

'Probation' by any other name?

Question: Does anyone utilize other terminology for what's commonly called a "probationary period?" I am concerned that this terminology could jeopardize our at-will status. No matter what you call it, what other issues should I consider as we formalize how we treat employees during the first 90 days on the job? -- **P.R. Ohio**

Comments

Those first 90 days are referred to as an "orientation period" in our P&P Manual. There is a 30 day wait for insurance, which is industry standard.

The new hire does get any paid holiday that falls within the 90 days and begins accruing PTO, but is not allowed to use it. If they leave within the orientation period, the PTO is forfeited; if they stay, they start off with a nice little bank of hours.

Posted by: R, Fairfax | May 16, 2007 at 10:10 AM

We use the term "introductory" period and it lasts for six months. This is a period where we expect the employee to learn about our organization and develop skills to perform their job duties. We also conduct an "introductory" performance review at the end of the six months to assess their performance and to coach in areas where we expect to see improvement.

Posted by: B Michigan | May 16, 2007 at 10:10 AM

WE call our 90 day period an "Introductory Period." The following is the paragraph that we have in our handbook. I am in the process of a Human Resource Audit which includes our handbook, so I will let you know if we are "shot down" on our terminology. Our employees begin to earn PTO (paid time off) from day 1 , but it cannot be used for 90 days.

"All employees have an Introductory Period of 90 days. During this time your performance will be monitored, and you will be trained on your job responsibilities. Your employment may be terminated at any time during this Introductory Period. At the completion of this period, your work and your attitude will be evaluated. After the successful completion of your Introductory Period you will be eligible for all applicable employee benefits. This does not guarantee employment for any specific period of time."

Posted by: Dedie Gruver | May 16, 2007 at 10:58 AM

We use the term "introductory" period. It lasts for 90 days. We conduct weekly performance appraisals and discuss them with the new employee. There are no surprises at the end of the introductory period. All new employees begin to accrue vacation hours, however, they are not entitled to take vacation time until they have been on the payroll for a minimum of 6 months. All employees are eligible for benefits at the end of the introductory period.

Posted by: Sheri, California | May 16, 2007 at 11:03 AM

At another company I worked at, we had the same concerns; therefore, our manual stated it as "Training Period". Not sure if this would work for you.

JG

Posted by: JG | May 16, 2007 at 12:03 PM

Our employee handbook uses the term "qualifying period.....It is a period for qualification of benefits, of orientation, adjustment and adaptation..."

The time frame for this correlates to our waiting period for insurance benefits. You could also call it an adjustment period.

Posted by: LW, MI | May 16, 2007 at 12:21 PM

We use the term "Orientation" period" in our Manual as follows: All new and rehired employees work on an Orientation basis for the first 90 days (3 months) after hire. The Orientation Period is intended to give you, as a new employee, the opportunity to demonstrate your ability to achieve a satisfactory level of performance and to determine whether the new position meets your expectations. This period is used to evaluate your capabilities, work habits, and overall performance. However, successful completion of the Orientation Period does not guarantee continued employment. Either you or the company may end the employment relationship at will, at any time during or after the Orientation Period, with or without cause or advance notice."

Posted by: D. Chan, Monterey, CA | May 16, 2007 at 03:28 PM

We use the term introductory period. There are many comments about benefit eligibility, which should be clearly outlined with the new hire. But I would like to mention that if we have a performance issue with someone in the introductory period, we will have at least one conversation with the new hire to provide an opportunity for change (assuming it's not for gross misconduct). If the issue continues, then we make an appropriate decision. Sometimes the work performance issue is a misunderstanding of expectations.

Posted by: CR, Minneapolis, MN | May 17, 2007 at 06:02 AM

We used the probationary period term in the past, but changed it to an "orientation period", which lasts 90 days. We changed it due to our at-will status and did not like the term just as you suggested in your concern.

Posted by: Rebecca Faini | May 17, 2007 at 10:50 AM

The concept of an initial period of some other basis for employment than Learn/Do Your Job and 'Performance Review is Constant' just didn't make sense to us anymore. You are employed, you may be corrected in your performance, and you succeed or you don't. Period.

Posted by: CC, HR for SmBz | June 13, 2007 at 11:47 AM

Agree with CC. There's no good reason for designating a specific time frame as orientation/introductory/training/probation/getting to know you/whatever.

If you have a solid reason for taking employment action at day 29, you can take that same action at day 91.

The only time frame I would designate is the benefits waiting period and, perhaps, to state that performance review will take place at 30 or 60 or 90 days.

Posted by: | June 14, 2007 at 10:44 AM