

First Friend, Best Friend

A “first friend, best friend” programs makes the union relevant for the variety of ways in which it assists the newly hired to get acclimated and become successful on the job.

- **The most important time you can spend is the time you spend reaching out to new hires, based on their needs.**
- **Sustained, personal contact over time is the key.**
- **Use your membership team to make this do-able.**
- **Make sure you say the words, *“Your success is a priority of our union and your support is a commitment I make to you as a union leader.”***

10 Ideas for Being a First Friend, Best Friend

Being a “first friend, best friend” to new employees means finding reasons to approach them personally and on a regular basis to provide help, support and encouragement to ensure their survival and success in their difficult first year on the job. Here are some ideas that are being used by your brothers and sisters in other AFT affiliates.

1. Introduce yourself, explain your role in the union, explain that our union views their success as a priority and explain how you will be helpful to them in their first year.
2. Provide walking tours of the worksite to introduce new employees to co-workers and to point out important locations (rest rooms, break rooms/areas, material and supplies, union bulletin boards, emergency exits, etc.)
3. Develop and hand deliver “survivor series” leaflets that provide practical advice on key work life events and milestones (“How to Read your Pay Stub,” “Choosing Your Health Plan,” “Tips for Successful Evaluation,” “Dos and Don’ts for Dealing with Students,” “Health and Safety Tips”)
4. Hold brief sit-down meetings to orient new employees to the contract or personnel policies, showing them which sections speak to practical questions like “How much are people paid?” “What do I do if I am sick?” “What holidays and leave time am I entitled to?” “How many breaks do I get?”
5. Plan drop-in visits, just to check in on new employees, to provide encouragement and positive feedback, to see if they have any concerns or questions.

6. Extend a personal invitation to accompany new employees to a union event, such as a worksite meeting, training event or social gathering.
7. Personally recognize new employees' achievements, such as completing first month on the job, first successful evaluation, completion of probation period, first time performing a specific job task, etc.
8. Convene short "rap sessions" between new employees in a worksite for them to meet each other, share experiences and support one another.
9. "Tell your union story," i.e., explain to new employees why union membership/activism is personally important to you, why it is compatible to your personal values, what you have achieved through the union, what sustains you as a union member/activist.
10. Arrange opportunities for new employees to learn from exemplary co-workers by direct observation or conversations about performing specific job task