

A background image showing a woman in profile, looking at a laptop screen in an office setting. The image is dark and semi-transparent, with a grid of small white circles overlaid at the bottom.

EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING:

Are Your New Hires Getting What They Need?

Organizations, and specifically top executives, are starting to see the value in using a structured new employee onboarding program. What was once just a full day of new-hire paperwork has evolved into something more thoughtful and robust. A structured onboarding program helps set employees up for success while sparking engagement. It also gives employers a chance to earn new hire loyalty and avoid premature turnover. It's a winning strategy for both the organization and its employees.

With a multi-generational workforce and ever-changing employment laws, it can be hard for human resource (HR) professionals to keep up. They must adhere to many orientation requirements (I-9s, W-4s, state registration, handbook acknowledgment, etc.) while also trying to meet new hire expectations. Most people want more than just a paycheck. They want a company that sees their value. From the start, new employees actively look for role clarity and signs of a positive work culture. But they can become easily overwhelmed with the amount of information initially provided (and fail to retain it). Employee onboarding shouldn't end after the required paperwork and company handbook review on day one. In reality, it should just be starting.

Less Turnover, More Engagement

An effective employee onboarding program can dramatically reduce company turnover. According to a 2019 report by Work Institute, 38% of turnover involved employees who quit in their first year.¹ Among them, 22% left within their first 30 days. The report also asserts that most of the turnover could have been prevented by employers. This data confirms that employees are not devoted to an organization on day one (or even by month one). New hires do their part by demonstrating value and potential during the interview process. It becomes the organization's responsibility to win their loyalty through a meaningful onboarding program.

In addition to reducing turnover, an employee onboarding program can directly affect engagement. Gallup estimates the cost of disengagement in the U.S. ranges between \$960 billion and \$1.2 trillion per year.² From a cost-savings perspective, employee engagement is crucial. A recent survey from BambooHR found that organizations with effective onboarding programs have 33% more employees who feel engaged.³ Onboarding helps employees acclimate with new co-workers, resources and the company culture. As a result, employees begin to create bonds with colleagues and feel more comfortable in their roles.

The bottom line is that effective onboarding helps set employees (and, therefore, the company) up for success. High achievers are enabled by how well employers prepare for their arrival, identify resources and provide training. When onboarding is done right, employees become contributing team members faster. In fact, companies with onboarding programs have 62% higher time-to-productivity ratios.⁴

1. 2019 Retention Report: Trends, Reasons & A Call to Action. Work Institute. Accessed on May 20, 2020 at <https://info.workinstitute.com/hubfs/2019%20Retention%20Report/Work%20Institute%202019%20Retention%20Report%20final-1.pdf>
2. Harter, Jim. "Failed Performance Management: The Fix." April 27, 2017. Accessed on May 20, 2020 at <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236396/failed-performance-management-fix.aspx>
3. "The Incredible Impact of Effective Onboarding." May 3, 2018. BambooHR. Accessed on May 20, 2020 at [https://www.bamboohr.com/Maurer,Roy."Onboarding%20Key%20to%20Retaining,%20Engaging%20Talent."](https://www.bamboohr.com/Maurer,Roy.) April 16, 2015. Accessed on May 20, 2020 at <https://www.shrm.org/>
4. Maurer, Roy. "Onboarding Key to Retaining, Engaging Talent." April 16, 2015. Accessed on May 20, 2020 at <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/onboarding-key-retaining-engaging-talent.aspx>

Where to Start

There is a basic misconception that onboarding responsibilities rest solely with HR. While HR may head and coordinate a program, hiring managers play a critical role in carrying out the work. Employees typically leave an organization because of poor management. Essentially, they leave the people, not the organization. It's important that hiring managers clearly define roles and expectations on everything from projects and requests to communication methods. These simple tasks can make a big difference in performance outcomes and voluntary turnover.

Whether you're starting from scratch or overhauling an existing onboarding program, taking the initial steps can be a challenge. It may be a lot of work upfront, but the long-term performance outcomes are worth the effort. Here are a few simple tips to consider:

- 1. Ask for input.** Planning and implementing a new employee onboarding program takes time and input from various departments. Be sure to obtain feedback from department managers and recent new hires. Ask them what they think could improve the onboarding process. Establish which manager / new hire conversations need to be included in the program. Onboarding programs are most successful when managers see the value in the process, so it's crucial to get them invested.
- 2. Prepare, prepare and prepare some more.** Avoid making new employees feel like they were unexpected. Organize workspaces and test technology. Create an onboarding road map or checklist for their first few months (length of onboarding may vary by role and industry). Include training dates and deadlines, meetings and activities.
- 3. Emphasize the little things.** Greet new hires at a planned location and on time. Send new hire announcements so your staff can help welcome them. Arrange welcome packages or gifts to acknowledge the significance of the day and make sure you spell their names correctly. Incorrect spelling can be quite off-putting. Schedule a lunch with the new hire's team.
- 4. Leverage technology.** Before their start date, e-mail as much new hire information as you can while remaining compliant. At a minimum, send the company dress code, parking instructions and their schedule. Avoid information overload on day one. Consider what can wait until the end of week one, month one, etc. Use e-learning when applicable. Many people engage better with videos as opposed to lengthy black and white documents.
- 5. Check in.** It's easy to get caught up in work, so establish regular check-ins. Ask for feedback. Give new hires someone to look to for guidance or advice, whether through an informal or formal buddy / mentor system.

Pandemic Pushes in New Normal

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to disrupt the workforce, we realize that onboarding has become more complex and challenging. Many HR professionals are having to rely heavily on virtual interviews and meetings, e-verify and more. But the importance of onboarding remains the same. While social distancing and stay-at-home restrictions apply, the five tips provided above may still be implemented. Substitute welcome packages with e-Cards or individualized welcome PowerPoints. Replace team lunches with virtual coffee sessions. Utilize e-learning to satisfy mandatory trainings. Leverage the digital world when completing I-9 forms or other onboarding documents. For the time being, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has deferred requirements for I-9 forms to be evaluated in person.⁵

Now is your time to exercise creativity and improvise to the best of your ability. With so much uncertainty and lack of research to fall back on, HR professionals need feedback from new employees during this unusual time. Rely on this feedback, as well as guidance from regulatory officials to strategize for what could be the new normal.

TAKE ACTION

Evaluate your employee onboarding program. If you see room for improvement but lack the time and / or resources to fix it, contact our HR Consulting Team. Our professionals will help you revive your program and ensure compliance. This investment can pay dividends for years to come with reduced turnover, higher engagement and better overall performance.

5. "Completing Form I-9 for Remote Workers." SHRM website. Accessed on May 20, 2020 at <https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/tools-and-samples/exreg/Pages/Details.aspx?Erid=1536>