



Onboarding and Career Mobility: Two New Programs for Court Employees and Long-Term Benefits for Courts

Authors:

Dr. Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, CEO of PRAXIS Consulting, Inc. (Denver, CO)

Linda K. Ridge, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, King County Superior Court (Seattle, WA)

Court leaders frequently express concern about the ability to: (1) recruit and retain qualified employees and (2) meet the development desires of a workforce that is increasingly hungry for “growth and learning opportunities.” Are you one of them? If yes, you are not alone. Leaders of both private and public organizations frequently express concerns about being able to recruit and maintain a high-performing, engaged workforce.

King County Superior Court (Seattle, WA) recently developed two new employee programs thanks to a technical assistance grant from the State Justice Institute, the hard work of a dedicated internal project team led by Deputy Court Administrator Linda Ridge, and the assistance of Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey (who served as a consultant to the Court on this project). The two programs are:

- (1) A multi-phased Onboarding Program for new employees and
- (2) A Leadership Development and Career Mobility program for “veteran” employees of 3 years or more.

Both programs are aimed at meeting the expressed desires and needs of today’s workforce and yield significant, noticeable benefits to Courts. Double bonus!

Onboarding Program: “All Aboard – Your Passport to Success”

Onboarding matters! A new employee’s decision to stay or leave largely depends on first impressions, yet many organizations put little thought or planning into that critical, first touch with a new employee through the individual’s first year on the job. Effective onboarding programs yield many benefits, such as helping new employees feel welcomed, supported, productive, and committed to the organization. There is growing evidence that effective onboarding programs also are correlated with lower hiring costs, lower turnover, and increased retention. Thus, onboarding matters!

Onboarding is simply bringing a new employee “on board.” It includes new employee orientation; however, true onboarding is much more! It involves an extended experience (i.e., over 12 months) and multi-phased process of:

1. Welcoming and socializing new employees to the organization;
2. Connecting them with co-workers;
3. Teaching them their day-to-day responsibilities; and
4. Engaging them in fulfilling the organization’s purpose and achieving organizational goals.



Building on best practices, King County Superior Court's Onboarding Program includes four phases beginning from the date of hire through the first year of employment. The 12-month experience focuses on welcoming, connecting, and integrating new employees into his/her work team, the department, and the Court's culture, ultimately helping new employees feel more connected, productive, and committed to their team as well as the Court organization. [See text box for description of the four phases.]

Numerous resources were created by the project team to support this program. They include:

1. Checklists for human resources, managers/supervisors, and new employees;
2. A New Employee Resource Guide providing essential information to navigate and get acquainted with the Court;
3. "Buddy" expectations to assist the person assigned to assist when first on the job; and
4. A program overview and description of the phases.

Phases of Onboarding

- **Pre-Boarding: Prepare for Employment** (prior to the first day). In this phase, it is important to make a good first impression. Show you are organized and prepared.
- **Phase 1: Welcome, Orient, and Connect** (first day through first week on the job). This phase is about making new employees feel special and welcomed. Roll out the welcome mat and acquaint the new employee to their specific work unit, job, and team.
- **Phase 2: Train and Connect²** (connect to people and the court's mission/purpose) (end of the first month through end of 3 months on the job). The focus in this phase is teaching new employees their jobs and connecting them to people and organizational purpose. Train, connect, and check-in with new employees in this phase.
- **Phase 3: Train and Engage** (end of 6 months through end of 12 months on the job). In this phase, ensure new employees are productive, contributing, and engaged. Expand their knowledge of the court, listen to their experiences and interests, and engage them in making changes/improvements.

Samples are available by contacting: Linda Ridge, Deputy CAO, King County Superior Court at linda.ridge@kingcounty.gov.

Leadership Development and Career Mobility Program

Numerous trends (e.g., rapid pace of change, shrinking labor force, shifting employee expectations) are disrupting talent strategies in public and private organizations. Consequently, talent strategies are now focusing on the "employee experience" to better meet employees' evolving expectations. One way organizations are responding is to facilitate greater mobility across the organization, providing employees with a multitude of learning, growth, and development opportunities.

King County Superior Court recently implemented a Leadership Development and Career Mobility program based on these factors. As one of the Court's strategic initiatives, the Program is aimed at developing and engaging the workforce by offering leadership development and career mobility (lateral and upward) opportunities for a small number of employees over a 9-month period. This employee-



directed program, with oversight from a Program Advisor and Human Resources and in collaboration with managers/supervisors, provides selected employees with a structured path to learn, grow, and develop in areas of interest. Benefits to the Court include developing and investing in the next generation of managers, sharing knowledge and building skills of employees, enhancing engagement, building commitment to public service and a career at the Court, and developing relationships and networks across boundaries, to name a few.

Based on the Center for Creative Leadership’s blended learning framework, the Program has 3 learning components:

- (1) On-the-job learning through “critical development experiences;”
- (2) Developmental relationships; and
- (3) Education/training (beyond the standard training provided to all employees).

A cohort of participants was recently selected for the pilot program. Over the 9 months, participants will participate in several cohort training sessions, work on an Individual Development Plan with targeted goals and competencies in at least 2 of the 3 program components (noted above), and report on their experiences at a Capstone/Graduation event. Participants will spend approximately 70 hours over 9 months (or an average of 8 hours per month) in this Program.

Similar to the Onboarding Program, the project team developed resources and training materials to support this Program. Please contact Linda Ridge at linda.ridge@kingcounty.gov or Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey at bwagen@praxisconsulting.org for more information.

Conclusion:

The Court’s leadership and managers are very excited about and support these new Programs. While the programs are in their infancy, we are optimistic about the positive impacts they will have on new and tenured employees. Early feedback from managers who are onboarding employees is that the resources and tools are very helpful. Also, new employees report positive experiences as a result of the “All Aboard, Onboarding Program. Participants of the newly launched Leadership Development/Career Mobility Program are very excited about this opportunity. They are taking full advantage of the offerings and directors and managers are enthusiastic and eager to participate. Time will tell as months pass as to the effectiveness of their 9-month experience. In the coming months, the Court will evaluate the programs and make further refinements ensuring they are meeting the expectations of employees and the needs of the Court. Lessons learned will be used to further strengthen these Programs.

