# Assigning A Buddy for Your New Hire

Providing a buddy is the first step for building relationships between your new hire and their new peers (as distinguished from members of leadership, such as you).

**Introduction**

Implementing a buddy system into your organization benefits the new employee while adding value to both the employee and employer. During the hiring process, employees may only meet Human Resources and their hiring manager. It takes a team to onboard a new employee. A buddy program, another component of onboarding, is an opportunity for the employee to meet their colleagues and get acclimated to the culture quickly.

**What is a buddy?**

A buddy is someone who partners with the new hire for their first 3-6 months of employment. The buddy is responsible for offering advice and guidance regarding the day-to-day aspects of working in the department. They should offer encouragement and feedback while introducing the new hire to the culture of the department. The buddy is like an officially appointed friend.

**Why have a buddy:**

The purpose of new employees being assigned a buddy is to welcome them and reaffirm their decision to be part of the University of Florida. A buddy program ensures new employees have a reliable, motivated, single point-of-contact for their basic questions regarding their work experience at UF. A buddy can convey information that helps new hires get set-up for success. The buddy can cover items that new hires need to know but may not necessarily need to know on day one, i.e., where is the nearest restroom? What do people usually do for lunch? I can’t get the printer to work – what should I do? What, exactly, does casual Friday mean?

**How is the buddy selected?**  
Supervisors select the buddy for the program. Assigning the appropriate staff member to act   
as a buddy is important. A good buddy is:

* Someone who is familiar with the culture, values and vision   
  of the unit or department.
* A person who maintains consistency between words and actions while setting   
  standards for the department.
* A co-worker from the department who will be a ***positive*** role model
* An employee who is familiar with the new hire’s role
* An employee who has been in his/her role for at least one year
* A good communicator with strong interpersonal skills and a strong sense of discretion.
* Ideally someone who does the   
  same kind of work as the new hire so the buddy can also provide job-specific feedback.
* An employee who has the ability to make time for the new hire and will be accessible to them (don’t pick someone who sits halfway across campus).
* An employee who is also trusted by their peers and understands that if they become aware of any serious concerns, they will be expected to report the concerns to the appropriate office (more on this topic below).
* An employee who may be interested in a leadership position. Serving as an official new hire buddy is a growth opportunity for the buddy. This may be a way for you to start thinking about who your rising stars are, who has leadership potential, and who wants to be a more visible member of the team. You will learn a lot about an existing employee by how they manage serving as a buddy for a new hire. Win-win!

**Functions of the Buddy**

The buddy will:

* Meet formally once a month for at least 30 minutes
* Conduct daily check-ins that are 5-15 minutes in length to answer   
  questions and build a relationship
* Serve as a resource for the new employee on expectations,   
  assignment clarification (if they are familiar with the job-specific   
  duties), policies, procedures and workplace norms
* Create a comfortable informal environment where the new   
  employee feels safe bringing up concerns and asking questions
* Be a point of contact for the new employee
* Make introductions to colleagues and customers
* Provide feedback and encouragement for the new hire
* Realize the new hire’s success is connected to the team’s success
* Follow through on commitments
* Reliably maintain confidential and sensitive information
* Build trust
* Be a role model for the new hire and department

**IMPORTANT:** As the direct supervisor, be sure to regularly check in with both the new hire and the buddy to ensure that everything is working well for the new hire and the buddy. It is also important to give the buddy some ability to shape the buddy relationship in such a way that it helps (not overwhelms) the new hire.

***Having a buddy or peer feedback partner for the new hire DOES NOT replace regular check-ins between the new hire and the direct supervisor.***

**Share the following guidelines with the buddy so they can provide excellent feedback.**

**Guidelines for Providing Feedback**

The purpose of feedback is to help others be successful in their roles. Creating a feedback culture where employees and co-workers regularly provide feedback in all directions leads to a more efficient, trusting and supportive team culture. Induct new employees into your culture of feedback early on by providing them with a buddy and/or peer feedback partner.

**Direct Supervisors:** Instruct the buddy to provide **reinforcement and redirection for the new hire.**

**Reinforcement**

Reinforce positive behaviors and performance. New hires rely heavily on feedback early on and they need to know what’s contributing or taking away from success in their new role.

Let the new hire know when they are meeting or exceeding expectations.

*“I like how you incorporated the graphs into the monthly report. It made it much easier to understand the data trends.”*

**Redirection**

Redirection occurs when there is an aspect of the new employee’s behavior or performance that   
doesn’t meet or exceed expectations. This can be more difficult, so consider the following   
steps to make this a more productive discussion:

1. **Prepare the other person by asking permission to give feedback**

*“Brandon, do you have a few minutes? I’d like to give you some feedback if you’re open to it.”*

1. **State your intention**

Offer your feedback as a step to help the new employee improve or avoid creating a bad habit by repeating a mistake. Sharing your intentions with the other person helps them to understand your motives for providing feedback.

*“I thought you would want to know.”* Or *“I’m telling you this because I want to help you.”*

1. **Describe the situation, behavior observed, and its impact**

Frame your feedback using the SBI model (Situation, Behavior, Impact). Define the *where* and the *when* to put the feedback into context. Be specific. Describe behavior you observed and its impact on the person, his or her work, the team, etc.

*“During yesterday’s staff meeting you interrupted several team members as they were speaking in order to ask questions. The impact of that is it’s frustrating to others because they cannot finish their sentence and could be perceived as rude.”*

***Remember, the goal of a buddy or feedback partner is to help the new hire connect to the work and their new team and to create a sense of inclusion while providing them with support and   
guidance as they learn their new job.***

**What should the buddy do if sensitive issues arise?**

* **What if the new hire reports they are having an issue with a co-worker?**
  + This is the type of issue that the buddy should report to the direct supervisor right away. New hires often determine within 30 days of starting a new job whether they want to stay or leave. If a new hire has a problem with a co-worker right away and it is not addressed, you could easily lose the new hire.
  + It is not appropriate to force the new hire (or the buddy) to address the issue. This is a situation where a member of the leadership team needs to find out what is going on and promptly address it. You never want to be in a situation where existing employees who are low performers drive away new employees who are high potential.
* **What if the new hire reports an issue with their direct supervisor?** 
  + A buddy can certainly share his or her insight about the direct supervisor (such as, how to effectively communicate with them or their pet peeves) if the buddy has any such insight to share. What they can suggest is having the new hire talk to Human Resources or the person to whom the supervisor reports. This, too, is the type of issue that needs to be addressed and resolved quickly, or you risk losing the new hire.
* **What if the new hire shares that they are dissatisfied with their position?**
  + New jobs can be hard. The buddy can start by listening. Ask what is it that they are struggling with—it could be the people (not feeling welcomed), the physical location (no parking and a cramped cubicle), the hardware (a slow computer and no printer nearby), etc. It may not be the actual job duties.
  + Suggest that the new employee discuss the issues with their supervisor. If the buddy feels comfortable, they should also discuss the topic with the direct supervisor. Existing employees may be immune to things a new hire will pick up on right away. Part of the value of incorporating new people into the team is to learn from their fresh perspective. While negative news is not always easy to hear, it is important to process. It probably has some value.
* **What if the new hire shares that they feel they are being mistreated (e.g., targeted by a bully or the victim of discrimination or harassment based on their age, sex, race, etc.)?** 
  + Any type of employee misconduct (directed against or perpetrated by the new hire) must be immediately reported by the buddy. ***This will not be easy, but it is absolutely necessary.***
  + Reports can be made to UFHR – Employee Relations or the department’s HR representative. The buddy should either help the new hire (who may be reluctant, if they are the victim) or share the information him or herself. It is not okay for such concerns to be ignored or go unreported.

***Beyond the Buddy.***New hires should be fully aware that they have various resources for posing questions or seeking clarification. Their buddy may end up being their go-to for questions, but the new hire should never feel like that is their only option.

As the direct supervisor, you should regularly reinforce with the new hire that *your door* is always open. The new hire should also be aware that they can reach out to your department’s HR rep or UFHR Employee Relations for additional support and direction.

**EXAMPLE EMAIL TO THE BUDDY:**

Dear BUDDY’S NAME,

Congratulations! You have been selected as a buddy for (New Employees Name), Title, Start Date. Please see the outlined process below. I will send an email to NEW EMPLOYEE on their first day and copy you.

* Meet formally once a month for at least 30 minutes in length
* Conduct daily check-ins of 5-15 minutes in length to answer questions and build a relationship
* Serve as a resource for the new employee on expectations, assignment clarification (if they are familiar with the job-specific duties), policies, procedures and workplace norms
* Create a comfortable informal environment where the new employee feels safe bringing up concerns and asking questions
* Be a friendly point of contact for the new employee
* Make introductions to colleagues and customers
* Provide feedback and encouragement for the new employee

Be sure to review the guidelines for providing feedback prior to meeting with the new hire.

**Thank you for accepting serving as a buddy for (NEW EMPLOYEE’S NAME).**

**EXAMPLE EMAIL TO THE NEW EMPLOYEE:**

Dear NEW EMPLOYEE,

As we discussed during your orientation, BUDDY’S NAME, title has been identified as your “**buddy**”.

What this means for you? You have been assigned a trusted and motivated person who will offer advice, resources, and guidance regarding the day-to-day aspects of working in your current department. Assigning a buddy is like assigning an “official friend.” The idea is that you will have someone who is available to guide you through politically sensitive questions, organizational dynamics, and organizational structure.

Your **buddy (BUDDY’S NAME)** has been asked to check in with you regularly to see if you have any questions, concerns within your first year of employment…and beyond. Your **buddy** may ask you to share a lunch break or two if you would like. Our hope is to provide you with a resource to accompany me as your supervisor, other work associates and department leaders. If you have any questions or concerns, please let us know.

Buddy Participation Agreement

By signing below, I confirm my voluntary participation in my department’s buddy program designed to help new employees acclimate to their new job, my department, and the University of Florida. I understand that serving as a buddy is an important responsibility, especially in the first months and year of a new employee’s career, I agree to:

1. Act as the assigned buddy for a new employee during the first year of their employment in my department, specifically:
   1. To formally meet every month for at least 30 minutes.
   2. To conduct regular check-ins for 5-15 minutes.
2. Serve as a positive and welcoming resource for the new employee. This will assist the new employee to successfully adjust in their new position and ensure that they have a peer to facilitate creating positive relationships across the department with business stakeholders and, as needed, across campus.
3. Provide the new employee with feedback and encouragement. The feedback will help them understand the department’s culture and work expectations so that they can be successful and engaged in their new job and with their new co-workers.
4. Create a comfortable informal environment where the new employee feels safe bringing up concerns and asking questions.
5. Through my conduct and my words, set a positive example, which means modeling best practices in my conduct, performance, and attendance.
6. Share my insight, experiences, and knowledge about my department, UF, and, when appropriate, Gainesville, to help the new employee effectively learn from my successes, failures, and observations.
7. Promptly consult with my direct supervisor or HR rep when the new employee has questions I cannot answer.
8. Understanding that building a trusting relationship with the new hire is important, I still agree to:
   1. Promptly consult with my direct supervisor or HR rep if I have concerns about how my relationship, as a buddy, is developing with the new hire.
   2. *Immediately report to my direct supervisor* any reports of serious misconduct perpetrated by or against the new employee (e.g., bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination based on protected class—such as race, age, disability, fraud or theft, etc.).

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Buddy Name and Title Date

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Buddy Signature Supervisor Signature