



# Never Swung a Hammer

By Brad Anderson, *Business Development*

In recent years, a serious concern in the construction industry is the labor shortage. In fact, there might be some reading this article who think it's been an issue for decades. The reality is, coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the construction industry is going to produce a tremendous number of new hires, some of which will never have swung a hammer or powered equipment in construction – and that's a challenge as we onboard these newcomers to the industry.

According to Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), "In 2021, construction companies will need to hire 430,000 more workers than they employed in 2020, according to an analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data released today by ABC." Insurance claims from employees on the job with less than 12 months of experience make-up approximately 50% of the overall workers' comp claims. On average, the overall cost for these claims is greater. It begs the question, "Are we prepared to onboard 430,000 newcomers to the industry?" Here are things to consider:

- + Does your company have a formal onboarding process in place?
- + How fast do your new employees become key contributors?
- + Does your organization proactively build relationships with newly hired employees?
- + How frequently are you engaging employees after the onboarding process for training and continuous contact?

In order to gain as much control over the new hire process, it's important to have a consistent approach. Develop a plan, a process, routinely evaluate your process for effectiveness, and interview recently hired employees to see how impactful and effective the onboarding process was.



## Phase 1 – The Pre-Offer

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The first stage in the onboarding process. This is where first impressions are formed and where you begin hammering home your safety culture. It's at this point the new hire will gain an awareness of the expectations and the standard operating procedure for your organization. We've found it's important to involve a variety of people in the hiring process. Each of your veterans will provide a different narrative and this will provoke a greater depth of the expectations and culture. **Be very clear about the role your new hire is applying for and, most important, call the references.** This is where you can weed out most of your issues.

## Phase 2 – The First Days

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Take advantage of the new employee's enthusiasm. Have processes in place that make the 30th day, as exciting as the first. **Be patient.** Don't overwhelm your new asset with too much information in the early days. And most important, greet the new hire on day one, introduce them to their coworkers, and make them feel they're part of the family.

## Phase 3 – The Orientation

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**Reaffirm the safety culture you shared throughout the interview process.** Provide a company history, past failures, and past successes. Reinforce their roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. Cover the specific skills required, then train specifically to those methodologies and technologies. Clearly outline the career path and opportunities – this keeps the new hire engaged and provides a carrot for them to chase. And finally, train them to your standards of excellence. Have them shadow the best of the best.

## Phase 4 – Post Orientation

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It's important to remember, your new hire is still green. The shadowing is over, your new hire is on their own. Or are they? **It's important to pay close attention to the new employee and provide ongoing care, concern, and a sense of security.** Clearly monitor their performance against role expectations. When possible, designate one of your key employees as their accountability partner and mentor. It's important you choose wisely who will be overseeing this process for the new hires. You want trust built and you want this person to actively demonstrate commitment to the new hire. The need to be present to answer questions and provide feedback is critical to the process.

Considering the expense of training new hires, and the cost associated with first year, disgruntled employee's, it's important to consider your return on investment. Setting these steps in motion will lower employee turnover rates, increase quality and effectiveness, and accelerate the new hires learning curve. Remember, you want to reduce the number of days it takes them to become "productive" to equal an average tenured employee. By doing so, you'll reduce the frequency of claims and lower the overall cost of these claims.

## Conclusion

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You're about to hire a lot of new employees who might have never stepped onto a job site. Create a hiring and onboarding process that fits your company culture and sets an expectation that safety is essential. Designing the process to keep the new hire engaged, motivated, and thriving is also critical. Create an onboarding process that empowers your key veterans and excites your new hires. Controlling what you can in this process is what's most important. You won't eliminate every bad apple, but in the end, there will be fruits that come from your onboarding process.

## About the Author

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