The Buddy Program

A Buddy System is a means of welcoming and encouraging new employees to help them in their first few months build a personal connection with UVAMC.

It’s tough being new. You’re not sure what lies behind each door: there are enough acronyms and buzzwords to fill a book, and somebody keeps moving the photocopier! These concerns pale in insignificance, however, in comparison to the uncertainty of what’s “normal” in the organization—what’s “right” and “wrong” here?—what’s expected of me?—what’s accepted here?

These apprehensions make every new employee feel like an “outsider”—less confident in relating with their colleagues—senior, peer or junior—and unsure about how to act. A “Buddy” can answer questions about the work environment, culture, resources and other information.

The specifics of the Buddy Program will vary slightly from one department to the next. It is the hiring manager’s responsibility to assign each new employee a Buddy and to effectively communicate the expectations to him/her. Use the New Employee’s Profile to choose a buddy with similar interests and backgrounds. For example, if a new employee enjoys hiking, a wise choice for a Buddy might be someone who also enjoys hiking.

When meeting with a prospective Buddy for the first time, please use the Buddy Checklist to discuss potential activities and gain their commitment.

What is a Buddy?

Buddies are colleagues who are willing to serve as resources for newly hired employees and help them feel connected to the team by answering questions and providing opportunities to socialize. Ideally, a Buddy should be someone other than their preceptor.

Buddies welcome their new employee and:

- Identify needs and answer questions
- Introduce them to colleagues, the organization, and the facilities
- Are available for support during a new employee’s first year
EXPECTATIONS FOR BUDDIES

The first week, an introductory meeting is an opportunity to tour the department, introduce colleagues, find their work space, and explain the operation of any equipment or systems they need to start work. Be familiar with the content of the orientation training, so that information is not duplicated.

Explain how you can be contacted during the day for assistance with anything that materially hinders their work or performance. Make it clear that you are available to them as required, but to leave non-urgent issues for a scheduled weekly meeting.

Explain the difference between a mentor, preceptor, and manager, and clear any ground rules regarding contact outside working hours. Ask if they have any initial queries or issues, and deal with them. Then leave the new employee to get on with the job! Remember: your role is to help the new employee get up to speed—not to prevent them from doing so.

Frequency and Timing of Meetings

Aim to meet regularly for at least 30 minutes. This meeting (often best held over lunch or in an informal setting), should be used to discuss any non-urgent issues the new employee may have.

During the working day, it may be reasonable to expect as many as a half dozen brief queries a day from the new employee in the first few days, tapering down to one or two a day thereafter. Although all new employees are different, after two or three months, you may hear little or nothing from them on a daily basis. THIS IS A GOOD SIGN. If you are still getting a large number of “urgent” queries after the first month, you should speak to your manager.

Within the parameters above, it is expected that you and the new employee will meet during working hours. (Your manager will let you know if you are spending too much time on this.) Some buddies and new employees agree to meet on a social basis, outside working hours. This is entirely a discretionary matter between you and the new employee. It is up to you to signal to the new employee how you feel about being contacted regarding work-related issues outside of working hours. The Medical Center has no policy on this. Many buddies have felt happy with being contacted where necessary outside working hours up to 9:00 PM on weeknights, but not on weekends. The details are entirely up to you.

A Buddy can contribute to the success of a newly hired employee by

- Scheduling regular contact, such as lunch, coffee, and phone calls
- Sharing insights about “how things are done around here”
- Discussing why you like working here and the UVA culture
- Answering questions and providing resources
Expectations from the Relationship

Your relationship should be open, positive, supportive, and your discussions, confidential! The Medical Center has no interest in knowing the details of these discussions and will not monitor buddy relationships. Be supportive of the Medical Center and your co-workers. Discourage gossip and speculation within a buddy relationship.

Termination of the Relationship

The Buddy relationship operates under a “no-fault” mechanism: at the request of either party, the Buddy relationship can be terminated at any time. The new employee is allocated another buddy, and the buddy is assigned a different new employee. NO REASONS WILL BE SOUGHT OR PROFFERED, NO DISCUSSION WILL ENSUE, NO BLAME WILL BE APPORTIONED. Contact your manager if you wish to trigger this process.