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The Matriculation Process: A Proven Pathway for New Technician Success in the Workplace

Developed by the Technology & Maintenance Council's (TMC)
Professional Technician Development Committee's (PTDC)
Technician Matriculation: School to Workplace Task Force

ABSTRACT

Most fleets use a thoughtful approach in the hiring of technicians. However, many of these same companies take a minimalist approach to matriculation. This can lead to poor performance, unacceptable conduct issues and poor employee retention. The purpose of this document is to help fleet managers ensure that all newly hired graduates of technical trade schools make a successful transition to the next level of their career objectives. This document covers matriculation guidelines from orientation to assimilation, offering principles and advice designed to help both managers and new technicians during the transition process.

INTRODUCTION

Matriculation, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, refers to the process of enrolling as a member of a body — especially of a college or university. However, in today's academic and business environment, it is also a term that's applied to a comprehensive process of assisting an individual in choosing, planning, and achieving their educational and career goals.

In the case of a fleet maintenance operation, matriculation is a company's way of supporting a new employee to ensure success in the work

place. It is a partnership between the manager and the new technician. For the purpose of this document, matriculation refers to the formal process of transitioning a newly hired employee from a qualified technical school environment into the fleet maintenance industry.

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Technology & Maintenance Council (TMC)
950 N. Glebe Road • Arlington, VA 22203 • Ph: (703) 838-1763 • FAX: (703) 838-1701
tmc@trucking.org • <http://tmc.truckline.com>



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THE PROBLEM

Most fleet maintenance companies use a thoughtful approach in the hiring of technicians. However, many of these same companies take a minimalist approach to matriculation. Newly graduated technicians are often welcomed into the mainstream workplace with either an overwhelming orientation session or an underwhelming single meeting with their manager to outline initial expectations, leaving the new technician confused and possibly frustrated. Either extreme can lead to poor performance, unacceptable conduct issues and poor employee retention.

According to the Society of Human Resource Management, 75 percent of U.S. employees are actively seeking new job opportunities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, job openings for automotive/diesel service technicians (due to attrition and expansion) are projected to increase by approximately 10 percent during the next decade. As the number of talented technicians in the industry continues to decrease, the demand for their services will increase. Fleet maintenance organizations throughout the industry may have to rely on newly graduated technicians from technical trade schools to fill this demand.

There are many fleet maintenance organizations that take hiring technicians very seriously. If they cannot find the right person, they sometimes postpone hiring. Sometimes they will consider people newly graduated from a technical trade school as job candidates. The employer will begin to analyze each candidate for potential talents and personality factors that separate the best workers from the average ones to determine the best choice of whom to bring into their organization.

Once a choice has been made and the job offer letter has been extended to the candidate, there

are a multitude of options of how a company may proceed with matriculation. However, not all of these options will lead to success.

THE SOLUTION

With today's industry-wide shortage of qualified and available candidates, it is important that each new technician make a productive entrance into the industry, assimilate easily and contribute to both the short- and long-term success of the company. How this begins is with you, "The Boss."

A committed manager can help new hires by eliminating the guesswork and shortening the learning curve by conducting a formal orientation process. Open communications and routine follow-up also work to ensure that the new technician is able to add value and is successful in his or her career goals. The new technician should also understand their role in working with "the boss" to ensure that they get off to a good start.

Solution Benefits

1. *Successful Transition*—The first benefit of this approach is that all newly hired graduates of technical trade schools make a successful transition to the next level of their career objectives with a clear sense of direction and purpose that is inspiring and energizing.
2. *Employee Retention*—The second benefit of an effective matriculation process is increased employee retention. According to Thomas J. Denham, of Careers in Transition, a career counseling firm that specializes in professional and tailored career development, "a survey of worker dissatisfaction [revealed] 80 percent of working people are dissatisfied with some important area of their job or career." The Saratoga Institute in California, considered by many to be the world leader in third-party exit interviewing and employee-commitment surveying, states that "about 35 percent

of American workers quit in the first six months” and that “...more than six in 10 turnovers begin with some kind of post-hire shock” (Branham). The institute identified the number one root cause of employee disengagement and voluntary turnover as being “...the job or workplace was not as expected” (Branham). Unrealistic expectations about the job or workplace can virtually be eliminated through the proper matriculation of a new technician.

3. *Increased Productivity*—A third benefit is increased productivity and efficiency resulting from an effective matriculation process. As an automotive or diesel service technician matures within an industry, so should his or her productivity. This is a constant that pertains to any technical position no matter the industry. However, according to the Society of Human Resource Management “...two-thirds of employees do not identify with their company’s objectives or feel motivated to drive their employer’s business goals” (HR.com). Ultimately this disengagement adversely affects organizational productivity and efficiency.

Fleet maintenance organizations cannot simply afford to shrug off technician disengagement and the potentially high costs of turnover as they also continue to seek ways to improve the overall efficiencies and effectiveness of their maintenance organizations. To increase vehicle reliability and reduce vehicle downtime, they must look to their employees with a “can-do” attitude and fresh ideas. Conflicting forces such as Sarbanes-Oxley, cost-cutting, organizational change, environmental regulatory matters and the demand placed on technicians to remain current with advances in industry technology all place high expectations on the “person” and are decreasing job satisfaction levels. New technicians are

less likely to respond negatively to the demands of the job if they understand from the beginning of their careers how they should be expected to react to conflicting forces that occur on the job.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS

Managers are a new technician’s primary resource and first role model. Managers set the tone for an employee’s new position as a technician and reinforce the value of his or her contribution. It’s up to managers to create an environment where a new technician feels comfortable asking questions.

In order to keep new hires up to speed and help them move from orientation to assimilation, TMC has developed the following suggestions to help ensure a new hire feels like a welcome addition to the team.

A. New Employee Welcome Letter

There are many benefits to having a complete and formal orientation process. It’s an opportunity for management to communicate valuable information so the new technician begins to learn about a company earlier and can get off to a good start. A formal orientation process should begin with the “New Employee Welcome Letter.” This letter is management’s chance to make a statement that reflects the company’s culture and sets the tone for the employment relationship from the outset. Here are some guidelines for developing such a letter:

- Attention should be placed on how the letter is worded so that it does not include any conditions or terms of employment.
- The letter should begin with a short welcome comment from management that conveys a sincere message about the value placed on the employment relationship.
- The main body of the letter should outline to the new technician the orientation process, briefly explaining to them what will happen during their first week on the

job as well as a pledge of management's support to the new technician as he or she undergoes the formal orientation process.

- The letter should also highlight specific resources that will be made available to the new technician such as a *Company Orientation Video*, a *New Hire Companion Book*, and a *Your Employee Benefits Book*.
- The letter should end the welcome letter by providing the manager's contact information, prompting them to "feel free to contact the manager with any questions," and reiterating management's support.

B. Prior to the First Day

Before a new technician enters the workplace, it is imperative that the employer provide information about the company's dress code and what to bring, (e.g., any required personal safety equipment, steel toe shoes, tools, etc.)

The most effective means of accomplishing this is by mailing the new technician a letter with an *Action Steps Checklist* (see **Example A**) clarifying the aforementioned information. The letter should encourage the new technician to ask questions, thus establishing an open door approach.

EXAMPLE A: ACTION STEPS CHECKLIST

Action Steps Checklist	
Name:	
Prior to First Day . . .	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read the <i>New Employee Welcome Letter</i> .
<input type="checkbox"/>	If necessary, contact the manager or human resources representative to ask any questions you have about instructions provided in the <i>New Employee Welcome Letter</i> .
<input type="checkbox"/>	Obtain any required personal safety equipment, (e.g., steel toe shoes, tools, etc.) s in the <i>New Employee Welcome Letter</i> .
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do research to learn all you can about your new employer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan what you're going to wear during the first week of work.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan the route you'll take to work as well as some alternate routes.
First Day . . .	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Participate in the New Hire Orientation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Watch the <i>Company Orientation video</i> .
<input type="checkbox"/>	Take a tour of your new location.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Meet staff and new members of your new team.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spend time with your peer coach, buddy or mentor, if applicable.
After First Day . . .	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review the <i>New Hire Companion Book</i> , corporate and departmental rules and regulations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review your departmental/divisional mission statement, strategy and values.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete required departmental training (if required).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shadow an employee who has a similar job.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Surf the <i>Transit Assets Intranet</i> to learn more about the wide array of benefits <i>Transit Assets</i> offers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Make sure your manager is aware of your individual needs or concerns.

EXAMPLE B

What You Need to Know...Right Away
MANAGER
Name:
Phone number:
Address:
MY INFORMATION
My work phone number:
My e-mail address:
Expected work hours:
Computer password: Remember... your password is secret. You should record it where it is easily accessible but also confidential.
KEY CONTACTS
Phone number for Security:
Human Resources Representative:
Phone number:
Other Key Contacts:
Transit Asset WEB SITES
Intranet: http://transitassets.com
Internet: http://www.transitassets.com

C. The First Day

It is crucial that a new technician understands and is comfortable with his or her new job responsibilities as well as the company's expectations. A solid orientation program can help communicate expectations and develop positive motivation, productivity and future retention of the new technician.

"Orientation" is defined by the CEO of EffortlessHR.com, Lola Kakes, as "a function that allows a new employee to learn about the organization, what the expectations are in the position, who is responsible and accountable, and in general what they need to know to become an integral part of the company." In an article about employee hiring, Kakes stated that "It's sad, however, that many companies not only don't provide an orientation, but expect the new employee to be able to figure it out themselves. The problem is, if

you don't provide a formal orientation process, the employee will still receive an orientation and it may not be the one that will benefit the employee, their co-workers or the company." (Kakes) An effective orientation process is especially important within a fleet maintenance organization, so make the first day with your new technician count.

The first day on the job will be a busy day for both the manager and the new technician. The day should begin with the viewing of an orientation video which should convey to the new hire what the company is about, the culture and general business model. Afterwards the manager should take time to explain to the new employee the importance and challenges of the technician position and how it works to support the goals of the company. The rewards of the position should also be communicated.

Next, the technician should be provided a *New Hire Companion Book* and *Your Employee Benefits Book*. The *New Hire Companion Book* usually contains information on policies, benefits, and other aspects of employment.

The technician should be given a tour of the maintenance facility and immediate premises, no matter the size, especially those areas he or she will be most involved with during his or her work day. It's important to point out the locations of tools, supplies, materials, manuals and other resources that the technician will use to do the job.

During the tour, introduce the technician to staff and provide the technician with a prepared list of "What You Need to Know...Right Away" (see **Example B**) which includes key contact information and job functions.

At the conclusion of the tour, provide the technician with an overview of the fleet and the vendors (if applicable) that support the maintenance operation. Time should be also be spent "going over the basic operations of

the company and department, such as work hours, timeliness/punctuality, explaining the time tracking process, payday schedules (including direct deposit information or banks used in the area), overtime policy, lunch time or break time policies, parking, telephone and Internet policies, security regulations and how the telephone system works. In addition, a review of the new employee job description, the filling of necessary forms, and a schedule for any additional needed information – such as training” (Kakes).

A checklist of all the previously mentioned information should be developed and utilized throughout the matriculation process to ensure that any job specific information he or she will need is covered. At the end of the first day, it is important to provide reassurance of your support in his or her development as “an on-going and evolving process.”

D. After Day One

The manager should routinely engage a new technician in conversation to find out how he or she is doing. Ask specific questions about how he or she is adjusting to the job. After the first day, the manager should also begin working with the new technician to chart a course of training and development that will help expand skills or to see future opportunities within the maintenance organization.

When charting this course, recognize that there are some areas of development that have little to do with courses taught in technical schools but are important to the success of any fleet maintenance organization.

An employee’s understanding of the basic principles of finance, budgeting, laws and ethics in the workplace, as well as approaches to critical thinking are all prime examples. If a new technician can’t manage his or her own personal finances, unwittingly avoid unlawful or unethical situations, or generate creative and innovative Ideas to solve problems, it would be unreasonable to assume that they will be able to contribute to a company’s overall success.

A manager must provide the basic tools to help the technician understand the dynamics of personal responsibility and accountability in regards to the company’s profit margin and how each employee fits into that plan.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR TECHNICIANS

The following section is designed for new technicians as a companion piece to the **Implementation Guidelines for Managers** section. It can be used as the basis for a company’s orientation materials as part of the overall matriculation process.

Welcome to Our Workplace

Life in the workplace is very different from a technical trade school. The rules may vary, but the same guidelines and principles you followed in school, should serve you well in the workplace. The following guidelines, principles and advice should help you in your transition into the workplace and beyond.

The length of time it takes to adjust to the workplace varies from person to person and shop to shop within the fleet maintenance industry. Being new to the industry, you may not fit in immediately at some jobs. All you can do is try your best, and do your job the best way you know how.

A. Prior to Your First Day

You've made it through a technical trade school and landed yourself a job. Now the next hurdle facing you is the first day of your new job. Securing a position was just the start; now you have to build upon all your hard work, and convince your company that it has selected the right candidate. This process begins prior to your first day at work.

Recently you should have received a *New Employee Welcome Letter* which outlines your company's orientation process; briefly explaining to you what will happen during your first week on the job. It also pledges management's support to you as you matriculate into the workplace. **Carefully read this letter.** If instructions are given in the letter, follow them carefully.

Before showing up for your first day at work obtain any items that may be listed in this letter such as required personal safety equipment, steel toe shoes, tools, etc. If you have questions regarding the content of this letter contact the manager or human resources representative for clarification.

To make the most of your entrance into the workplace, begin to use the *Action Steps*

Checklist that was attached to the *New Employee Welcome Letter*.

Take time to do some research. Learn all you can about your new employer. Learn about its products or services, philosophies, and their corporate culture.

Plan what you're going to wear during the first week of work. Employee appearance is a major element of the company image so you'll want to wear appropriate attire (conservative and functional outfits) until you're issued company uniforms (if applicable). Note that if you are issued a company uniform, it is your responsibility to wear it properly and in its entirety. The uniform should be clean, pressed, and well maintained upon your arrival to work each day.

Punctuality and regular attendance are an important part of career advancement and retention. If you are repeatedly late for work, you jeopardize your future at the company. You definitely don't want to be late for your first day at work so plan the route you'll take to work as well as some alternate routes. Should there be heavy traffic, construction or if a train line runs through the route you'll be glad you did this.

B. Your First Day

First impressions are important, be conscious of the impression you are making as you enter your new workplace. Be courteous and respectful to others, regardless of their role. Concentrate on seeking and listening to advice rather than attempting to impress people.

The first day of a new job can be demanding for any new technician; however, as you go through the orientation process pay close attention to details and procedures that are presented to you so that you can master them as soon as possible. Keep a positive attitude and an open mind. Some procedures may

(Over)

seem confusing or unnecessary, but they have been implemented for a reason. Do not comment on processes until you have mastered the skills associated with them. As you work through your tasks, consider the factors that influenced the development of policies and procedures. If you have questions about a policy or a procedure, remember that it's okay to ask questions. It is now your responsibility to do something right the first time around than have to do it over.

C. After Your First Day

Take the time necessary to review the *New Hire Companion Book* that was provided to you on your first day of work. This book usually contains information on policies, benefits, and other aspects of your employment. It's your responsibility to know them.

“In order for a business to be successful, it has to have a clear and broad mission that resonates with the public and tells them why it would be beneficial to do business with your company...a mission statement is a company's articulation to its customers, employees and the entire world of the purpose of its existence” (Khatib).

Review your divisional and departmental mission statement, strategy and values. By doing so, you will help develop a sense of direction and purpose that hopefully will energize and inspire you.

Standards and requirements for job performance will vary depending on the company you work for; however, working with your manager you are expected to attain the highest level of job performance regardless of your work assignment within any fleet maintenance organization. After your first day you may be required to complete small projects to prove your ability before being assigned more significant assignments. Be patient. As you become competent at completing those jobs or assignments begin asking yourself daily how you can become

more efficient at doing them; finding ways to continually improve your performance.

Get to know the names and responsibilities of your workmates [peers], as you may need to ask them for assistance in their area of expertise. Shadow a technician who has similar job duties. Through observation you may be able to learn something new.

Keeping your boss informed is one way of keeping the boss happy. This sounds easy enough but a lot of new hires at work forget this principle. Make sure your manager is aware of your individual needs or concerns. Be honest with your boss about good and bad news. Do not hide bad news from your boss and do not make things seem trivial when in fact they require your boss's attention immediately. Regardless of how bad the news is, your boss needs to know, and it's better to hear this from you than to find out from someone else.

Have a positive attitude at work and take personal responsibility for your own growth. Your boss can guide and facilitate, but ultimately you need to do your part. This advice is the most significant thing that will aid you in successful matriculation into the workplace and well beyond.

The *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines “attitude” as “a way of looking at life; a way of thinking, feeling or behaving.” Therefore an attitude is not just the way we think, but the way we think, feel and do. This principle determines how far you can go in your career.

Lastly, realize that everything you do has your personal signature on it. So you want to give everything assigned to you your best shot. In doing so, over time you will gain experience and improve your skills. You will also develop deep belief and pride in yourself that will fuel your journey towards career success. □

SUMMARY

Ultimately, there are no magic formulas for guaranteed success when a newly graduated technician enters the workplace. The guidelines, principles and advice presented in this document represent a partnership between

the manager and the new technician and were developed to support the matriculation process; aiming to guide the new technician towards a successful career, work and life. In return the company benefits from increased productivity, efficiency and employee retention. □

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