

Sink-or-swim strategy goes under

From page A45

He said managers begin preparing for new employees a month before they start the job. On the first day, new hires arrive to find their computer and phone are working. There's also a tour of the building, followed by a session with a manager to learn some of the basic procedures.

"It's strange, but these things get taken for granted," Codrington said. "We forget that people have to know the little things."

David Berrington, director of human resources for UMA, a Vancouver-based engineering consulting firm, sees onboarding as the last stage of the recruiting process and the first stage of the retention strategy.

"This is the opportunity to set the stage for the employment experience," said Berrington, whose company employs about

1,000 people. "It's the chance to deliver what you talked about in the recruitment process."

"If you don't get the onboarding right, it will lead to a departure in the first year or two."

At UMA, Berrington said hiring managers are asked to prepare for new employees by thinking about how they will experience their first few weeks on the new job.

"We want them to feel welcomed and engaged from the first day," he said. "Orientation used to be a sink-or-swim experience. You showed up on your first day and if you got a place to sit, you were lucky. The thinking was that if you were good, you'd figure it out."

"That's not going to work today. There is so much invested in hiring that you want to make those first days and weeks a good experience."

With organizations spending

more time and money attracting and retaining key employees, onboarding is becoming a more thoughtful process, he said. UMA assigns a buddy to every new employee to help them find their way through company procedures and to figure out the company culture.

Even if a company has no formal process, new employees still undergo a period of orientation as they settle into a new organization. To improve their success, new hires should take the initiative to find out what they need to know.

"Think about the first 100 days and what mark you want to set, what you want to prove you can do," Berrington said. "You are really establishing and launching a good employer-employee relationship, which is what we all want."

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