

# Experiencing Orientation: Beyond Policies and Paperwork

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of sitting in on an orientation for our client, Rowntree Gardens, a faith-based Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC) that provides a full range of integrated onsite services to meet the changing needs of people as they age. Randy Brown, CEO, engaged Drive in our services because he understands the importance of their rich history and deeply rooted culture.

Together we are working to enhance their already strong culture and create a sustainable program to retain their top employees while also finding new ways to recruit the right candidates.

***Thank you to our friends at Rowntree Gardens for their hospitality during our visit  
and for letting us share our experience with others!***

Here are the top three best practices we experienced during Rowntree Gardens orientation – we all can learn a little something from Rowntree Gardens!

**1. Inspire a Shared Vision.** Melinda Marston, Human Resources Director, set the tone by starting off the orientation by sharing a little bit about Rowntree Gardens rich history and what it is that makes Rowntree different than other communities. She next flashed up a slide with the companies' vision statement, "To be a daily blessing to all we encounter." So far, this might sound typical of an orientation but what was so fabulous is what happened next. Melinda did not just share the vision statement, she brought the vision to life by asking probing questions to the group. Melinda asked the group, "How can you be a daily blessing?" She then took it a step further again when she shared, "You all have such beautiful smiles!" Smiling may be a simple act but it is a daily blessing we can offer each other every day. Melinda's statement was sincere and perfectly timed. Her passion for her work was *felt* throughout the room.

**2. Involve Residents.** During the orientation, Marilyn, a community member, demonstrated ways to be patient, kind and respectful to residents. She provided some fun facts on Rowntree Gardens, gave us a pop quiz and physically challenged us to empathize with the residents. Marilyn put Vaseline on her glasses for one of the orienteers, she asked Denise to put in ear plugs and repeat after her (while Marilyn whispered facing the opposite direction!), and then she had me wear a thick pair of gloves and try to open her bible to find a specific passage. Marilyn was great! She was hilarious which made orientation fun, but she was also sincere and inspirational. What really got us teary is when Marilyn told the group how important they all are to the community members. She did a fantastic job touching on ageism, abilities and was an inspiration to all!

**3. Not Just A Job.** If you want your team members to be passionate about their work, and you want to create a culture that is committed to serving your community members then they need to know this isn't just a job. During the orientation Melinda got choked up and began to get tears in her eyes. She said to us all, "When you go through our gates you are going into their front door." What a powerful statement! Melinda never said, "this isn't just a job." She never needed to say, "this is their home." We could feel it. We instantly knew Melinda truly believes Rowntree Garden's is a place "Where devotion meets compassion," and if you were sitting in the orientation you'd know it too.

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# We've created a list of 10 tips for making your next orientation fabulous. Do you do all 10?

- Provide name cards on the table or name tags that can easily be read. People should feel like they are an important part of your community. If you are a community that expects your team members to wear name tags, then making them a part of the orientation is a no brainer!
- Provide waters and small snacks for the group. This is especially true if your orientation is scheduled at meal time or extends for multiple hours. You can involve a member of your dining team into the orientation by sharing why it's important to them to create wonderful dining experience for others.
- Have a welcome gift waiting for them at their seat. It could be a t-shirt, umbrella, even a pen is a fun surprise. Want to involve your community members? Have your residents write welcome letters and include them in a small gift bag. If your company uses uniforms you could simply put together a gift bag with their uniform, name tag, and a letter. We strongly encourage you to use a gift bag and tissue! It's a simple way to surprise and delight to make the experience feel more special.
- Be mindful that your language matches your message. Most people agree that the "f" word, "facility" that is, describes an institutional environment. It's hard to connect to a culture who cares so deeply for creating a home, if we're still calling it a "facility." Yes, we know CMS calls it a facility but that doesn't mean you should too. Also, if you are a community that has a lot of acronyms, or neighborhood names, explain what they mean or provide a "cheat sheet" in their welcome packet.
- Include actual real-life stories into your orientation! If you're talking about your rich history demonstrate what that means through stories. Your goal should be to connect to people on a personal level. At Rowntree Gardens, Melinda shared the story of Mr. Rowntree and the renaming of their community.
- Use pictures! We don't mean stock photos – real pictures! Pictures from your website, videos, and examples of real events are a great way to provide a visual for a story and connect people to the message.
- Create an experience they will remember by doing a team activity. Play some "Getting to know you" games with attendees so they get to learn about each other and you get to know them on a deeper level. Or have them create a dream board about what your organization's vision means to them.
- If orientation tends to take place on a person's first day of work, keep in mind you want to make their first day a celebration! What are you doing to celebrate them on their first day of work? Even if the orientation is not the first day, how can you apply this same concept that orientation isn't just about sharing the nuts and bolts of policies and benefits, it's about welcoming your new employees.
- Invite supervisors to stop in and participate in part of the session. Better yet, have the CEO drop by and explain in his own words that he/she is grateful that they have joined the team.
- Next time you have an employee orientation ask yourselves, "How can we create a 5-star experience for our new team members that will carry through into their work?"

Want an outsider to take a look at your orientation program? Set up a call today to get started. Also, be on the lookout for more information on **The E Series: Culture Driven Recruitment & Retention** program we've put together.

*This article was written by team member, Allison Duda.*

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