

Onboarding Can Make or Break a New Hire's Experience

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Summary. Poor onboarding can leave your employees with lower confidence in their new roles, worsened levels of engagement, and an increased risk of jumping ship when they see a new, more exciting position elsewhere. On the other hand, companies that implement a... [more](#)

Although most of the rhetoric around the Great Resignation is centered on American workers in office jobs, labor shortages are growing around the globe in a wide range of sectors and types of roles. Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia are also in the midst of labor market turbulence, relating to both so-called “skilled” and “unskilled” labor. As the world’s labor market continues to shift, the companies that retain key talent and invest in their workforces will be the ones who invest in employee onboarding.

The purpose of onboarding should be setting new hires up for success and decreasing the time it takes for them to become comfortable in their new roles. This only works if onboarding processes are designed strategically with the end goal in mind. But onboarding has become even more challenging with the rise of remote and hybrid work. In a 2020 survey by Workable, respondents in HR reported remote onboarding or training as the biggest hiring challenge during the pandemic, and it continues to challenge employers.

Even before the virtual shift, more than one-third of companies lacked a structured onboarding process, remote or otherwise. Furthermore, many organizations underestimate how long it takes a new hire to be proficient in their role. The average onboarding program lasts 90 days, but according to Gallup’s “Creating an Exceptional Onboarding Journey for New Employees” report, it typically takes new employees 12 months to reach their full performance potential.

Strong relationships aren’t built on poor foundations. If you want to improve your talent retention, you need to improve your employees’ onboarding experience. Gallup reports that only 12% of employees feel their company does a good job onboarding new team members, leaving 88% of workers with lackluster

onboarding experiences. And in a 2021 survey from Principles, 94% of HR professionals who responded said people they'd hired during the pandemic have only interacted within the company virtually, and of those respondents, 31% said employees were struggling to connect with colleagues. Ten percent weren't even sure how new hires were adapting.

Considering that poor onboarding can leave your employees with lower confidence in their new roles, worsened levels of engagement, and an increased risk of jumping ship when they see a new, more exciting position elsewhere, these statistics are concerning, especially for companies hiring remotely.

On the other hand, companies that implement a formal onboarding program could see 50% greater employee retention among new recruits and 62% greater productivity within the same group. Additionally, according to Gallup's onboarding report, employees who have a positive onboarding experience are almost three times as likely to feel prepared and supported in their role, boosting their confidence and improving their ability to perform their role well.

The Keys to Onboarding Success

A short onboarding program isn't the only thing hurting your new employees' experiences. Recent hires also need opportunities to form workplace relationships with their managers, peers, and key stakeholders. In fact, the Gallup report also reveals that employees are more than three times as likely to strongly agree that they had an exceptional onboarding experience when their managers had an active role in the process. However, many managers don't have the capacity to support or implement onboarding programs. Furthermore, most smaller companies (and even some larger ones) don't offer mentorship programs. By

failing to offer mentorship opportunities to new hires, you rob employees of the chance to develop the relationships needed to succeed in their new working environment.

As a manager, it's your job to ensure each new employee's experience in the workplace is a positive one — but knowing what steps you need to take to create an effective onboarding plan can feel overwhelming. The following three steps can help managers create strategic onboarding processes that set new hires up for success and improve employee retention.

1. Set clear goals and measures for success.

Before establishing a new onboarding *program*, you should start by reviewing your onboarding *goals*. And when you're reviewing goals, make sure they encapsulate the four Cs: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. Here are a few questions you should ask:

- Have you clearly identified and explained the regulations, policies, and procedures employees need to comply with?
- Have you clearly set employee job expectations and linked them to concrete, time-bound measures?
- After completing the program, will employees have a full understanding of your company culture and be supported to establish all the relationships vital to their success?
- Where do your organization's capabilities need to be improved upon to execute this new program?
- After completion of the onboarding program, how will you improve and maintain the work-life balance of new hires on an ongoing basis?

Once you've created a set of goals that address all four Cs, it's time to decide how you plan on measuring success. Your measures should be directly linked to your goals and include quantitative metrics (like the percentage of new hires still employed at your company after a year) and qualitative metrics (like feedback from new hires about their onboarding experience). Arriving at these goals and measures requires input from stakeholders across your organization, so be sure you make time to meet with company leaders before moving forward.

2. Create a multi-departmental onboarding team.

If you want to improve the employee experience in the workplace, you need to create an onboarding process that goes beyond HR and involves other company areas, including relevant teams, key stakeholders, and the CEO.

The sooner managers can introduce new hires to their team, the better. Before making the introduction, ensure the team knows why the new employee has been hired and what roles they will play in the team or across the organization. Although facilitating strong team relationships can be a larger initial time investment, it can help boost employee productivity and performance.

It's important to remember that new hires will also interact with stakeholders outside their immediate team. However, it's not always obvious to new employees how they will be working with these people or the best way to connect with them. Managers can help build these relationships by making a list of names, including notes about who they are and how they're important to the company. As a manager, it's your job to ensure that connections are running smoothly, so schedule a time to check in with stakeholders and ensure that new hires' networking is coming together.

An often overlooked (yet critical introduction to make) is between your new hire and your company's CEO. If you have a smaller organization, schedule a one-on-one or group coffee between the new hire(s) and your company's leader. If this isn't realistic because of company size, location, or time constraints, try holding a town hall or special party with the newest employees, the executive team, and your CEO. Connecting new hires to the CEO will give them a sense of inclusion in the company as well as cement the idea that the growth they represent for the company is important.

Moreover, meeting the CEO gives employees a direct window into the company culture and what type of employee experience they can expect. A great first meeting with the CEO stays with employees for a long time to come, positively impacting their sense of belonging and commitment, which, in turn, drives better retention and performance.

3. Provide support throughout the onboarding journey.

During onboarding, managers should focus on cutting down the time spent on new hires' administrative duties and increasing time spent on performance coaching and creating connections. Ideally, HR has equipped you with a technological platform that handles these key tasks. Using these tools, you will be able to implement and track onboarding best practices in real time throughout each stage of the process, like the following:

- Before a new hire starts, you can have them register on your company's onboarding portal so they can view a welcome video, complete their initial documentation, and receive their day-one schedule and overall customized onboarding program. You can also check whether all the relevant stakeholders have been notified of the new hire's pending arrival.
- On day one, you can track whether the new hire has

successfully completed their schedule for the day, including whether they were introduced to key stakeholders, were placed in their workstation, received their business tools, and finished their day-one learning program. You also can receive feedback from employees regarding their day one experience, allowing you to take corrective action.

- For the remainder of the onboarding program, you can monitor whether new hires have read critical company information, check for completion and pass rates for e-learning modules, and gauge the impact of the onboarding experience on the achievement of key onboarding goals at an individual and cohort level.
- By the end of the program, you will have a comprehensive dashboard depicting the level of achievement in each of your onboarding goals so you can see what's working and what needs to be improved.

Lastly, you'll want to ensure this new platform integrates with your overall human resource management system. That way, you can easily track the impact of your onboarding program on actual new hire on-the-job performance and levels of new employee satisfaction.

During a time when companies are struggling to retain talent, creating a strong onboarding process for new hires is imperative. By implementing a strategic onboarding program, managers can build new hires' confidence, increase engagement, and create an environment that retains talent for years to come.

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