

Make the buddy system work

Many organizations have a buddy system in which an employee volunteers to help a newcomer get settled in the job. Such a program works best when the “buddy” makes the most of this experience:

Don't gossip. New employees are especially impressionable and susceptible to any rumors that float around. They may have no one to trust but you, so it's all the more important that you steer clear of making negative comments about coworkers. Stick to describing the roles and functions of key personnel; stop yourself from inserting editorial comments along the way about how this or that person screws up or has lots of enemies.

Offer bits of institutional history. By providing a few historical facts about how the company has evolved, you can help new hires appreciate the organization's beliefs and character. Discuss the founders of the company, how its products and services have changed with the times and what kind of customs or traditions remain in place.

Expand your network. As you make the rounds with new employees and introduce them to your colleagues, use this as an opportunity to meet others within your firm. Example: Take the newcomers to meet people in a department that you've wanted to learn more about. One reader reports that he was “buddied up with a new intern, and I took him to see the mysterious folks in info systems, where I had a chance to connect faces with names and even get them to finish one of my projects that they had forgotten about.”