

Orientation-Assimilation

Human Capital Center Toolbox Series



Table of Contents

2

Orientation-Assimilation:
Improving Retention at CPA Firms

4

Assimilation stage 1: Prior to the first day

4

Assimilation stage 2: Orientation

5

Assimilation stage 3: Week one activities

5

Assimilation stage 4: First 30 days

5

Assimilation stage 5: First year

What is the PCPS Human Capital Center Toolbox Series?

The Toolbox Series is designed to highlight the learning and tools available in the Human Capital Center (HCC), including templates, action plans, checklists and more. The HCC serves PCPS members by focusing on staffing best practices and providing the resources to master and implement those recommendations. Contributions to the Toolbox Series were made by the AICPA's Specialized Communities, including the Personal Financial Planning, Information Technology, Forensic and Valuation Services and PCPS sections. Visit the 11 segments of the Human Capital Center at pcps.aicpa.org/Resources/Human+Capital+Center/ to discover more.



This tool icon refers to Tools that are available in the PCPS Human Capital Center.

Orientation-Assimilation: Improving Retention at CPA Firms

As retention challenges reach an all-time high for CPA firms, proper orientation and assimilation become one of the most critical aspects of retaining quality team members.


Assimilation is part of the overall integration of new team members into your firm by helping them adapt to the work environment and their role.

Orientation – an element of assimilation – is a training program that formally introduces new hires to the firm’s people, systems and processes. Orientation is a key step in the overall assimilation process. The **Orientation-Assimilation Action Plan**, located in the PCPS Human Capital Center, is a guide for following the proper steps to introducing this process to your firm.

The assimilation process should be designed to ensure that new team members are welcomed in a comprehensive and professional manner. Successful assimilation empowers people by helping them to become productive team members in as short a time as possible, resulting in quicker returns on significant investments made to recruit new team members.

Orientation is a carefully planned and structured event that should be executed to help new hires gain a quick understanding of how things work around the firm and office, who everyone is and where to find essentials.

Orientation is the first event that new team members should attend. It will lead to the remaining steps in the assimilation process, including further introductory meetings, specific job training, buddy or counselor meetings, evaluations and feedback and firm events.

A man in a dark suit and light blue shirt is sitting at a desk, looking down at a computer keyboard. His hands are on the keyboard. There are papers and a calculator on the desk. The background is slightly blurred, showing a bright office environment.

Office preparations should be completed prior to the start date to ensure that new hires feel like part of the team on day one.

There are several tools available to help streamline the assimilation process. *The Assimilation Process and Orientation Program* is a learning manual that describes the method of assimilation and explains how an orientation program fits into that process. It also walks you through the five stages of assimilation and explains how to set up a process that works for your firm.

The five stages of assimilation are:

- *Stage 1: Prior to the first day*
- *Stage 2: Orientation*
- *Stage 3: Week one activities*
- *Stage 4: First 30 days*
- *Stage 5: First year*

Assimilation stage 1: Prior to the first day

Many components of assimilation can occur prior to the first day. Ongoing correspondence with new hires – from job acceptance to commencement date – is important to maintaining momentum and continuing relationship development. Administrative paperwork and new hire forms should be forwarded to new hires in advance of the start date. Similarly, office preparations should be completed prior to the start date to ensure that new hires feel like part of the team on day one.

The **Assimilation Checklists and Agendas** document offers useful tools on possible preparatory activities to help new hires to settle in and to alert team members of the arrival of the new employees.

Assimilation stage 2: Orientation

Orientation is the first event that new team members should attend. It is essential that this experience be positive, because activities from day one will shape their perception of your firm and set the stage for the future. New hires need to meet their colleagues, get a feel for the office layout and facilities and be introduced to key systems and processes. It is also important that they are assigned some work tasks so they feel immediately engaged and productive.

Orientation can be a one-, two- or three-day event. It is key for the firm to decide the optimal amount of time to dedicate to orienting new hires. A longer orientation period might be justified if the firm plans to present a lot of information. A larger start-group may warrant more time for orientation as well. The advantages of a longer program include giving new hires more time to digest content, having more flexibility to engage the new team members and allowing them more avenues to retain the material.

It is highly recommended that you request feedback from new hires regarding the orientation. Comments should be considered, and actions should be taken to address trends in the feedback. See the **Assimilation Survey Forms** tool for information regarding feedback surveys.

Assimilation stage 3: Week one activities

During the first week, new team members will become acquainted with the specifics of their work groups and their key responsibilities. They will be introduced to the systems, processes, policies and procedures of the team and be increasingly involved in the tasks of their role. As the first week unfolds, momentum must be kept consistent, and learning should increasingly focus on the new hire's role. See the **Assimilation Checklists and Agendas** document for possible activities that can be organized for the first week.

Assimilation stage 4: First 30 days

During the first month, new team members engage in more tangible learning and the application of the resources and tools used by the practice. After the first 30 days, new team members should have a good understanding of their roles in the firm and what is expected of them. Refer to **Assimilation Checklists and Agendas** for possible activities that can be organized for the first 30 days.

Assimilation stage 5: First year

After the first month, the assimilation program shifts slowly from a welcome focus to a team focus. When new team members succeed, the firm succeeds. The next 11 months will bring additional questions due to firm and process changes and cyclical events.

There is a plethora of necessary training that new hires must participate in to learn the firm's processes, software applications and methodologies. The Learning Culture section of the Human Capital Center offers a modifiable template called the **Orientation Training Checklist** to help firms plan for the training requirements during the assimilation cycle.

The assimilation program officially ends after one year. It is important to remember, however, that you should continue to "recruit" your team members during their entire tenure. You can learn more about retention and other programs in the Reward & Compensation & Incentives and Work/Life & Retention sections of the PCPS Human Capital Center.

One more tool to note is the **Sample Team Member Handbook**, developed by Next Generation Consulting, that covers the major topics that CPA firms should communicate to new hires. With a few firm-specific additions, the user can quickly generate an implementable team member handbook that is unique to their firm.

Visit aicpa.org/pcps and become a member for access to an array of tools and resources for developing your firm's assimilation and orientation strategies. To find out if your firm is already a member, email pcps@aicpa.org.



Access These Tools At aicpa.org/PCPS

Orientation-Assimilation Action Plan

Assimilation Checklists and Agendas

Sample Team Member Handbook

Assimilation Survey Forms

Orientation Presentation Template



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