

SUCCESSFUL STARTS

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Welcoming and Inspiring New Hires



Orientation at Ameristar utilizes games to bring out people's playful sides.

A big, colorful beach ball floats from fingertip to fingertip in a wide circle.

Laughter echoes in the warm atmosphere.

The setting isn't a sandy beach or tropical island. It's a new employee orientation session at Ameristar Casino + Hotel East Chicago, which has more than 1,300 associates.

"We start off with an active welcoming exercise," observes learning and development business partner Cornelius Henderson. "We toss the beach ball around to get a little bit of information about the employee. We have a number of different probing questions we ask them based on where their hands fall on that beach ball: 'What are your favorite foods? Do you have any pets? Who would play you in a movie about yourself?'"

"It's not only an opportunity for them to talk and express themselves and for us to get to know them, but we tie that into some of the things we offer ... our food venues on our property and the benefits we have, like pet insurance."

T&W Corporation – a design-build firm in Indianapolis that

serves businesses, industries and churches throughout the state – has a workforce of approximately 40.

"We try within the first couple of days to get as many employees in one of our training rooms as we can to introduce themselves to the new employee and try to almost have a forced assimilation there," Steve Shehorn, executive vice president, comments with a chuckle.

"We've gotten a lot of feedback from the (new) employees that it was profoundly cool to them that we'd take the time to pull everybody in just for their benefit to give them an opportunity to have some face-to-face time with people."

Muncie-based MutualBank is growing its orientation program with the acquisition of BloomBank (headquartered in Bloomfield).

"Now we're over 500 employees and we range in locations from South Bend all the way to Mitchell, Indiana," shares vice president of human resources Dorothy Douglass. "We added 10 branches (increasing the total to 40)."

Despite differences in size and scope, Ameristar, T&W and MutualBank share similar tactics in making new recruits feel at home.

Approachable, accessible

Orientation at MutualBank starts before an employee's first day in the office.

"We send out an onboarding message where they complete all of their paperwork ahead of time so when they show up on their first

day, they can sort of hit the ground running and we've got all of that paperwork eliminated," says assistant vice president and training manager Chase Batt.

Employees at MutualBank's Muncie location are welcomed by the CEO or COO during an in-person chat.

"We also do it by videoconference (for people at other sites)," Douglass explains. "It's not the perfect method, but at least these folks get to see and talk to and have the opportunity to ask questions of our executive leadership."

Managers are given flexibility in creating an initial impression.

"Anything from taking them to lunch with the team or having a pizza delivered if they're in the branch to extend that welcome," Douglass notes. "And not just, 'Hi. Welcome to work. Get to work!'"

Like T&W and many others, MutualBank establishes rapport with casual introductory conversations.

"We did some icebreaker things to, I guess, break down those barriers," Douglass recalls of the BloomBank integration. "We did things like, 'Give us a little-known fact about yourself that maybe your co-workers don't know' and we talked through that. That's how they remember us."

"They remember that Chase is a drag racer more than they remember that he's a training manager. They remember that I want to teach yoga one day more than that I'm the head of HR. We remember some of them for some of the things they do. That's been kind of a fun thing."

Ameristar implements role playing.

"It's not just dealers working with dealers or front-of-house folks working with other front-of-house (employees). It's everybody who's in that orientation working with each other," Henderson emphasizes.

Bridging the (age) gap

The average tenure of T&W team members is 20-plus years. Grooming the next generation is top of mind.

"We've got employees that are in their mid-60s that are only a year or two away from retirement and we've got brand new college grads coming in right now – and everything in between," Shehorn remarks. "We've been extremely intentional about hiring new employees in the younger age group to create and continue that diversity of age."

"We've got the older ones passing on the skilled trades, mentoring and that type of thing internally so these younger folks have an opportunity to work around veterans and garner some of that wisdom before they retire."

MutualBank also addresses generational



Newer and seasoned employees find common ground at T&W Corporation. Eleven-year veteran Andrew Huey (left), vice president, brainstorms with service coordinator David Dilk, who joined the team two and a half years ago.



A MutualBank Christmas Eve breakfast features food, games and photos with Santa.

differences. Douglass points to an example in Bloomfield.

"They have a couple of employees that have never been on a computer before. Our corporate trainer spent the day with those folks to give them an introduction to the computer system."

"Chase and I happened to be down there and the lady (a Baby Boomer) that was in the training had been very nervous. Didn't want to do it and doesn't like computers. She stopped us in the hallway and said, 'Gosh! Thanks. I was telling my dad yesterday that I suddenly feel like we can be in the 21st century now because I'm not as intimidated by the computer anymore. And I feel like I can do this myself.'"

Game on

Peer-to-peer interaction plays a vital role

in helping employees adapt at Mutual Bank.

"On the branch side, we pair people up, so they always have a teller buddy or a co-worker they can reach out to," Douglass imparts. In the case of BloomBank, employees that haven't previously used the MutualBank system are paired with others throughout the company. "They can pick up the phone and say, 'Hey, I'm not sure about how this new account is supposed to work. Can you walk me through it again?'"

T&W brings people together by communicating its culture. One outlet: internal committee participation.

"We try to encourage them to get on these committees early so they get a sense of team right off the bat," Shehorn affirms. "Even our daily culture – just the physical layout of the building is a very open

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environment. There's kind of an open-office type concept. They're automatically somewhat immersed into a culture where they can't get isolated very easily."

Ameristar's 90-day learning journey is an extension of its new hire orientation program. The goal is to help build abilities, knowledge and relationships.

Henderson: "There's a number of different checkpoints where the hiring manager or supervisor gets a chance to touch base with them and say, 'How's it going? What are some of your challenges? What could we do better? What do you need? What have you learned? What would you like to know more of?' It helps to guide them through that

whole process."

After the 90-day period, individuals can apply for different roles if desired.

Henderson's passion for people is especially evident when he talks about the Living Our Values employee recognition program.

"We have former winners speak at the orientation directly to those new hires and talk about, 'How do we live our values and how can you become an award winner as well.' This idea of family and connectedness and relationships really lets them know, 'Hey, I was where you were. I won that award as well. And you can too.'"

RESOURCES: Cornelius Henderson, Ameristar Casino + Hotel East Chicago, at eastchicago.ameristar.com | Dorothy Douglass and Chase Batt, MutualBank, at www.bankwithmutual.com | Steve Shehorn, T&W Corporation, at www.tw-corp.com