

Three Must-Have Onboarding Elements for New and Relocated Employees



Your company's success is tied to the quality of its workforce. So, like most HR professionals, you invest countless hours in recruiting, hiring, and sometimes relocating the cream of the crop—promising employees with the talent and experience to take your organization into the future. But sometimes the future comes more quickly than you expected. For some reason, a significant number of new hires may exit the company within a period of months, leaving you to wonder what went awry. Are you hiring the wrong people? It's possible, but it's more likely that you haven't invested enough energy and focus in the onboarding process. Instead of trying to save exiting employees after they have made the decision to leave, a more effective way to reduce turnover is to consider how you can help your new and relocating employees overcome the initial challenges they will face when they join your workforce.

WHY THE ONBOARDING PROCESS IS IMPORTANT

If you think happy and engaged employees just happen, you couldn't be more wrong. The development of a truly satisfied and engaged workforce begins with a comprehensive onboarding process.

By now, most employers understand that the onboarding process needs to be more

substantive than filling out some forms and taking a 30-minute, whirlwind tour of the employee handbook. Relatively few employers, however, approach the onboarding stage as a critical part of their firms' employee retention strategies.

A robust onboarding process represents a key milestone in the employee journey, especially for employees who are relocating to work for your organization. Why? Although all new employees have to overcome several important hurdles as they transition into your organization, those challenges can be even more daunting for employees who are relocating as well:

- ❑ *Logistics.* New employees have to make several critical decisions as they transition to your company's workforce. For instance, they usually need to sell their homes, secure new housing, move their furnishings, and deal with any number of personal matters during the transition.
- ❑ *New geography.* Relocating employees may need to become familiar with a new city or geographic region. Initially, they may struggle to find local grocery stores and restaurants, suitable health-care providers, and other services with which locals are familiar.
- ❑ *Family issues.* A job-based relocation affects not only the transferee but also the family. In addition to finding new jobs

and schools, family members will want to develop new social and professional networks. Given the scope of these challenges, it's not surprising that the failure rate for executive hires is nearly 50 percent, largely due to personal or family dissatisfaction with the new situation.

- ❑ *Time of heightened anxiety.* All new hires have a host of questions and concerns related to their new jobs. Most experience some anxiety, but this may be heightened when it comes to transferees. Although these concerns build toward that all-important first day, they begin the moment the new hire accepts the employment offer and begins planning the relocation.

Most new hires have never before had to relocate for a job. Those who have done so probably haven't done it in at least five years. So, for the majority of relocating employees, the move to a new city is a major life event and the source of significant stress. Whether you like it or not, that relocated employee's ultimate perceived job satisfaction may be built on the success or failure of his or her transition to a new city.

Also, the onboarding needs of a relocating new hire can vary, based on the complexity of the relocation. For example, new hires who are moving to an international destination will require much more assistance than those who are relocating in-country. For these long-distance moves, it's even more important to provide a comprehensive onboarding process and a robust mobile relocation services technology.

But relocating employees aren't the only workers who require an effective onboarding process. By developing a more structured approach to onboarding, you can improve the

overall satisfaction and retention for all your new hires.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ONBOARDING PROCESS

Token attempts at onboarding will never mitigate the risk of high turnover rates and premature loss of key hires. To be effective, your onboarding process has to be:

- ❑ *Strategic.* Onboarding needs to be a strategic resource for your organization, not another item on the HR team's to-do list. When it's supported by ample planning and is incorporated into the organization's larger business strategy, the onboarding process has the potential to serve as a pillar for organizational growth.
- ❑ *Comprehensive.* Onboarding isn't a one-time event; it's a process that persists through all the early stages of an employee's journey. Even more, it's an investment in workers that helps them become more productive and more satisfied members of your organization. The more you invest in onboarding, the larger its return for your company.
- ❑ *Consistent.* Onboarding needs to be consistently applied to every new hire. Likewise, the level of attention needs to be maintained throughout the process, thereby ensuring that onboarding delivers maximum benefits to the organization and its employees.
- ❑ *Measured.* Like every other mission-critical process in your organization, onboarding should be monitored, evaluated, and measured regularly, with an eye toward constant improvement. By soliciting feedback from new employees and developing quantitative measurements, you can judge

the impact of the onboarding process and increase its success over time.

Employee turnover costs your organization time and money. Unfortunately, retention rates are plummeting today, especially among the younger generations of workers. According to UrbanBound research, 91 percent of millennials expect to stay in a job for less than three years—a statistic that can destroy your ability to develop a first-class workforce.

For today's organizations, a robust onboarding process isn't just a good idea—it's a fundamental requirement for business growth and sustainability.

Onboarding can reduce turnover, however, by setting the stage for a more satisfying work experience. For today's organizations, a robust onboarding process isn't just a good idea—it's a fundamental requirement for business growth and sustainability.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING

When done well, onboarding combines strategy, consistency, and other priorities to create a cohesive, structured process. The onboarding process needs to be documented and repeatable, of course. Reinventing the wheel every time a new employee joins the team only jeopardizes the HR and business goals you could potentially achieve with a well-thought-out onboarding process.

Although details of any onboarding process vary, based on your business's unique requirements, as well as those of your employees, several components should be part of every onboarding process. These elements improve employee satisfaction by

making it easier for new and relocating workers to join the company.

Initial Resources

The onboarding process begins the moment the individual accepts your company's employment offer. The gap between the employment decision and the first day of work is a critical time because the weeks leading up to that first day are filled with stress and uncertainty.

For example, the person might wonder: *What are the workplace routines? Is there someone who helps coordinate relocation details? What is the office dress code?* If these and countless other questions aren't answered at the start, the ambiguity can create a negative impression that persists through the employee's stay with your company. Because many incoming employees are hesitant to ask too many questions, the burden for anticipating and responding to these questions falls on your organization.

To lay the foundation for a successful first day (and beyond), provide a portfolio of initial resources that are available to employees after they have committed to work for your organization, and organize information for new hires so that it will be easily accessible. For instance:

- ❑ *Centralize the useful information.* New hires shouldn't have to hunt for the information they need. To make the transition process more convenient, aggregate all job-related information in a central (and preferably digital) location. It can be an internal wiki page, a section in your relocation software, or another online location easily accessed by incoming employees.

- ❑ *Communicate the timeline.* Provide a timeline of expectations and events leading up to the first day. The timeline should include information about when to expect to hear from your company and anything individuals should do to prepare for their new roles. By providing a clearly developed timeline, you can minimize the anxiety that new hires experience when they don't know what to expect.
- ❑ *Offer a web-based relocation platform.* It's not enough simply to cover the cost of relocation expenses for new hires. More than ever, professionals expect their new employers to provide tangible assistance in making the move. Provide a web-based relocation platform that gives incoming employees direct access to relocation guides, checklists, calculators, and other resources. These tools will equip the relocating employees with the information they need, while drastically minimizing the burden on the HR team.
- ❑ *Make preliminary introductions.* Facilitate e-mail introductions with supervisors and coworkers prior to the first day. Ideally, these introductions can result in conversations that pave the way for a successful first day and make it easier for the new hires to hit the ground running.

Gathering all the initial onboarding information and assembling the resources can

To streamline the process and improve the accuracy of information, ask your current employees to identify the things they wished they had known before their first day.

be a daunting job, even for HR veterans. To streamline the process and improve the accuracy of information, ask your current

employees to identify the things they wished they had known before their first day. This information can then be used to populate your centralized information resource and to create FAQ resources for the onboarding endeavors.

First-Day Routines

The first day in any workplace is a milestone. It's critical for the employee, but it's just as important for your company. Like it or not, the impression your organization makes on that first day will influence an employee's perception of the company over the next several months.

Your goal should be to make that first day as pleasant and as memorable as possible. And believe it or not, that may mean going against your instincts and not requiring employees to fill out paperwork on the first day. There will be plenty of time to handle administrative details later. Instead:

- ❑ *Be prepared.* There's no excuse for not being prepared for the new hire. The employee's network login, e-mail, and other information technology (IT) accounts should be active, and his or her desk should be tidy and stocked with supplies. Another nice touch is to have a small basket of branded items (e.g., a coffee mug or a water bottle) waiting at the desk.
- ❑ *Encourage organic conversations.* Look for creative ways to encourage natural, organic conversations between the new hire and your employees. In addition to making sure current employees understand the new hire's role, consider providing your staff with interesting tidbits about the new person, which will help them initiate conversations.

- ❑ *Prepare a list of work assignments.* It's important to help new hires hit the ground running. Although you don't want to overwhelm them with a long list of tasks, a short assignments list will incorporate new hires into your workflow and help give them a sense of accomplishment at the end of that first day.
- ❑ *Go out for lunch.* A casual lunch with team members is an ideal way to build relationships. It's also an effective way to introduce new team members to the local eateries and other resources in close proximity to the workplace.

The first day on the job is a big event for new hires, but also for the families, especially if they're relocating. If possible, include the family members in the first-day routine by sending a gift basket, flowers, or even just a card. The few minutes it takes to personalize a note will communicate volumes about your company—assuring the family that you are concerned about their happiness and satisfaction as well.

The Next Three Months

Effective onboarding doesn't end on the new employee's first day. In fact, some of the most important dimensions of the onboarding process occur during the next 90 days.

HR needs to provide the individuals with the information and tools for adapting to the new situation, while at the same time encouraging them to quickly ramp up productivity in their new roles.

During these initial three months, the recently hired employees will be acclimating to the new job, new colleagues, and possibly

a new city. During this stage, HR needs to provide the individuals with the information and tools for adapting to the new situation, while at the same time encouraging them to quickly ramp up productivity in their new roles. Here's how you can do this:

- ❑ *Develop a 90-day plan.* During the first three months, new employees will develop the behaviors and habits that will help them succeed in the long run. To facilitate this process, create a 90-day plan with measurable, role-specific, attainable goals. These goals will provide new hires with a benchmark against which they can gauge their performance.
- ❑ *Provide hyperlocal information.* Hyperlocal information is information that new hires can't easily find with an Internet search. It's hidden tips and insights that can be uncovered only by living in your city. Survey your employees for these insider tips on food, transportation, and other matters, and then compile it in a digestible format for the new hires. This hyperlocal information will help relocated employees settle into their new location.
- ❑ *Offer and receive feedback.* Near the end of the first 90 days, schedule a time for obtaining feedback from new employees. Listen as much (or even more) than you talk, and use it as an opportunity to discover what new hires like or dislike about their jobs, and consider how you can help them overcome any challenges they face.

Despite your best efforts, serious issues may crop up beyond those first 90 days. An employee may be dissatisfied with the new job or dislike the new city; he or she might feel it's a struggle to integrate into your organization. In nearly all instances, you

can address these issues by communicating openly with the employee and identifying an action plan to resolve the problem.

Although development of a strategic onboarding program doesn't happen overnight, businesses and HR departments

can improve their onboarding processes if employee retention is indeed a priority. By reenvisioning the onboarding process as a prerequisite for growth, you can lay the groundwork for a more satisfied workforce and overall business success.

Michael Krasman is cofounder and CEO of UrbanBound (www.urbanbound.com), a relocation management software provider reshaping the way employers offer and administer relocation benefits to their employees. A serial entrepreneur who has cofounded five high-growth businesses, he has spent the past 15 years at the crossroads of technology and human resources. He is also a cofounder and board director of Hireology. He is past president of the Chicago chapter of the Entrepreneur's Organization.