



Since college, every job I've had has had a 90-day probationary period.

I used to think this meant that during those 90 days, I could be let go for any reason but after those 90 days, I would only be let go if I did something egregious.

It turns out none of this is true.

Today we're going to talk about what a probationary period actually is, whether or not it makes sense for your organization to have one, and regardless of whether or not your organization has one, how you can benefit from having a probationary period mentality permanently.

But let me be clear. I am not an attorney. Much to my father's chagrin. I don't work where you work.

Throughout these videos and throughout your career always always make sure you're covered.

Make sure you understand the laws around your work and hiring.

Make sure you understand your organizational policies.

Make sure you're leading in a way that is true to your values and honors your integrity.

Always always make sure that you understand the laws, the rules, and the policies around the decisions that you make.

This includes a probationary period.

When we're hiring sometimes, many times, it just doesn't work out.

Sometimes it's because of poor performance.

Many times, it's because of a bad fit.

Sometimes it's because of life circumstances.

Whatever the reason, there are situations where it just doesn't work out.

Sometimes we realize this really, really early on. It's one of those balances- do we know for sure it's never going to work out? Have you given it a chance? Have you provided support in order to make it work out?

How much are you expected to give and invest to figure that out?

I can't answer that for you, but these are important questions to ask.



How do you just know it's not going to work out and how do you know when to give it a little more time and a little more effort?

If you do have a probationary period it's important to understand that the laws around firing aren't any different during a probationary period than they are outside of it.

Unless you live in Montana you are in an at-will state, which means your organization can let you go at any time for any reason that is not a discriminatory practice. This isn't relegated to a probationary period.

Many people like me have misconceptions about what a probationary period means in terms of being let go. As it turns out, unless you're in Montana, day 89 and day 90 and day 91 are legally, exactly the same when it comes to being able to let someone go.

The rules aren't any different but you might consider setting up a probationary period to have a set, agreed-upon clear time where you are going to have a conversation with your newly-hired staff and decide if you are going to continue working together or not.

This is one of those areas where adopting a probationary period mentality permanently will benefit you. You should be consistently having these conversations, whether it's every 90 days, 30 days, 60 days, quarterly- however, it works for you in your organization.

You should consistently be having conversations with your staff to make sure that they want to be there and that they're meeting the expectations that you have for them.

Having said all that, if you do find value in having an actual probationary period then be very clear with the staff you've just hired about what that means.

What does it entail?

What are they expected to have accomplished so that at the end of the probationary period it will be clear to both of you whether or not the working relationship will continue?

What is that conversation at the end going to look like?

Is there a particular document or form that you're going to be using? If so, share that up front.

What does that staff need to do to stay?

What are some areas or things that they would do or not do that would make it so that they can't stay?

It's not just you saying that they can stay or not.



You want the staff to have input and you want them to have an opportunity to say, 'I appreciate the opportunity. I just don't think it's gonna work out. I'm gonna start looking elsewhere.'

The best result, the best case scenario in any hiring arrangement is that you both walk away better for it and on a good note. It's not always going to happen, but the more you're able to make that happen, the more everyone benefits.

Nobody benefits from a bad match. If you're continuing to force something that isn't going to work for either one of you, nobody benefits from that. You're not doing anyone any favors by forcing a bad match.

Again, sometimes things are performance-related. Sometimes it's not necessarily about performance.

You want as much as possible, if you need to sever the relationship, to sever it in a way that you both can walk away not just feeling good, but that there are no long-term ramifications for your continued careers.

Also remember you just went through a hiring process. If you do have a probationary period that's 30 days, 60 days, 90 days or whatever it is, you have a candidate pool that you just went through and in many cases a lot of those candidates will not have found a job yet.

Yes, going through hiring again and orienting again and the paperwork again is a lot but that's not reason enough not to let go of someone who needs to be let go of. I hope you find some solace in knowing that because you just went through a hiring process that you should have other candidates available to you.

Do what you can to support that person if they want to stay and your goal always is that they can meet expectations and stay. Then do what you can to support them.

If the relationship needs to be severed still do whatever you can to support them, especially if it wasn't something egregious, it wasn't something with performance, it was just a bad fit, do what you can to help them move on to the next step.

The principles of that probationary period whether you have one officially or not, carry them throughout that staff's time with you.

Being clear about expectations.

Having frequent feedback and coaching to and from. Not just you giving it out.

Talking about goals.

Giving space to ask questions.



Providing lots of growth opportunities.

All of the things that you would do or maybe are doing in a probationary period, do them throughout the time that your staff works with you.

Always have the message that you're there to help them succeed, that you want to help them meet expectations.

If they don't meet expectations, or they don't want to be there, or it's not a good fit, then you both need to sit down and reevaluate the working relationship.

So, something for you to think about is, how will you create a permanent probationary period mentality?