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### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION IN NIGERIAN LAW FIRMS**

#### **1. Introduction**

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, employee orientation is defined as:

“an act of training or preparation for a new job or activity”<sup>2</sup>

Orientation is the process of introducing new employees to their work environment. In Nigerian law firms today, employee orientation is a pivotal process designed to acquaint new employees with the employer’s core values, familiarise them with various departmental functions, introduce new employees to colleagues, and provide a platform for addressing pertinent work-related queries. This formal introduction plays a crucial role in shaping a productive first impression and is integral to the overarching on-boarding experience.

Employee orientation plays an important role in Nigerian law firms as it ensures that new employees are well-informed and educated about the firm’s culture, policies, and procedures.

#### **1.1. Benefits of orientation for new employees in Nigerian Law Firms**

Firstly, it ensures compliance by educating employees about the firm’s safety standards, anti-discrimination laws, confidentiality agreements, clarifying their rights and responsibilities, etc.

Secondly, it enhances productivity and efficiency by reducing the learning curve for new employees, enabling them to contribute effectively from the outset.

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<sup>2</sup> See, ORIENTATION | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary access on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

Thirdly, a well-executed orientation program improves retention rates by creating a positive initial experience. When employees feel welcomed and supported, they are more likely to remain with the firm.

Fourthly, orientation sessions provide opportunities for new employees to meet colleagues, supervisors, and other team members, fostering relationships that contribute to a cohesive work environment.

Lastly, understanding the firm's values, mission, and vision helps employees align their work with the organization's goals, thereby promoting a strong firm culture.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Orientation Process**

### **2.1 Firm's Culture**

During the orientation process, it is essential to emphasize the firm's culture and values, providing new employees with a clear understanding and practical examples of how these values are applied within the organization. This includes detailing cultural activities and norms, and illustrating how employees can embody these values in their daily work. The use of visuals such as videos and image-centric handbooks can effectively convey this information, making the cultural aspects of the firm more tangible and memorable for new employees. By integrating visual elements, the Human Resource (HR) personnel will enhance the orientation experience, ensuring that new employees not only grasp but also resonate with the firm's cultural identity from the outset.

### **2.2 Orientation Process should be well tailored**

In the digital age, a 'one size fits all' approach to the orientation process is ineffective (this approach refers to a method of training that is designed to fit all new employees irrespective of their profession or cadre without discrimination). The primary goal of orientation is to ensure that new employees feel valued and welcomed. Therefore, HR professionals should possess a comprehensive understanding of the organization's essential information before conducting orientations. This knowledge enables them to tailor the orientation experience accordingly, ensuring it meets the specific needs and expectations of each new employee. This personalized approach not only enhances engagement and satisfaction but also facilitates smoother integration into the firm's culture and operations.

### **2.3 Management's Involvement**

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<sup>3</sup> See, Employee Orientation: Definition, Benefits & Best Practices (helpjuice.com) accessed on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

It is crucial for HR to involve senior members of staff (Partners and Senior Associates) in the orientation process. This involvement not only enhances the new employee's sense of value but also provides them with valuable insights and wisdom from a senior management perspective. By incorporating Partners and Senior Associates into the orientation exercise, HR ensures that the process is more meaningful and informative, offering firsthand knowledge of the firm's vision, culture, and strategic direction. This approach fosters a deeper connection between new employees and the firm, contributing to their overall engagement and success.

#### 2.4 **Orientation should be dynamic and conversational**

Orientation should not be a one-way street, throughout the process, new employees should be encouraged to ask questions and share their views or opinions when appropriate. HR plays a crucial role in ensuring that orientation initiatives are engaging and interesting. This can be achieved by using inspiring language, incorporating visuals that resonate with the firm's culture and values, or even adopting an interesting theme to enhance the overall experience. By fostering an interactive environment, HR not only educates new employees but also encourages their active participation and integration into the organization.

### 3. **Steps taken during Orientation Process**

There are materials HR/Employers could make use of, to carry out an effective orientation and HR should ensure that all essential items and information are covered within integration activities, some of which are stated below.

#### 3.1 **Documented materials/items that entails reviewing:**

- a. The firm's vision, mission, internal values and culture booklet
- b. Forms for tax and pension scheme
- c. Staff handbook/Employee manual

#### 3.2 **Essential Information:**

- a. Departmental processes and information
- b. Job description, expectations and functions
- c. Overview of firms business-related social events and activities
- d. Health, safety, and office details
- e. Benefits and compensation essentials
- f. Key firm policies e.g., annual leave, overtime

#### 4. **Key Considerations applicable during the Orientation Process**

By enhancing your new employee orientation processes you stand to push your firm ahead of the pack, catalyzing your success in the process, and that is priceless.

- a. Foster conversational interactions. This encourages new employees to ask questions in the course of orientation.
- b. Utilize videos and visuals to enhance understanding.
- c. Customize the orientation process to meet employees' needs.
- d. Conduct informative tours and introductions.
- e. Incorporate involvement from senior leaders or management.
- f. Solicit feedback from new employees to refine and improve the orientation process.
- g. Regularly evaluate and update orientation activities to ensure relevance.

#### 5. **Options for New Employee Training and Development Programmes<sup>4</sup>**

In most Nigerian law firms, training varies greatly depending on the type of work for which an employee is employed and their existing skill level. This becomes even more critical if the firm uses proprietary software or systems unique to the firm, or if the procedures and policies are specialized, involve official secrets, require specialized knowledge, or are legally complex.

The most common training and development techniques include:

- Onboarding and Orientation Processes
- Consistent and continuing Legal Education and Skill Enhancement
- Mentoring and Training Initiatives
- Utilization of Technology in Training Programs
- Self-paced online training
- Leader-led group training programs

##### a. **Self-paced online training**

This is a form of online training that allows employees to work on their own schedule and at their own speed. It can be an incredibly effective way for employees to learn new skills, as it gives them the freedom to explore topics

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<sup>4</sup> See, <https://www.lawcrossing.com/article/900055311/Training-and-Development-Strategies-for-Law-Firm-Professionals/> access on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2024.

at their own pace and to go over review material as needed. Self-paced online training could cover areas such as software skills, safety procedures, or other technical skills.

b. **Onboarding and Orientation Processes**

Effective onboarding and orientation processes are essential for integrating new employees into the firm's culture, processes, and expectations. A well-planned onboarding program provides new employees with detailed information, resources, and support needed to contribute to the firm's success from their first day, which includes orientation sessions, introductions to management and partners, giving relevant training materials, and continuing support from mentors or buddy programs.

c. **Consistent Legal Education and Skills Development**

Consistent learning and skill development are important for delivering quality legal services. Most Nigerian law firms provide opportunities for lawyers and other employees (paralegals) to engage in continuing education and other professional advancement program, such as attending conferences, seminars, workshops, and obtaining higher degrees or certifications.

d. **Mentoring and Training Initiatives**

Mentoring and training play an important role in nurturing the growth and development of solicitors and paralegals at all stages of their careers. Pairing junior associates with experienced mentors provides adequate guidance, support, and feedback as they navigate the difficulties of legal practice and develop their skills and knowledge. Additionally, training programs enable solicitors and paralegals to receive guidance and support to handle tasks, set goals, and achieve their assigned goal.

e. **Use of Technology in Training Programs**

Technology revolutionizes training and development programs by enabling more customized, interactive, and engaging learning experiences. Nigerian law firms apply various technical tools and platforms, such as e-learning modules, virtual training, video conferencing, and online teamwork tools, to deliver training content and facilitate skill development. These machineries offer flexibility and accessibility, giving employees the privilege to learn at their own pace and convenience, irrespective of the location or time constraints.

g. **Leader-led group training programs**

This training program takes employee development out of the training room and into everyday conversations led by department managers. HR plays a role in recognizing the developmental needs of the firm's new set of employees and then helps them cultivate new skills to increase their respective career development and growth.

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, effective employee orientation goes beyond paperwork; it is about creating a positive experience and providing detailed information to new employees from the start. A successful employee orientation process not only helps new employees integrate into the business quickly but also tailors training and development processes to the firm's specific needs and preferences. By doing so, employers can ensure greater success down the line and are able to extract optimal output from the employee or new hire.

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