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Given the bullet:  
Johnny Depp, as  
William Blake in  
*Dead Man* – an  
induction failure  
at its worst

## INDUCTION

# IT PAYS TO BE NICE

A well-designed induction process is likely to increase staff productivity and retention rates and reduce workplace incidents and accidents. **Report: Jeanne-Vida Douglas**

● In the 1995 Jim Jarmusch western, *Dead Man*, Ohio accountant William Blake endures a mysterious train ride to a distant town only to discover that the job he's travelled hundreds of miles to accept no longer exists. Blake turns bandit after being chased from the company offices by gun-toting owner, John Dickinson, and spends much of the rest of the movie with a bullet lodged in his chest. He is eventually cast adrift on a canoe to spend his last moments contemplating the sky.

While it's an unlikely outcome, the cult flick no doubt plays on the mind of many a new appointee as they nervously cross the threshold of a workplace to discover that no one knows they are supposed to be there, the boss is out and their desk is piled with the detritus of a previous employee.

Training and recruitment specialist Marie-Claire Ross says most companies



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Marie-Claire Ross,  
Digicast

have no formal induction process in place and as a result lose a vital opportunity to ensure that new staff immediately feel part of the team and are able to be productive from their first day in the office.

Ross became interested in induction after a particularly bad first day experience when she was left alone at the bottom of the stairs in a poorly lit section of a building. Her hopes rose when a couple of people passed by on their way to the toilet but clearly she wasn't their responsibility and they kept walking.

"Even the companies that do have a formal process often miss important elements," Ross says. "And most companies, regardless of industry, perform quite poorly when it comes to socialisation of new starters."

It turns out that the country's best employers usually have a very good onboarding or induction process and in many cases it's a series of simple but effective measures to ensure new staff have what they need to get the job done.

Software and web services company Google, which was named Australia's best place to work for the second year in BRW's *50 Best Places to Work*, has a simple process, which consists of a half a day training that covers resources, security and an office tour. On their first



## 8 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO USHER IN RECRUITS

The best induction programs are well thought out and planned right down to a series of specific tasks required during orientation – and can last up to six months.

- 1. It begins before they do:** Send a welcome letter and include a task-specific overview of their new role and the steps involved in the induction process so they know what to expect and what to bring on their first day.
- 2. Make new starters feel welcome:** First impressions count. Make sure someone is on hand to take new staff members on a tour, encourage other staff to be friendly to new workers and to introduce themselves. Assign new staff to a mentor or buddy and have the CEO or other senior person take the new starter out to lunch in their first month.
- 3. Have their workspace ready:** A desk, computer with logon information and a telephone will improve the new recruit's ability and motivation to be productive from the word "go".

**4. Have HR forms, policies and procedures ready:** Ensure the forms are all ready to be filled out and that someone is on hand to answer questions as they arise.

**5. Have their direct supervisor available:** The direct supervisor must be available on the first day to make sure the newbie has a clear idea of who they are reporting to and how to communicate with them.

**6. Provide visually engaging induction training:** Ditch the big, bulky boring training manual in favour of face-to-face training and a vivid presentation where possible. Creatively presented information is easier to retain.

**7. Communicate company core values:** This will help to get the new starter living and breathing company core values as quickly as possible.

**8. Train the trainer:** Ensure that those involved in the process have been trained and know what is required from them. Make sure they are able to communicate the company's core values and have the knowledge to answer questions.

Source: Marie-Claire Ross, Digicast Productions

day at the office, noogelers (yes, that's what new Googlers are called) are provided with an email address, laptop, phone, SIM card, security badge and a white helium balloon so that other people in the office know there's a newbie in their midst so they can introduce themselves.

And it's not just a matter of making people feel welcome. Research carried out in 2007 by recruitment agency Recruitment Solutions found that a well-designed induction process increases retention rates and staff productivity and leads to a significant reduction in workplace incidents and accidents.

But you don't need to be Google to have a great induction process, Marc Ratcliffe, chief executive MRWED Training and Assessment, which has made Australia's Best Places To Work list three years in a row, says. You just have to take the time to explain and demonstrate the company's core values, he suggests.

"Our induction process mainly involves close contact with a mentor early on who will co-ordinate their transition into the organisation," he says. "They will have an opportunity to meet the key personnel, explore the company history and philosophies and shadow someone else who does a similar role already.

"They are also supported through back-end processes, email logins and the like before going 'live' with customers, then there is a follow-up at around six weeks to see how the transition is going."

Whenever possible, Ratcliffe meets the employee at the six-week follow-up. It's important to ensure that new staff feel comfortable talking with the chief executive and that he benefits from the feedback, he says.

Having similarly featured in the *50 Best Places to Work* list for the past three years, the SAS Institute runs a two-day induction program where new employees are first given an overview of the company, then provided with more specific information tailored to their department and role. The process features face-to-face briefings with senior staff, eLearning modules and in the case of new sales staff, a two-week training session called "Starting Block" held at the global office in Cary, North Carolina.

"Induction is an extremely important step in setting up a new employee for success in their role," Brendan Gregor, human resources director for SAS south-east Asia, says.

"It also ensures that a baseline of information is provided, which assists managers in creating ongoing clarity for employees." **BRW**