

4

ONBOARDING NEW TECHNOLOGY TALENT

WHITE PAPER

In this chapter, we highlight the keys to a successful new employee onboarding program. Included is helpful background information, research findings, and suggestions geared toward providing you with the tools you need to get your new talent up to speed and making positive contributions to your organization quickly.

4 ONBOARDING NEW TECHNOLOGY TALENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ONBOARDING NEW TECH TALENT

Make Sure Workspaces are Fully-Functional

Avoid Overwhelming the Candidate with Paperwork

Explain Why You Hired the Person

Describe What Sets the Company Apart

Map the Internal Customers the New Employee will Support

Explain the Inner-Workings of Your Department

Introduce the Team

Establish Concrete, Immediate Goals

Provide Immediate Feedback

MOTIVATING NEW EMPLOYEES

Provide Something to Believe In

Empower the New Hire

Incorporate Work Assignment Variety

Establish Long-Term Goals

Embrace Gamification

Proactively Ask Questions

Assign A Mentor

Recognize Hard Work

Keep Personal Concerns to Yourself

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assimilating a new hire, motivating him or her to do their best work over the long-term, then keeping the person as an employee once they become a high-value contributor, are all responsibilities that you, the hiring manager, must manage. It's a tall order to be sure. But with the right approach, success is well within your means. In most cases, the "right approach" is usually one that requires you to assess (via a one-on-one interview) the key members of your IT team on an individual basis to determine what it is they need to be productive and committed.

In this chapter, we highlight the key intervention points, offer helpful background information and the latest research findings, plus suggest initiatives that are the most likely to produce the desired results. Those range from the super-simple (providing a fully-functional workstation prior to the new hire's arrival) to ideas that are still being vetted by industry leaders (like the use of motivational gaming, and the controversial concept of offering raises several times a year).

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for these employee-management challenges, and we're honest about that fact. But tailoring the included suggestions to your unique situation is how the best managers get the best performance from their IT teams.



ONBOARDING NEW TECH TALENT

AS A TECHNOLOGY MANAGER, IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS THAT WILL HELP NEW HIRES CONTRIBUTE IN MEANINGFUL WAYS. AS BUSY AS YOU AND YOUR CO-WORKERS ARE, IT'S GOING TO TAKE TIME AND EFFORT TO BRING THE NEW PERSON UP TO SPEED. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME KEY STEPS TO HELP EXPEDITE THIS PROCESS AND PROVIDE NEW HIRES WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A MORE IMMEDIATE, POSITIVE IMPACT.

ONBOARDING A NEW HIRE

The internal pressure for a new hire to begin contributing right away is almost always very high. The need for someone with those skills was there even before the job was posted. While the search was progressing and the interviews were taking place, even more projects were flagged “for the new person.” And now that the person is finally on-site, with no commitments to speak of, just about everyone in the department has a “special project” for them.

In reality, it's your responsibility to create the conditions that will help the person contribute in meaningful ways.

As the manager of that new hire, the easiest thing to do is turn the new employee loose and let them learn in real-time. It's the “sink or swim” approach. Deep down, however, we all know that making someone learn the hard way is not the best way – even if the person was hired for their ability to “hit the ground running.” In reality, it's your responsibility to create the conditions that will help the person contribute in meaningful ways. As busy as you and your co-workers are, it's going to take time and effort to bring the new person up to speed. They need time to acclimate.

While it can be argued that employees are responsible for their own productivity, the new employee is in a unique situation. This is a person working at a distinct disadvantage. A new hire may very well have the necessary experience, job skills, and even existing knowledge of your industry, but they don't know your company's culture, your department's work style, the processes co-workers use, the employee reporting structure and much more. Those are the things you need to help this new addition adjust to.

It all starts on day-one, when new employees are most prone to learning the wrong way to do something (behaviors that could lead to costly mistakes, and are almost always more difficult to unlearn later). Included below is a 9-step plan for a successful new hire onboarding program:

1. Make Sure the New Hire's Workspace is Fully-Functional

If you want the newest member of your team to start contributing right away, make sure their workspace is fully functional a few days before they arrive. That includes computer, phone, office supplies, network access and more. Sit down and personally make sure these things are functioning before the new hire is on-site.

2. Avoid Overwhelming the Candidate with Paperwork on the First Day

The best way to deflate the enthusiasm of a new employee and distract them from learning is to push a big stack of new-employee paperwork in front of them on their first day. Instead, post this information online and provide the new hire with a link to it from a welcome email a week before they actually report for duty. That way, they can take the time to carefully review it, make decisions with their spouse, get questions answered, and show up for work with all that busy work out of the way. Once the new hire is on-site, take that opportunity to explain the unwritten rules, nuances and traditions (the things not included on the policy pages of the new-employee manual).

If most employees work 10-hour days during the week, and a seven-hour day on Friday, say so. If keeping a cluttered desk is frowned upon, explain that. If the CEO likes to pop in unexpectedly to see what people are working on, and you have some tips on how to best handle that, pass them along. Don't make the new person learn the hard way.

3. Explain Why You Hired the Person (and how they'll create value for the company)

Don't assume the new employee understands why you chose them – or has a grasp of exactly what it is that you want them to really focus on. That's just the kind of information that usually gets lost in the shuffle of interviews.

Be specific. Be honest. And narrow your comments to just two or three critical factors with a statement like, “We selected you for this position because you're a standout at A and B. And we're counting on you to use those skills not only to support C, but to also take the lead on D.”

If helpful, highlight the skills, experience and knowledge the new hire should be focusing on. Then, using the same clear and concise approach, explain how the person's role will create value for the company. For example, “As the [job title], you'll create a more direct link between A and B and, hopefully, decrease the time it takes for our department to

deliver the applications they're requesting." That kind of information not only makes the new person feel proud, it also clarifies their role and provides them with a sense of job security (a vital building block for immediate productivity).

4. Clearly Describe What Sets the Company Apart from Others in the Industry

After confirming what makes your new hire so special, take some time to explain what makes the company a standout. As a candidate, the person surely researched your company and its position in the industry. But it's up to you, the hiring manager, to set the record straight. Explain the company's value proposition, and the key advantage(s) it holds over competitors. Be clear and specific. Create a sense of excitement, and give the new hire something big to believe in.

5. Map the Internal Customers the New Employee will Support

No job exists in a vacuum; and your new hire needs to understand who it is they're supporting. Map out the new employee's internal and external customers (not on a white board, but rather on something the employee can refer back to time and again). And take the time to explain the role and importance of each of those customers so the new person can effectively prioritize projects when all those constituents are asking for things at the same time.

6. Explain the Inner-Workings of Your Department

While there are likely some aspects of your IT operations that could be considered standard practice across any company, chances are your organization has its own quirks, processes and nuances. For a newcomer, it is helpful to know of these details right up front, in order to address any confusion or frustration that may arise during a hectic development cycle. These specifics could cover software and platform versions, peer-review cycles, sprint schedules or coding approaches; but being transparent about such topics up front can help to minimize issues and discrepancies down the road.

7. Introduce the Team

The sooner you can start building interpersonal relationships between the new hire and existing team members, the easier it will be for the group to gel and increase productivity. Consider assigning a welcome mentor to make the introductions (someone who knows the team just as well as you, but has more time to make proper introductions). The person making the introductions should provide the following information for each member of the team:

- The person's job title and role in the department.
- The expertise and skills the person brings to the team. For example, "Jake is our resident QA ninja. Believe me, if there's a bug in the system, Jake will be the first to find it."

Most people are too humble to provide this information on their own. However, do ask each member of the team to also share a personal insight about themselves (a favorite hobby, a recent personal accomplishment, etc.), which gives the new hire an entrée they can use to break the ice in future interactions. If your team is made up of more than 15 people, consider posting headshots of each person, together with a summary of the information above, to an intranet site that all new hires can use to refresh their memory regarding who's who. Also consider posting the contact information for helpful resources from other departments.

SAMPLE: MEET THE TEAM



JANE JONES
Business Analyst
Specialties: Documentation, Microsoft
Vizio, Microsoft Project, Waterfall/Agile



DAVE CAMPBELL
Lead .NET Developer
Specialties: .NET, C#, MVC and
Entity Framework, SOA



TRACY SMITH
.NET Developer
Specialties: .NET, C#, JavaScript,
JSON, Web Services



GEORGE TAYLOR
QA Analyst
Specialties: SQL, HP LoadRunner,
HTML/XML/CSS

If there are opportunities for the new hire to network with coworkers outside of the office (sport teams, a favorite bar, etc.) pass that information along, as well. The more interaction there is, the easier it will be for the newest member of the team to assimilate the corporate culture and start building rapport.

8. Establish Concrete, Immediate Goals

Nothing makes a new employee feel more like a valued member of the team than showing up on their first day of work to find a roadmap of tasks and projects they can focus on in their first quarter, their first month, the first week, even that very first day.

Day one

After meeting co-workers, completing any final paperwork and learning the layout of the office, there won't be much time left. However, if you can think of a task that can be accomplished in a few hours, it's a great way to get them contributing – and feeling more at ease – right away.

Week one and beyond

Any manager can toss hot projects at the new guy on an as-needed basis. However, a manager who truly wants to encourage success will create a project roadmap, a list of projects the new-hire will be expected to complete in their first week, month and quarter. Ideally, this roadmap will not only tackle necessary tasks, but also, ultimately, provide the new associate with the engagement they need to learn their new role and interact with key co-workers and customers.

Embed training

For the first few weeks, try to make each day a mix of training and accomplishment by breaking large tasks into manageable learnings. That way, the new person is always learning, and always producing.

9. Start Providing Feedback Right Away

Feedback is key for a new employee. Eager to please, they want to know when they're doing well, and when things could be better. Try to provide small course corrections ("Next time, let me review your expenses before you turn them in to Accounting.") and compliments ("I understand your presentation was a big hit today.") on a daily basis. Then, at the end of the first week, have a sit-down discussion with the new hire. Ask for their honest feedback, and provide your own observations, advice and criticism.

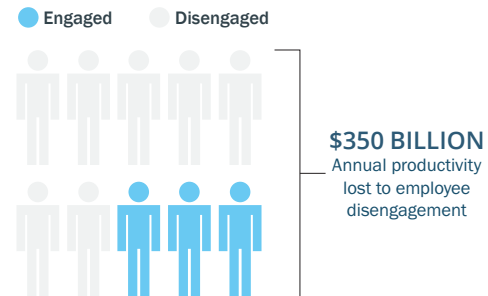
In these situations, providing compliments comes easily for most managers, while criticism is more difficult. The best criticism is direct, honest and constructive. Don't beat around the bush. Make clear what didn't work, provide your opinion why, and make clear how you would like things handled differently next time.

After three weeks, provide your recruiter or staffing partner with an update. Let them know the specific areas where the new employee is meeting or exceeding expectations, as well as the areas where they are falling short. Honest, on-the-job feedback is the only way staffers can evaluate the processes and research used to recruit candidates. Target sometime around day 45 for a formal, written review that will go in the new hire's employment file.

MOTIVATING A NEW EMPLOYEE

There's more to employee motivation than encouraging a worker to come to work on a regular basis and complete their assigned projects on time. It's about creating conditions that will help the employee do their best work; finding new ways to increase that person's productivity; improving the quality of their work; and encouraging behavior that contributes to the success of everyone on the team.

Better still, the facts demonstrate that when employees are truly feeling motivated, the company directly benefits where it matters most: the bottom line. According to a seven-year study of 841 leading corporations, and 3,490 of their employees, when employee motivation improves, the company's stock delivers higher returns the following year – a finding that holds true regardless of whether economic conditions are good or bad. The opposite has also been found to be true: A more recent Gallup survey estimated that the U.S. economy is losing \$350 billion annually in lost productivity because 70% of American employees are not engaged in their jobs.



While no single team-building exercise or motivational activity can be counted upon to inspire dramatically improved performance, managers who use the following incentives can certainly create an environment where motivation thrives – for both the new hire as well as tenured employees.

GIVE THEM SOMETHING BIG TO BELIEVE IN

While many motivators are job-specific, it's essential that the worker also have something bigger to believe in. A mission statement could suffice, but often a vision statement from the CEO is more directional and less platitudinous. For example, Google uses a list of "Ten Things We Know to be True" to inspire its employees, while online shoe retailer Zappos uses a similarly unorthodox yet inspirational list that it refers to as its "10 Core Values":



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| • Focus on the user and all else will follow. | • Deliver WOW through service. |
| • It's best to do one thing really, really well. | • Embrace and drive change. |
| • Fast is better than slow. | • Create fun and a little weirdness. |
| • Democracy on the web works. | • Be adventurous, creative, and open-minded. |
| • You don't need to be at your desk to need an answer. | • Pursue growth and learning. |
| • You can make money without doing evil. | • Build open and honest relationships with communication. |
| • There's always more information out there. | • Build a positive team and family spirit. |
| • The need for information crosses all borders. | • Do more with less. |
| • You can be serious without a suit. | • Be passionate and determined. |
| • Great just isn't good enough. | • Be humble. |

EMPOWER THE NEW HIRE (GIVE THEM AUTONOMY)

Another motivator for most employees is the manager-sanctioned freedom to take the lead and try out some ideas on their own. To try and develop a new, more efficient process, for example ... or, to simply make more decisions instead of always taking directions ... in other words, to act more like a company principal, or even the owner. Of course, new employees need to spend at least a few months in a position before being allowed to take on such responsibility. But more experienced team members should be encouraged to take charge and have ownership of the outcomes.

Hold them accountable and demand regular feedback. But understand that mistakes will occur. In today's dynamic workplaces, ordering employees around like a drill sergeant is counterproductive – while providing these subject experts with more power and autonomy can often deliver far better outcomes.

INCORPORATE ASSIGNMENT VARIETY

It should come as no surprise that employees who are assigned interesting projects typically report that they are more engaged and motivated. Unfortunately, not every IT manager has enough of those kind of projects to go around – which is why many managers alternate responsibilities and roles on a rotating basis, allowing employees to spend a cross-section of time in various types of project work.

ESTABLISH LONG-TERM GOALS FOR EACH EMPLOYEE

It's not just new employees who want to know that there's a long-term plan for them at the company. Existing employees are also motivated by the promise of job security this kind of thinking promotes. This is especially important in the world of IT, where the constant whirl of programs, processes and technologies drive even the most experienced of employees to distraction with feelings that their time is limited.

Sit down with each employee in your department and have a conversation about what the person wants from their job and career, and how they envision both developing in the next two to five years. Then use that information to help the employee establish the necessary goals. Show them the path, and fill in the details about how they can traverse it. If advancement requires a degree, tell them about tuition assistance or scholarships the company may offer. A clear path of progression is a very powerful motivator.

LEVERAGE THE NEW GAMING APPLICATIONS

In an attempt to relieve managers of those additional responsibilities (and to make programs more metric-based), some companies have turned to digital gaming. Typically, these programs allow employees to earn points or badges for completing jobs or meeting deadlines. To leverage the element of competition, a leaderboard can be used, which lets participants compare their performance to their peers.

- Employees at global consulting firm Deloitte earn virtual badges after completing training courses and “unlock” more complex courses when completed.
- SAP uses games to assign sales leads, as well as to encourage model-employee actions, like carpooling.
- IBM has incorporated a number of digital games into its training and motivation programs.

According to Wired magazine, these games “stimulate the same universal motivators that keep people playing video games: the desire to have control, to improve, to make a difference, to progress and achieve, and to connect with others. As it happens, tapping into these drivers is essential not only to creating successful video game experiences, but successful workplace cultures as well.” However, experts

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

Face-to-face meetings are where true communication happens. Phone calls, video conferences, instant messages and emails have their place, but when it comes to motivation, face-time is the real differentiator.

Make it easy for team members to ask questions of you, and be honest with them. Honesty encourages loyalty, which is a great motivator in times of need.

Approach team members frequently with “I need your help.” Soliciting input is a sure-fire way to engage.

Intercept rumors immediately, and provide employees with facts as soon as possible. Unsubstantiated concerns are distractions that can quickly lower productivity.

Good communicators listen actively (and make others feel valued as a result).

warn that there are potential downsides: You need to ensure the game is teaching desired behaviors, not just doling out meaningless rewards; response to the game needs to be monitored to ensure it isn't creating animosity; and, of managers still need to manage employee performance.

JUST ASK

No matter how creative and well-considered you think your motivation program is, it's what your team thinks that matters most. That's why it's important to survey them – especially new employees – about their personal preferences. The best method is also the simplest: Just ask, "What motivates you to do your best work," then actively listen.

ASSIGN A MENTOR

Not everyone is going to be motivated by your management style. Instead of letting that frustrate you, accept it and match the person with a mentor... a superior or peer who can make a better connection with the employee, model your desired behavior, and inspire the person to be their best. A mentoring circle (a collection of people the employee can call on for advice and inspiration) provides multiple points

of support, and helps ensure someone is always available to work with the person. The circle can bridge business units as well as geographies.

PRAISE AND RECOGNIZE HARD WORK

Studies consistently show that one of the best ways to motivate an employee is also one of the simplest and least expensive: take the time to personally recognize and praise the employee when they accomplish good things. No celebratory outing is necessary. Just let the person know that you're aware of their positive performance and you appreciate it very much. A face-to-face conversation works best for this. A handwritten note is an added bonus.

KEEP YOUR OWN CONCERNS TO YOURSELF

As a manager, one of your jobs is to model good behavior. When you're motivated and working hard, those you manage see that they need to do likewise. Unfortunately, it works the same when you're unmotivated or distracted. That's why it's so important that you keep personal feelings, concerns and distractions private. The less your team knows about those things, the less they'll be impacted by them.

CONCLUSION

Effective new employee onboarding is critical, to be sure, but the key to employee retention extends far beyond the first few weeks and months. In our next chapter, we'll dive into the heart of employee retention, and provide information to help ensure that your top performers are positioned to contribute to your organization long term.

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