The First 30 Days: Onboarding in Home Care

With great onboarding, you build up a strong culture of appreciation and mutual respect, keeping your best caregivers with you for years to come.

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The world of home care is one in which compassionate, skilled people dedicate themselves to making a real impact on the lives of those who need it. As an agency admin responsible for managing a team of caregivers, you probably already understand the importance of having a dedicated group of caregivers committed to sticking with clients for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, you probably also understand the struggles of caregiver retention. Like any relationship, first impressions mean a lot, and getting the first 30 days of your new relationship right is key to building a strong foundation with your new hire; each stage of the process sends a message to your new caregiver. Just as you are learning about who they are as a person, they are learning about you, your other employees, your clients, and your agency's culture.

Day 1: Setting the Stage

As soon as the offer letter is sent, it's important to ensure your new caregiver feels welcomed into your agency. A friendly email, text message, or phone call accompanying the initial offer letter can make a big difference when it comes to what will be the first day of what will hopefully be a long relationship. Be sure to include all necessary information, such as documents or how to login to your online onboarding process. As the true first impression of your company, it's important to make this phase of the onboarding process as smooth as possible. After all, the better the process, the better the first impression.

Caregiver message received: Are they prepared? Do they communicate?

Days 2-5: Document Collection

After the initial welcome, it's time to gather all the necessary documents, such as W-4 and I-9 forms, certifications, etc. While this may sound like a less-than-exciting way for you and your new caregiver to spend their first few days, that only means that expectations are low, giving you plenty of room to beat them. By providing a clearly outlined, organized checklist of what needs to be completed by when, you can show that your agency is professional and well put together. You can elevate this stage even further by digitizing the process, letting new hires access these documents online and be guided through the process by an automated system, while you can track progress with something as simple as a progress bar. These things can set you apart from agencies that caregivers may have worked at before, letting them know that you are different from their past employers.

Caregiver message received: Do they value compliance? Do they care about getting it right, and do they make it easy?

Days 6-10: Meeting the Team

The exact number of days into the process will begin to vary at this point, but roughly a week after accepting the offer letter is about when new hires should expect to start coming into the office, whether that's virtually or in-person. That first work week should be all about introducing the new caregiver to the team, their direct manager, and the various admins they will be interacting with. This period is all about making them feel comfortable with their new environment and the people they will be working with. Many agencies rush through this, looking to get new caregivers productive immediately, but it's important to remember that this is a long-term investment on your part. While you can take this time to get them up to speed on your agency's processes and the clients that they will be helping, don't let onboarding stop after you've collected all the legally required paperwork.

Caregiver message received: Is their team invested in their company and its employees? Do they value training and development?

Days 11-20: Mentor for Success

Once your new caregiver is ready to jump into action and begin helping clients, it's important to set them up with some sort of mentor who can serve as a helping hand during this transition period. Even if this caregiver has years of experience, a mentor can still be very helpful when joining a brand-new agency. After all, it may just mean that they have less caregiving-related questions and more organizational-process questions, like "How do I request time off?" or "How do I enter my time?" These are things that may have been answered in your employee handbook or addressed during the initial onboarding, but there is a lot of new information and processes that new hires have to take in when joining a new agency. Giving them a coworker who can answer any questions while also providing a built-in support system is a fantastic way of ensuring that nobody feels left alone or unsupported.

Caregiver message received: Are they serious about long-term employees or do they just need a body? Is culture a priority?

Days 21-25: Personalized Training

After working with your new caregiver for a few weeks, it may become apparent what their pre-existing strengths are and where they may have a lapse in previous experience. Each agency is different, and all client assignments come with their own unique challenges. This should be enough time to identify what your new hire needs to learn to have long-term success in their new role, and it's important that you provide them the resources necessary for achieving that success. This is great because a well-trained staff not only reflects positively on you and your agency but also shows your new hire that you care about them as an individual and are here to support them with their job growth. Utilize a combination of seasoned caregivers that are already familiar with the skills that you are trying to teach as well as online modules so you can provide a well-rounded training experience.

Caregiver message received: Did they take the time to understand my strengths and areas of opportunity, and are they doing something about it?

Days 26-30: Feedback and Reflection

As the first month of your new relationship comes to a close, it's essential to check in with your new caregiver and gather feedback on their thoughts surrounding this new work environment and team. Asking them questions about the onboarding process – such as "What went well?" and "What can be improved?" – can provide valuable insight from the very people that you are working so hard to retain. This can help you adjust your process, setting your agency up for even greater success in the future. In the present though, it simply makes your budding caregiver feel valued as their opinion carries weight and matters to you.

Caregiver message received: Is this a place I see myself working at for a longer term? Am I happy and comfortable here?

Beyond 30 Days: Nurturing Long-Term Relationships

The first 30 days are just the beginning. To ensure that you continue to build and maintain healthy relationships with your caregivers, you should never stop investing in what makes them buy into your agency. Providing ongoing support in the way of caregiver-manager check-ins, personalized training, and growth opportunities is critical.

At the end of the day, home care is all about the nurturing relationship between the caregiver and the client. Why should your agency be any different? With a thoughtful and engaging onboarding process expanding to all caregivers for their entire time at your agency, you build up a strong culture of appreciation and mutual respect, keeping your best caregivers with you for years to come.

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