

# onboarding

guide.

How to set up your new hire for success:  
best practices for managers.

## introduction.

Successful onboarding is a key part of any recruiting and hiring strategy. It is the next logical step after an employment offer has been extended and accepted. It is at this point that 'recruiting' efforts make a critical turn inward and focus on preparing new employees for success in the workplace and creating a sense of belonging that promotes engagement and loyalty.

Ensure that your new hire understands:

their role and responsibilities

---

the expectations of their leaders, supervisors and co-workers

---

the company's workplace culture, values and mission

These objectives may be addressed through an onboarding process that is well planned and executed.

## definition.

Perhaps a place to begin would be to clarify what employee onboarding is not. It should not be confused with orientation. Nor should it be confused with first-day training or an employee's first day on the job. The role of an orientation largely focuses on gathering and supplying information to new hires that is mandatory or routine. Activities such as completing job applications and filling out tax forms, while necessary, are generally not what talent experts consider to be a full onboarding process. The same thinking applies to first day training and the employee's first day at work. While all these may be elements of onboarding, they do not constitute onboarding in its entirety. Onboarding is not a one-day event but rather a carefully planned engagement delivered over time.

What onboarding is not:

orientation or supplying mandatory or routine information

---

first-day training

---

paperwork such as tax forms

### What onboarding is.

Informal onboarding refers to the process by which employees learn about their new jobs without an explicit organizational plan.

Formal onboarding refers to a written set of coordinated policies and procedures that assist employees in adjusting to their new job in terms of both tasks and socialization.<sup>1</sup>

Also known as ‘organizational socialization,’ onboarding is the method by which new hires can acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviors to become effective members of the company. It enables new employees to not only embrace and adjust to the performance aspects of their jobs, but to the social workplace dynamics that drive the employer’s culture.<sup>2</sup>

Along with formal and informal approaches, onboarding generally falls under different levels of complexity called the four C’s.<sup>3</sup>

compliance: ensuring that new employees understand basic legal and policy related rules and regulations.

culture: providing employees a sense of community by educating them about the organization’s values, beliefs, goals, mission and behaviors.

clarification: taking the time to make sure employees understand their new jobs and performance expectations.

connection: providing guidance about interpersonal relationships and information networks that can enable career success.

## business impact.

Why is a positive onboarding experience so important? Onboarding is the first opportunity for the hiring organization to personally deliver on the career promise as communicated in its employer brand during the recruitment phase. From the perspective of the new employee, the onboarding experience directly reflects on the character of their new employer: how dedicated the organization is to their success and how satisfying a career they are likely to have.

Onboarding, when done correctly, can lead to more engaged employees and less turnover. A good onboarding experience fosters greater job satisfaction and organizational loyalty<sup>4</sup> and can lead to reduced turnover. Engaged employees positively contribute to improving key company metrics, including profitability, turnover rate, absenteeism, product quality and customer satisfaction levels.<sup>5</sup>



## risk of inaction.

A study of employees in the United States and the United Kingdom found that businesses lose an estimated \$37 billion each year because of employees not understanding their jobs or what is expected of them.<sup>6</sup>

---

Approximately half of senior-level outside hires will not work out within 18 months<sup>7</sup>, and 50 percent of all hourly workers will leave new jobs in the first four months.<sup>8</sup>

---

The monetary turnover costs to replace an employee can be as much as 150 percent of the position's annual salary.<sup>9</sup>

### Effective onboarding fosters employee engagement.

These figures point to a need for employers to more strongly bond new hires to their organizations. An effective onboarding process can go a long way in transforming new employees into long-term satisfied and engaged company ambassadors.

best  
practices

## planning.

Properly conducted onboarding can produce substantial results for the new employee and the hiring organization. Because it has many moving parts, planning and implementing a sound onboarding process should start with consideration of three elements: participants, information and duration.

When developing an onboarding plan, consider these three elements:

- **Participants.** Who is going to be part of the process and how are you going to prepare them? The onboarding process should involve as many applicable stakeholders as possible. This includes senior management, immediate supervisors and key co-workers. The strategy is to have important stakeholders and the new employee personally interact in ways that help them understand one another.
- **Information.** What materials will be needed (an itinerary, welcome package, company information, etc.)? The information provided should clearly inform the new employee about what is expected in terms of job performance, responsibilities and workplace behaviors.
- **Duration.** Larger organizations provide onboarding that can last from several months to more than a year. For smaller companies, an onboarding process that last a few days to a few weeks is common.



There is no single magic formula for new employee onboarding. But with proper planning, a good process can decrease ramp-up time while boosting job satisfaction and loyalty.

**Develop an outline of the onboarding process with as much detail as possible.** Plan its primary drivers, including duration, the information that will be covered and all personnel involved. Additionally, outline all materials that will be needed and plan routine and any non-routine logistical situations like an office or department tour. This upfront investment pays off in the long run.

**Involve other employees in planning.** Company leaders, colleagues or managers who will be working directly with the new hire may have specific insights for making the onboarding process more targeted and relevant. Meet with the direct supervisor of the new hire to learn about the position's role, goals, projects and duties. Likewise, incorporate feedback from employees about what they would have liked or found helpful when they were going through onboarding.

**Choose someone to own the process.** If not implementing the onboarding process yourself, designate a single individual to do so. This employee should be exceptionally knowledgeable about all aspects of the company. Choose an employee who is a proven company 'ambassador' with polished communication skills, a positive attitude and a personable approach. Having a single point of contact for all matters of employee onboarding works to provide process clarity and consistency.

**Communicate to current staff that a new hire will be joining the company.** This will help ensure a proper welcoming atmosphere.

**Choose a team member who will assist or mentor the new hire.** The employee should work in the same or a similar area and be a proactive role model.

**Contact your new employee before the start date.** The new hire has demonstrated a commitment by accepting the employment offer. Return that commitment by communicating with the new employee as soon as possible and as often as needed. If there is no concrete information to deliver about the onboarding process to come, a simple and genuine welcome greeting will do.

## implementation.

**Prepare a warm, personal welcome.** Onboarding provides the opportunity to make a great first impression. The person the new hire first meets should be central to the onboarding process. This may be an experienced HR staff member, the director of HR, the hiring manager or another relevant stakeholder. Never underestimate the value of a warm handshake and an enthusiastic smile.

**Provide necessary documents and information.** There is undoubtedly paperwork and other information that must be completed by the new employee. Having the necessary paperwork — all in one place — adds an orderly tone to this process. Furthermore, by providing information about the organization's values and history can help make the new hire feel connected right from the beginning.

Relevant information may include:

- a welcome guide
- HR policies or employee handbook
- companywide policies and procedures
- information about the organization's values, mission and culture
- a company directory and a team organizational chart
- tax forms
- a benefits guide
- key departmental processes
- projects and work expectations
- a glossary of company terms and acronyms
- a detailed schedule of the first day

**Try to limit first-day administrative tasks.** While completing necessary forms and information is a key part of the hiring process, most new hires would rather not spend their first day solely engaged in this task. If possible, provide as much information and documentation online, before the first day of onboarding. This will leave more time for workplace socialization, skills learning, team bonding and more. If it's not possible to address administrative tasks in advance, spread out the process over a few days.



**Establish the lines of communication.** Every employee should know whom to talk to, whether regarding a business-related question or otherwise.

**Set expectations about performance.** Managers or direct supervisors should also communicate the cadence for reviewing the employee's progress so the new hire knows when to expect feedback. This can be especially critical during the first 90 days.

**Arrange workplace resources.** A checklist of elements to address may include: providing tools or equipment that will be used on the job, including software; setting up email accounts and communication portals; and supplying reading materials or anything that can help bring the new hire up to speed with current company projects. Include phone numbers for internal resources like the help desk, IT or HR so the new hire feels empowered to try to fix any issues immediately.

**Make the process relevant to the position.** While a good portion of onboarding is dedicated to educating the new employee about companywide operations, culture, goals and mission, time should also be devoted to job-specific learning. These elements may include: a tour of the relevant department, meetings with immediate supervisors, a detailed description of job responsibilities and duties, and information about departmental processes and objectives.

**Introduce the new hire to a mentor or peer guide.** This can assist the new employee with skills learning and building a company social network — both key to accomplishing better productivity and loyalty. Shadowing someone else in the role, or an employee with similar responsibilities, can be a great way to quickly learn best practices. Additionally, arranging an activity or lunch with a group of co-workers can be a great way for a new hire to socialize and to begin to build a professional network within the organization.

**Prepare the new hire's workspace.** Have all necessary materials, supplies, equipment and furniture in place to create a welcoming environment. Request access to tools or software that may be used.

**Request feedback on current processes.** Include everyone who is involved in the onboarding process: the new hire, immediate managers and supervisors, HR staff, senior leadership, and co-workers. The collected information can be an invaluable source of actionable data for improving future onboarding efforts.

Careful execution of employee onboarding also involves regular monitoring. Depending on the duration of the process, plan to check in consistently with the new employee and with managers. These check-ins can take the form of a simple phone call or email at the end of each day, or they can be planned meetings that are part of the onboarding schedule.



Smart onboarding can help businesses move forward. It can foster deep personal connections. It can strengthen an organization's focus on continuously developing its talent, which is something that prospective and current employees value — and expect — from their employers.

## onboarding best practices at a glance.

### Planning:

- develop an outline
- involve other company personnel
- make contact prior to start date
- schedule lunch or a non-work event
- choose someone to own the process
- communicate to staff that a new hire will be joining the company
- choose a staff member to mentor the new employee

### Implementation:

- prepare a warm, personal welcome
- organize documents and information
- set expectations about performance
- prepare the workspace and provide necessary software, tools and access
- make the process relevant to the position
- introduce the new hire to a mentor or peer guide

## sources

1. Zahrly, J., and Tosi, H., "The differential effect of organizational induction process on early work role adjustment," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 10, 59-74 (1989). Louis, M.R., "Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25, 226-251 (1980). Louis, M.R., Posner, B.Z., and Powell, G.N., "The availability and helpfulness of socialization practices," *Personnel Psychology*, 36, 857-866 (1983).
2. For reviews see Bauer, T. N., and Erdogan, B. (in press). Bauer, T. N., Morrison, E. W., and Callister, R. R., APA Press (1998). Saks, A.M., and Ashforth, B.E., "Organizational socialization: Making sense of past and present as a prologue for the future," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 51, 234-279 (1997). Saks, A. M., Uggerslev, K. L., and Fassina, N. E., "Socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment: A meta-analytic review and test of a model," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70, 413-446 (2007).
3. Copyright, Talya N. Bauer (2010).
4. Cognisco. "\$37 billion: Counting the cost of employee misunderstanding," A white paper commissioned by Cognisco (2010).
5. James K. Harter, PhD., Gallup; Frank L. Schmidt, PhD., University of Iowa; Sangeeta Agrawal, MS, Gallup; Stephanie K. Plowman, MA, Gallup; Anthony Blue, MA, Gallup, "The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes," Q12® Meta-Analysis: Ninth Edition, 2016. Accessed May 29, 2017. <http://www.gallup.com/services/191489/q12-meta-analysis-report-2016.aspx>
6. Maier, G., and Brunstein, J.C., "The role of personal work goals in newcomers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment: A longitudinal analysis," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 1034-1042 (2001). Meyer, J.P., and Allen, N.J., "Links between work experiences and organizational commitment during the first year of employment: A longitudinal analysis," *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 61, 195- 209 (1988).
7. Smart, B., "Topgrading: How leading companies win by hiring, coaching, and keeping the best people," Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall (1999).
8. Krauss, A. D., "Onboarding the hourly workforce." Poster presented at the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), Atlanta, GA (2010).
9. Suzanne Lucas, "How Much Employee Turnover Really Costs You: The costs may be hidden, but they are still there. That alone should motivate you to treat your staff well," Inc. Accessed May 29, 2017. <https://www.inc.com/suzanne-lucas/why-employee-turnover-is-so-costly.html>

