the orientation team the Friday before the start date on Monday. The team member will answer any questions, make sure the new employee is comfortable with what they expect will happen, and convey how excited the team is to have that person on board. Stephanie described "rave reviews" to this addition to the program and claimed that it is one of the best aspects they have added.
- **Orientation**
  - This weeklong phase begins on an employee's first day at QUALCOMM and the focus lies on an overview of the business, insight into the core values, and information about resources that are available to the employee. An activity called "The Spirit of Invention" points toward QUALCOMM's core values, "Innovation, Execution, and Partnership." New hires are challenged to build QUALCOMM's newest wireless product using LEGO® blocks and within a 15-minute timeframe. During that period, the new employee receives messages about changes to the product or last-minute limitations. After the exercise, the groups talk about how the core values all played a role in how they managed that short task and how they will work at QUALCOMM.
  - At the same time that a manager decides the kinds of physical needs the new employee will need on the job, like a computer or a desk, a peer mentor is nominated. Together, the mentor and manager put together an onboarding plan for the duration of the first four weeks. The plan may include classes to take, people to meet, or sites to visit. At the end of the first week, all new employees gather for a hot breakfast and informal discussion of how their first week progressed. They talk about their best experiences, explain their most challenging times, and provide feedback to the orientation team about how to support future new employees.
- **Ongoing**
  - This phase begins at an employee's second week at QUALCOMM and continues throughout the remainder of the tenure. The focus during this period is on opportunities to learn more about the business, its technology, and the products offered. Executives (Directors and above) receive a customized onboarding plan that outlines the first 90 days at QUALCOMM, taking into account the culture of their specific group. The Learning Center offers over 500 classes per year for the goals of professional development and career growth as well as general knowledge about the business. For example, employees had the opportunity to attend a program that the investor relations group gave background information on the financial state of the business.

## Feedback and Effects

In order to evaluate this improved program, the orientation team gathers feedback from every new employee after one week, three months, and then one year. Since the program was rolled out in August 2006, the one-year mark has not yet arrived, but the feedback from the other time intervals so far has been very positive overall. In their feedback, QUALCOMM employees report feeling more dedicated to the company because they feel like the company is more dedicated to them. They view the orientation program as a unique aspect of the organization that conveys the company's special investment in the workforce. In a qualitative sense, employees appear to be more engaged, connected, and guided within their roles due to being immersed in the business and culture from very first day. Ultimately, the orientation team will examine the effect of this program on voluntary turnover, specifically regarding employees with 1-2 years of tenure.

In response to a question regarding budget restraints, Tamara and Stephanie emphasized that the most effective parts of their programs were, for the most part, the least expensive. They cited the phone calls from the manager and the orientation team member and welcome e-mail as highly valuable to the new employee. The new hire immediately gains a sense of support from this gesture of welcome from the organization, but the only cost is time. They also recommend developing any improvements internally and utilizing the expertise from staff that already exists, rather than automatically turning to outside experts. It is important to keep value to the employee at the top of mind, rather than the amount of money invested in the program. Using employee feedback specific to their orientation helped the orientation team focus their efforts in a way that would be most helpful to new employees.

## Conclusion

When organizations dedicate time and resources to refining the way in which a new employee enters the work environment, the effort translates to an impression of support, investment, and caring that will hopefully continue throughout the employee's tenure. Positive feedback so far for QUALCOMM's efforts point the way to success, but Stephanie made it clear that "employee onboarding is an entire company's responsibility, rather than just one group." By shouldering the responsibility for the way a new employee perceives the organization, leaders, managers, and human resources professionals can make a significant impact on the experience of employees at all points of their tenure.



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