

Orientation Strategies for New Staff: By and For School Leaders

The objective of this article is two-fold: to present a unique orientation program which was introduced at the American School of Guatemala, and, in parallel, report to readers about strategies employed by heads of 25 schools in the TriAssociation area for orienting new staff at their schools.

The information that follows resulted from a "show and tell" among colleagues from approximately 25 schools in the Central American, Colombian and Caribbean region. Our collective wisdom and practice has been summarized herein. The following can be used as a catalyst to introduce new ideas or as a comprehensive checklist to ensure that nothing is overlooked from year to year. I hope it will be a helpful resource when recruiting, contracting and retaining teachers confronts for all of us.

The strategies are divided into four stages: Stage 1: Recruiting and Contracting; Stage 2: After contracting/Before Arrival; Stage 3: After Arrival; and Stage 4: Follow-up.

Stage 1 Recruiting & Contracting

- Advertise vacancies widely & on website
- Conduct multiple interviews
- Have discussions about how to implement our model
- Go to recruiting fairs accompanied by an overseas teacher
- Allow candidates to e-mail with current/past staff; also with newly hired/veteran staff
- Send recruitment literature and info about school, community culture, city, salary & package, job description, housing photos, cost of utilities, teacher profile.
- Send intro emails prior to fairs
- Attend various recruiting fairs to interview maximum candidates possible/position
- Offer personal interviews/ group interviews
- Meet and greet for dinner/breakfast sessions
- Contact Secretary of Tourism or

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Chamber of Commerce for info

- Develop first rate website & direct candidates to it
- Get volunteers within staff to serve as "landing pad" (buddies) for newbies
- Call their mothers to talk about safety and living in new country (even if they are 40)
- Call references personally by phone
- Prepare a video and brochures to sell the idea of coming to this "dangerous" country
- Send a CD with curriculum or access to Atlas Maps
- Send Video or CD of School(or on website) with books, maps, music CD with local music / singer, tourism booklets, CD about country, city
- Interview candidates on Skype, independently in major cities or at fairs
- Send welcome and perusal package
- Advertise among teachers in -country and want to change school/city
- Promote to Peace Corps, other NGOs
- Advertise positions on several websites
- Send e-mails and make phone contact
- Conduct presentations about school and country
- Send school manual/information booklet to teachers once they sign contract
- Send Ministry of Tourism information
- Bring information about country and school to job fairs
- Send list with telephone contacts/keep in pocket
- Prepare video/ DVD with interviews of teachers, kids, admin,
- Sign pre contact letter of intention
- Send time-line for recruiting
- Send security info to each candidate.
- Send out all conditions and expectations in writing -no surprises
- Be sincere about what the school is like and look for good matches

Stage 2 After Contracting / Before Arrival

- Send welcome letter from Principals
- Assign each newbie a buddy

- Communication by staff Liaison officer, HR office, PTA, Principals, department heads and new staff
- Send reading lists & staff manual
- Forward curriculum, grade level information, summer news events, textbooks
- Schedule reception and pick up at the airport: remember the personal touch is important!
- Develop pre-service training on Cultural awareness, quality of life, curriculum
- Ensure contact with Human Resources on contract issues and process documentation and work permit
- Ensure welcome by foreign hire manager and Head of Human Resources
- Facilitate communication with current teachers of the same subject area / grade /section
- Ensure prompt answering of numerous questions
- Send photos of apartments/post on website
- Put new hires in contact with real estate agents
- Advertise things for sale from teachers exiting
- Ensure e-mail contact with other new teachers
- Send information about programs and materials
- Keep webpage updated, especially with photos
- Offer opportunities to ask questions about school, city, curriculum
- Link up with team leader, grade level, contacts person
- Send articles on tourism or other general information that is positive about the country/city/region
- Help find apartment; ascertain profile and needs (e.g. pets)
- Stay in touch thru email/Skype/telephone
- Contact consulates / embassies
- Give explicit instructions about flight arrangements/travel agent contact
- Arrange appointments for visa procurement
- Send addresses and phone # for "buddies" on staff and other new staff
- Inform & explain US mailing address
- Send their contact info to all staff so veterans can welcome them.
- Send new teacher handbook that includes practical info about the move.
- Send country postcards with welcoming messages

- Send Director's/Principals' summer plans and contact info.
- Establish contact between new hires and grade level leader, Principal and PR person.
- Advise new hires about which documents required to bring.
- Link up with "buddy" teacher to get advise about what to bring, lifestyle
- Send e-mail with academic info, books, curriculum maps, schedule.
- Maintain constant communication (don't lose anybody on the way)
 - Send emergency info (booklet)
- Maintain constant e-mail communication with director, principals, colleagues and the Assistant who is doing their legal /visa papers.
- Assign a host family (colleagues) , mentors, buddies
- Send info about work permits, etc. from Business Manager or HR.
- Send arrival details
- Send phone and email contact info to relatives of new hires
- Send newsletters about special events.
- Post information on school website compiled from FAQs from teachers
- E-mail more specific information (cultural and geographic concerns)
- Establish contact with "settling in" committee
- Establish housing / roommate matching
- Send a packing list
- Make hand-holding telephone calls
- Schedule meeting point in major city for group flight

Stage 3 After Arrival

- Establish schedule for airport welcome by Director and /or Principals or HR personnel
- Conduct orientation of hires (both local and overseas hire)
- Conduct ice breaker & bonding activities
- Conduct presentations about medical issues (Peace Corps doctor) and security (RSO), history, school culture, house hunting
- Begin apartment search. Place a welcome basket in each hotel room/

- apartment.
- Conduct trips around the country and city.
- Invite for dinner at Director's home
- Offer survival language classes
- Schedule new teachers orientation week
- Assign buddies: colleagues and/or parents
- Set up time to meet with travel agent, doctor, bank officer, etc.
- Provide a cell phone
- Provide use of vehicle or transportation
- Introduce them to school "family" who provide on-going support
- Give housing info and procedures
- Describe common places to shop, eat, etc.
- Provide school tour
- Introduce them to policies and procedures
- Invite for welcome dinners or wine and cheese parties informal or formal
- Familiarize them with procedures of the School
- Offer relocation money or start-up local currency
- Have furnished apartment ready with survival basic groceries
- Tour city, banks, supermarket & health clinics
- Establish Internet connection ASAP

- or allow for telephone calls to their families.
- Help with child's registration at school
- House them in guest house hotels or pre-arranged apartments on arrival
- Meet with Principals, Business Manager to discuss Faculty handbook, Parent/Student handbook, schedules, expectations, etc.
- Arrange for bank account, insurances, driver's license, mail delivery.
- Show them their classroom and give them keys and materials/supplies
- Help them view apartments and bring them to school to see their classroom
- Accompany them for furniture shopping
- Talk about safety, security, even if dangerous/distasteful
- Get them on line (internet, e-mail account)
- Submit all documents for visas, insurances & help with bureaucracy-never alone
- Continue buddy contact
- Offer a buddy to help with housing, city tour
- Set up medical care
- Give card with important telephone numbers to keep in wallet
- Invite new staff to a social to meet admin and veteran staff

Continued on page 25 ►



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Orientation Strategies,

cont'd from page 23►

- Offer different workshops –during 1st days about school procedures– reports, school culture, language support, personalized education
- Offer presentations on Social Security and medical service
- Give emergency info booklet and manual for new teachers
- Provide insurance info, medical centers, continue work/visa permit process, banking
- Prepare goal setting
- Offer a week's induction on bank, housing, tour to important places, medical...
- Induction with veteran staff
- Assign a host parent family to new hires to help with apartment hunting.
- Invite technicians to school to solve things like: cable TV, in the apartments, Internet connections. Insurance.
- Ensure orientation at School (for a week) first two days with newcomers, three days with all faculty members
- Invite them to meet parents, board
- Review stages of transition
- Pair with a mentor / buddy
- Offer presentations on cultural awareness/ culture shock
- Offer presentation regarding our school and different curricular programs.
- Offer furnishings for apartments
- Offer classes in local language
- Conduct Orientation on teaching standards, how to get things done, special needs program, technology, Philosophy, Policies, school sections, leisure/ recreation and shopping
- Conduct feedback survey
- Invite for party for old and new staff. (introduction to salsa!)
- Conduct one on one interview
- Offer orientation by host parent family
- Engage in "Oh No; Oh Wow" activity
- Meet with Buddies
- Meet of Director in 2nd trimester
- Schedule activities in calendar on a monthly basis
- Pay travel allowance for employee and dependants to go home to visit every 6 months.
- Schedule ongoing professional development
- Plan excursions
- Conduct survey about stages 1-3
- Ask how they are doing & what are needs.
- Expand the list of contact numbers
- Invite newcomers to dinner after 2 months to share experiences and progress
- Continue program
- Maintain close contact between newcomers and Principals / counselors, buddy
- Follow up with foreign hires who are already there for at least 1 year
- Schedule language courses
- Continue buddy – mentor program
- Continue group – social / travel activities
- Conduct surveys and get suggestions for next year
- Set up general and individual meetings to identify issues, etc.
- Maintain open door policy with human resource person and administrators
- Schedule socials with Principal, head of school, staff
- Schedule classroom visit walk through
- Schedule interviews before October contract
- Schedule October dinner with Director
- Repeat "Oh No; Oh Wow" activity.■

Dr. Zilber is the former head of School of the Colegio Americano de Guatemala and the American School of Barcelona. She is now writing a book about the Third Culture Kids (TCK), children of international school educators. Email: ettie.zilber@gmail.com

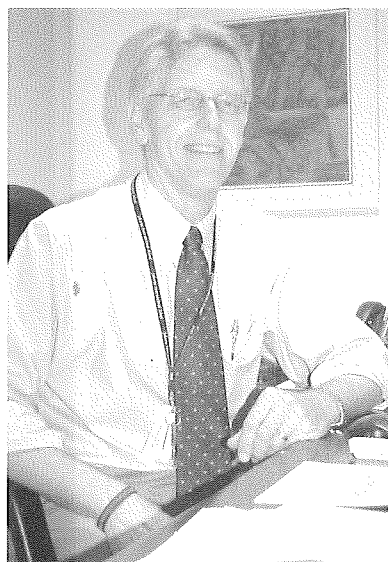
Stage 4 Follow up

- Meet with Head / Principal between 6 weeks to 1st year . (how is it going?)
- Meet regularly with Principals (monthly)

David Cramer New REO for Eastern Europe

Dr. Keith Miller, Director of the Department of State's Office of Overseas Schools, announced the appointment of Dr. David Cramer as Regional Education Officer for Eastern Europe effective in August, 2009.

Cramer holds degrees from Virginia Technical Institute and from the Pennsylvania State University where he earned his doctorate. He is former head of schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh; Abu Dhabi; and La Paz, Bolivia. He has also worked in schools in Thailand, El Salvador and Saudi Arabia. His international career began in 1978. At present he is the head of the Jakarta, Indonesia, International School. He has served on the NESA Board of Directors for eight years, including a term as Treasurer. He held a similar post with the E A R C O S Board where he served for two years.



**Dr. David Cramer,
new REO for Eastern
Europe.**

His wife, Diane, is also a teacher. They have two daughters, one pursuing a Ph. D. degree in educational leadership, and the other in college in Wyoming.

Cramer's main hobbies include rebuilding of antique cars, woodworking, and traveling to out-of-the-way places. He also is an avid sportsman with activities in golf, tennis, basketball and softball.