

Onboarding for RSRs: Weeks Two - 10

This article is the third in our series on best practices for how to recruit, train and retain route service representatives or RSR's. We have previously discussed [how to identify the best RSR to hire](#) and [the ideal first week for a new RSR](#). After the foundation of the first week, the training should continue with a 10-week program culminating with RSR certification.

Onboarding Process: Weeks Two Through 10

One of the keys to long-term retention for a RSR is an onboarding process that elevates the RSR to success through a thoughtful and organized program. We recommend a 10-week training program that results in a certified RSR who is ready to hit the ground running on week 11. A 10-week program may seem like a lengthy training period but the time and energy invested in this training is designed to eliminate further turnover and negate the need to hire several RSR's just to find the right fit for the position. We recognize that owners and service managers feel that this process can be dramatically shortened; the trainee, however, is grateful for the time due to the amount learned during the training. The investment in time is highly worthwhile.

| RSR Training Week | Route Trainer | Description |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Week 1 | Mentor | Intro into World Class Training |
| Week 2-3 | Mentor | Mentor's Route |
| Week 4-5 | Mentor | New RSR's Route |
| Week 6 | Manager | New RSR's Route |
| Week 7 | | New RSR Solo on Route |
| Week 8 | Mentor | New RSR's Route |
| Week 9 | Manager | New RSR's route |
| Week 10 | | Certification |

The success of this program relies heavily on the RSR having a mentor that can model best practices and guide him/her through examples and applications while on routes.

Weeks Two and Three:

Lack of training for new RSRs will cost your company money. The RSR should spend weeks two and three of their training program riding their mentor's route, observing and being exposed to their mentor's existing customer relationships. The new RSR will continue training by focusing on absorbing as many best practices as possible from their mentor. They will learn how to handle day-to-day route management and how to overcome obstacles that are common to our industry without the responsibility of having to overcome issues and/or develop relationships on their own route. As the two training weeks progress, they will be able to practice in the insulated environment of their mentor's route. The RSR will continue to grow during the time with daily recaps and feedback from their mentor at the end of each day.

Weeks Four and Five:

Week four will be the new RSR's first time to ride and experience the route you have hired them to manage. Weeks four and five of the training program should be spent with their mentor on the new route rep's own route learning about their new environment and customers. It is important for the new RSR's creditability to wait until week four for the RSR to ride their own route so they have three weeks of experience on routes without having made an inexperienced mistake in front of their own new customers. During these two training weeks a manager or a relief route rep should cover the mentor's route.

Week Six:

During week six, over halfway through the 10-week program, the RSR's mentor should return to their own route to sustain their relationship with their own customers while the manager will take over monitoring the RSR during week six. The mentor's role with the RSR is to guide and counsel the RSR while utilizing their previous experiences at the company and in their career to educate the new hire. This week's routes, with the RSR's manager will have a different tone. The RSR's manager is their direct supervisor and serves in a role that is more than an advisor. Rather, they give direction and assess the new RSR's productivity and abilities.

Week Seven

This is the first week the RSR rides their route alone. Due to the fact, they are nearing the end of their training program, daily check-ins should occur with their manager. Week

seven is an insulated time for the new RSR to make mistakes on the route. These mistakes are crucial to an effective training program. The new RSR will learn how to correct these mistakes in week eight. Daily check-ins are a way for the RSR to have an immediate resource to any conflicts or questions that may arise during week seven.

Week Eight:

This week, the mentor should join the RSR for the final time and help the RSR mitigate any issues they had during week seven riding alone. The new RSR's mentor should help correct the mistakes made in week seven without judgment. It is important for the new RSR to feel autonomous to make a mistake because, learning how to fix it now will prevent the RSR from making the same mistakes on a repeated basis. The financial cost of small mistakes in the present is more cost effective than a continuing mistake in the future. The new RSR should learn that customers do not measure us by the mistakes that are made but by our ability to correct them.

Week Nine:

During the final week of the RSR training program the manager should ride with the RSR. However, it is important to keep in mind that onboarding should not end until the RSR is certified to do the job that you hired them to perform.

Week 10: Certification

The RSR should be ready, able and willing to do any portion of the job by the time they are handed their own keys and are on their own route alone.

The 10-week training process should be taken seriously and culminate with an oral examination. This should be administered in a relaxed setting to keep the RSR at ease. An example would be sitting around the conference table in front of the team, which should include the RSR's direct supervisor and the RSR's mentor.

Examples of certification questions could include:

- Explain our mission statement.
- Why do we sample products at our customer's location?
- What do we do if our garments are damaged beyond repair?
- What are our responsibilities to our customers?

At the end of the certification bring the conversation back to the RSR and inquire how their training was handled. After asking the RSR to step out, seriously discuss their answers with the team and their mentor.

It is imperative that new RSRs are not released if they are not ready. If necessary, have them spend another week with their mentor targeting just the areas where they need additional guidance. A RSR should have to study and work diligently to earn their certification. This is the fork in the road where onboarding ends and their continued training begins.

The certification process for a RSR should be a monumental occasion for the new RSR. We recommend giving a framed certificate to honor the accomplishment to the RSR when they complete their certification with the GM or owner present in front of the service team. If possible, continue the celebration over a special lunch with the new RSR.

Ongoing Review

Another key for success in new hires is to follow the pattern of hire, orientate and train. RSRs and the business as a whole can only succeed with ongoing feedback.

The conversation should continue at their six-month review and one-year review. At each RSR review, focus on customer service, operations, safety issues and employee satisfaction. Training and two-way conversation are in the engine of the RSR's vehicle. The more powerful the training, the faster and more efficiently they can perform and succeed.

In our next issue we will address the end of day process for a RSR.