

Keeping employees through the first three months!

Fact Sheet #

2

What is this Fact Sheet about?

- This Fact Sheet has been specifically written to help you keep some of the hundreds of new employees who flee the Australian Meat Industry within hours, days or weeks of starting work!
- It's *not* about *Induction* (though you may consider reviewing some of your Induction processes after reading it). It's also *not* a rehash of the many retention techniques used by industry to develop long-term stable workforces.
- This Fact Sheet has been written to stimulate thought about why so many people leave the Meat Industry so soon after entering it.
- It's for employers who are making progress against the challenge of recruiting in a time of low unemployment—but remain frustrated because they still don't have enough people on the floor!

Why would you focus on the first three months?

- Depending on your recruitment and induction processes, it can cost between \$2500 and \$5000 to get a new employee to start work.
- However, the expense of recruitment, induction, vaccinations and PPE fit-out are not the only costs to your business if a large number of your new recruits leave in the early days of the job.
- Even if the impact on daily production is not so great—because you weren't expecting too much too soon—a revolving door scenario has a more significant effect on the rest of your workforce.
- Morale takes a dive if employees feel they are being forced to assume an 'unfair' workload—or if they've lost bonuses while spending time helping a newcomer. (You may not be alone in feeling you haven't had a return on your investment!)
- And what does the community get to hear about your workplace? What reason do people give for the fact they're unemployed again so soon? How does that impact on potential new recruits?
- In many ways, a short term employee who quits can do you more harm than someone leaving who's been around awhile.

"I'd say we lose about half of the people we recruit—you're always trying to guess who'll stay."

HR Manager
SA Meat Processor

"Sometimes they don't even see out the first day—they don't really give it a chance to work for them!"

Plant Manager
SA Meat Processor

"They start okay & one day they just don't turn up—after the second or third day you realise they're not going to."

Supervisor
SA Meat Processor

Research in 2005 found turnover rates from 35% to 90% (average 56.5%) and an annual turnover bill for an average plant ranging from \$650,000 to \$1.3 million!

What makes new workers quit?

→ Ask the starters who leave...

Many sites fail to follow through when an employee fails to return to work. Your call needn't be about persuading them to return—but if you keep hearing the same story, you'll know what to change on site.

→ Ask the new employees who stay...

What has kept them with you? Are there some aspects of the job that gave them 'second thoughts'? What has stopped them from giving in?

→ Ask your new recruits...

What do they like about the job so far? What are they finding the most difficult? Is the job what they expected? What expectations are not being met as yet?

→ Ask your recruitment people...

When people knock back work with you, what reason do they give?

→ Ask yourself...

Are you providing the right support to newcomers? Do you just expect them to 'get on with the job'? Do you expect too much? Do you have the right people 'in charge'?

- Questions about why people quit are best answered by you!
- For some work sites, it will be because they shouldn't have been hired in the first place—and, if so, you should review your recruitment processes (or recruitment agency). It will do you more harm to fill hastily and inappropriately than sustain the vacancy for awhile longer.
- Sometimes employees feel incompetent because they 'can't keep up' and no-one actually tells them, 'that's okay'.
- In fact, some sites have a deliberate 'baptism by fire' approach, where newcomers get the worst jobs in the worst rooms to see whether they 'have what it takes'.
- Bullying still happens in the industry—which, despite some good effort, retains its 'blokey' culture. Some young men feel unable to cope with what others consider 'joking'.
- Often new employees (particularly young people) blame being 'ridden' by overbearing Supervisors for the fact they left. Yes, it may be that they just didn't have a strong work ethic to begin with—but it's also likely at least some of those claims are true. Loud, domineering Supervisors will *always* lose you good workers!

What can you do to stop the revolving door?

- 'Good money' helps—it may be what attracted them—but it's often not enough to keep them.
- Mostly, the 'what-to-do' will depend on the responses you get to the questions outlined above. The important point is to actually ask the questions!
- When investigating the underlying causes, don't assume everyone is using the same good sense you do when dealing with new recruits.
- Rethink how quickly you feel they should progress to become competent in their work. (The next page will help you do this.)
- We know they'll leave if their own expectations aren't being met—but they'll leave just as quickly if they sense they're not meeting yours!

Be sure you (and others) are realistic in your expectations

What do they *really* need to know in the first hour? first day? first week?

Identify & address learning issues early—empower people to learn & produce

Recognise effort for what it is—even if it's below what you really need

Acknowledge improvement—as often and as publicly as you can

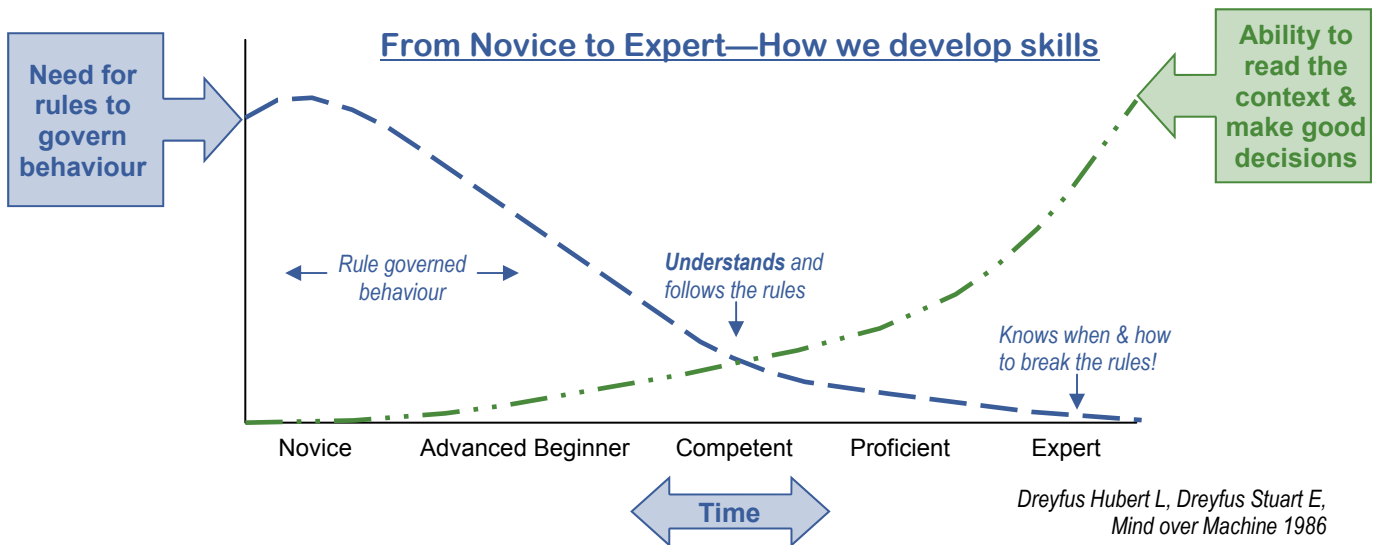
Be constructive in feedback—if you must give a negative include as many positives as you can

Ask a Supervisor to 'adopt a person' who's struggling—this is a 'caring' function

Accommodate work-life balance with shift rosters if you can

Are you expecting too much from your new employee?

- The model below has been used by employers across many industries for more than 20 years! It clearly shows there are major differences in employees' need for rules along the pathway from 'novice' to 'expert'—which can take several years in a particular job.



- **Novices and Advanced Beginners** need rules to direct behaviour. They need to know exactly what to do, step by step—and without clear rules, they're dangerous!
- With practice and support, they reach the **Competent** stage, where they know the rules and know how to operate effectively within them. They can plan and organise activities and feel able to cope with unpredictable situations by working out how to apply 'the rule'.
- **Proficient** performers have moved beyond this and can deal with most exceptions to the rule.
- **Experts** know when to break the rules! The expert just knows what to do in any situation, can work out what is most important and has the expertise to perform at a high level.

Applying the 'Novice to Expert' model in your workplace

- Which rules are critical for novices on the first day/week/month? Which rules can be introduced as familiarity grows?
- Where is the best place to start a novice? Is there opportunity to stage the process, moving through several rooms over time, if the target position is more demanding or confronting?
- Who is the best person to help a novice? What training and support would help them perform well in this key role?
- Use the model to re-think who you may be using to 'buddy' new employees. Neither the *advanced beginner* nor the *expert* are likely to be right for the job.
- It's important to realise it can take from two to three years for an employee to move from *novice* to *competent*.
- Not everyone will move through every stage. Many people don't progress beyond *competent* unless they get additional support and opportunities to develop their skills.
- The stages are relative to the job. An *expert slaughterman* who is promoted becomes a *novice Supervisor*. He is operating in a new context with new rules to learn—and needs support.
- The best person to teach a novice is *not* an expert. Put a novice with someone who has reached the competent stage. They are good at following the rules—but may need some coaching on how to explain the rules clearly to someone else.

Where you can find further information

→ This Fact Sheet supports information in a booklet produced by the FTH Skills Council and MLA called *'How to become an employer of choice in an industry of choice'* which is a practical guide to workforce development in the Australian Meat Industry.

→ The booklet includes sections on *Recruitment* and *Retention* which have notes that are relevant to this topic. Specific sub-sections which may be useful include:

- Why people leave their jobs
- Why people stay in their jobs
- A positive workplace culture.

→ The booklet also has a section on *Building Capability* which steps through the process of:

- Orientation
- Induction
- Settling
- Training

as a sequence most likely to assist in increasing retention levels. *Orientation* and *Settling* are not the 'nice-to-haves'—they are important processes sometimes overlooked by companies under pressure to fill vacancies.

→ Other Fact Sheets in this series provide specific information that may support or expand the content of this publication. You can access the Fact Sheets on the FTH Skills Council website.

Go to: www.fthskillscouncil.com.au

→ MINTRAC, the MLA and the AMPC have worked together to produce an Induction Manual (available in hard copy and CD Rom) which includes templates for a 5-Day and 3-Month induction program as well as a 1-Day program with follow-up activities.

Some of these activities may prove useful even if your Induction process is outsourced.

Go to: www.mintrac.com.au

→ The Australian Government's *Workplace* website has a range of useful publications specifically designed to help employers with recruitment and retention planning.

For example, a Fact Sheet called *20 Cheap and Easy Family Friendly Ideas* has simple suggestions which may be useful for your site. You can also check out a database which outlines what other companies have done successfully.

Go to: www.dewr.gov.au

or directly to www.workplace.gov.au

Want to know more?

For further information about workforce development resources for the SA Meat Industry, please contact:

Food, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Skills Advisory Council Inc

Telephone: 08 8362 6012
Facsimile: 08 8362 1455
Email: info@fthskillscouncil.com.au
Web: www.fthskillscouncil.com.au

Meat & Livestock Australia

Telephone: 02 9463 9106
Facsimile: 02 9463 9182
Email: kabba@mla.com.au
Web: www.mla.com.au

Although all reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of the information contained in this document, it has been provided in good faith for general information only. No warranty, express or implied, is given as to the completeness, correctness, accuracy, reliability or currency of that information. The document is not intended to be exhaustive or to replace the need for people to make their own enquiries or to seek independent advice. The information contained in the document is provided on the basis that the Food, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Skills Advisory Council, Meat and Livestock Australia, the Crown in the right of the State of South Australia and Adit Communications accept no liability for any loss or damage caused or arising from the use of the information.