

Supporting New Hires' Success



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Meet Paradise Tomato Kitchens

Paradise Tomato Kitchens is a manufacturer of custom-made, tomato- and pepper-based sauces for restaurant chains and food manufacturers with operations in Louisville, KY and Los Banos, CA. Whether it's pizza or marinara sauce, dipping sauce for buffalo chicken wings, barbeque sauce, or sriracha, tomatoey deliciousness rolls off the lines every day at Paradise Tomato Kitchens.

Operations Managers Surface a Problem

High turnover disrupting operations is something managers have struggled with since Amy Green, human resource manager at Paradise Tomato Kitchens, joined the company six years ago. So, when she was presented with the opportunity by her local workforce development board, KentuckianaWorks, to participate in a project focused on improving job quality and addressing turnover, Amy jumped at the chance.

When she realized they didn't have enough data to understand what was really playing out with turnover, Amy dove in and created a system to help pinpoint where and when turnover was happening. Analysis of the new HR data revealed that although turnover was low among tenured employees, 73% of new hires were leaving within the first 90 days of employment.

Something must be happening during those first 90 days, but what? Amy knew that the only people who could answer the question were the new hires themselves.

Employee Listening is the Solution

Like many organizations, Paradise Tomato Kitchens started their employee listening efforts with an electronic survey. But response rates were low and didn't provide the answers they needed. Amy and the team took a step back and realized that production employees didn't have

easy access to complete an online survey. They quickly pivoted to listening to employees through one-on-one conversations.

Amy gathered a team of HR and operations managers and kicked around ideas. They started with the idea that "someone" should have regular conversations with each new hire over the course of their first 90 days



with Paradise Tomato Kitchens. It didn't take long to realize that approach was unmanageable for a single person. Not to mention, it would be a missed learning opportunity for the rest of the team if only one person heard directly from new hires.

Introducing “Checkpoint Interviews”

The team kept experimenting and eventually landed on the idea of “checkpoint interviews,” 5- to 10-minute conversations between each new hire and a rotating cast of leaders. By distributing the workload across the organization, learning was also distributed, and no single person would be overwhelmed by the task.

Amy and the HR team developed a set of 10 standardized questions to help steer the conversations and created a schedule based on what would best serve new hires as they learned about working at Paradise Tomato Kitchens.

In addition to gathering insights from employees about what was working well/what could be improved and helping employees feel more supported, Paradise Tomato Kitchens hoped checkpoint interviews would improve managerial understanding of employee challenges, expand employee connections within the organization, and improve rapport among individuals at all levels.

Amy and the HR team coached supervisors about problem-solving approaches to help them ask questions during the critical first 90-days. Amy helped guide the supervisors to approach these conversations as they would approach them with a family member, focusing on uncovering the root cause of issues, such as attendance, from a place of empathy and ways in which the manager may be helpful.

“How do we help these folks be successful? How do we make sure that they are brought into the workforce and are able to do what they need to do to help support their family?”

Amy Green

Human resource manager, Paradise Tomato Kitchens

Checkpoint Interview Schedule

(5-10 minutes each)

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Week 2 | Direct supervisor
focused on training needs and relationships with team members. |
| Week 4 | HR team member
focused on relationships with supervisor and team members and surfacing any potential barriers to attendance the employee might have, such as childcare. |
| Week 6 | Plant manager
focused on relationship-building with leadership and suggestions for operational improvements. |
| Week 8 | Production supervisor
focused on additional training needs and suggestions for operational improvements. |
| Week 10 | Workforce development manager
focused on overall experience with training and suggestions for improvement. |

Insights Start Pouring In

The Paradise Tomato Kitchens team expected to learn about typical challenges new hires might face, like relationship issues between new hires and supervisors or other team members. And indeed, issues of this sort arose – but there was so much more.

The Best of Intentions...

During a checkpoint interview with Allie Barnes, a new hire on the mash line, the Paradise Tomato Kitchens team learned that their strategy of alternating new-hire trainers during the first several weeks was backfiring.

Alternating trainers was intended to help new hires meet the team and develop relationships, but that wasn't how it was playing out on the line. Instead, each trainer shared their own way of doing things and new hires got confused. Insights like this one enabled Paradise Tomato Kitchens to make training processes more effective and less frustrating for new hires.

Sometimes It's Not About the Job...

Allie found HR's questions during her checkpoint interview about her life outside of work — and their follow-up after the conversation — very helpful and supportive:

“I was having some issues finding housing. They made sure I had the numbers and the places to call so I could get assistance and get help.... [HR] came back a couple of times and checked in [asking], ‘How's everything going? Are things working out for you?’ And I appreciated that because I moved here from another state and don't have a lot of resources.”

Allie Barnes

Mash line employee, Paradise Tomato Kitchens

Amy and the HR team had a shock during another checkpoint interviews when an employee revealed that they were living in their van:

“[When we found that out] we, as the company, put them up in a hotel for two weeks in the middle of winter because it was really cold out and we didn't want them to be in a van. We would've never known those kinds of things before – it was just having that conversation to make sure this person was going to be successful on the job.”

Amy Green

Human resource manager, Paradise Tomato Kitchens

These checkpoint interviews coupled with Paradise Tomato Kitchen's connections to community-based organizations were crucial in alleviating housing issues for employees to set them up for success moving forward.



New Hire Turnover Drops and the Momentum Continues

Amy and the team kept a close eye on turnover as their checkpoint interview experiment unfolded and found a dramatic improvement — voluntary new hire turnover dropped by 32% in the past year since they began.

To keep the team informed and motivated, Amy and the HR team introduced quarterly “retention forums” where HR and operations meet to analyze new hire turnover data and discuss any insights gleaned from the checkpoint interviews. They also share feedback about how the process is working to make adjustments and keep team members accountable for getting their checkpoint interviews done on time.

Allie said the increased visibility with management made her feel supported and improved her confidence in approaching the plant manager with issues that arise:

“I don’t feel like you have to talk to a hundred other people in order to speak with [the plant manager]. This is one of the best companies I’ve worked for because [management is] asking how you’re doing, how’s the job going, what they can change. They care about their employees.”

Allie Barnes

Mash line employee, Paradise Tomato Kitchens

Amy and the HR team are planning to incorporate learning from the checkpoint interviews into their performance review process. They are also planning to highlight checkpoint interviews during new hire orientation in the future.

Advice for Other Employers

To successfully address organizational challenges like turnover, Amy at Paradise Tomato Kitchens suggests the following tactics:

1. Assemble a team of stakeholders within the organization to identify challenges and examine any data that is available.
2. Clarify the problem and brainstorm potential solutions as a team.
3. Gather any additional missing data that would help the team understand challenges.
4. Make sure you have ways to ask your employees for feedback in a trusted

environment. They are a critical source of information about what’s happening on the ground floor.

5. Run short tests to see what innovation works and continually reassess until you find an approach that works best for the team.
6. Establish a system to continually monitor progress through a critical lens.
7. Engage with your local workforce development ecosystem to learn about resources available for employee support.

“We were brainstorming together and the one thing that I can take away from this is we were all in this together. A lot of times, it’s showing the data that gets folks on board and saying, ‘Here’s our challenge.’ It’s being able to sit down and talk about the data and make sure that the folks understand that we will try things out and maybe they won’t work. It’s perfectly fine, but we will learn things throughout the process that work for us that may not work for someone else.”

Amy Green

Human resource manager, Paradise Tomato Kitchens

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