ONBOARDING FOR SUCCESS

Best practices for long-term sustainable results

A progressive, human-centered design approach to onboarding new employees

So, you've recruited a senior leader, hired a new manager, built a new department, hired a new cohort of co-op students. One thing remains the same, no matter the experience level, life stage or personal attributes of new hires, they are all human beings with needs, fears and aspirations. The need for connection, the desire to fit in and establish relationships, and to grasp the company's culture, or "*how things are done around here*" – from its purpose, mission and values, to how the company and its departments operate – are important requisites of all new hires. On a personal level, the need to understand expectations, fulfill the role's responsibilities and make an impact are basic elements to feeling rewarded.

Beginning a new job is a unique and personal decision based on many factors and is often cited as one of life's top stressors. Organizations have a personal responsibility to properly onboard new employees, an often-overlooked function. It starts with involving people in the process. No matter what level of maturity an organization's onboarding program is in, continuous participation by employees is necessary to evolve an existing program or create a new one. Employee feedback can help inspire ideas that will improve processes and experiences that will positively impact people and culture.

The relationship between customer brand and employer brand, customer experience and employee experience, rooted in the common purpose, needs to be considered. Organizations that get the co-dependency between the two are much further ahead, ensuring values are demonstrated and brand promise experienced, not just stated, during onboarding. This sets the foundation for positive employee experiences during the employee lifecycle and in turn, enhances customer service delivery.

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Don't forget about pre-boarding. Many companies are beginning to include orientation processes prior to day one. Employees will appreciate some pre-reading and paperwork completion before their first day, making the first day less burdening. With more and more technologies available in the HRIS ecosystem, it's important to keep in mind that while technology can automate simple, routine tasks during pre/onboarding, human connection is still key.

Prior to scaling or operationalizing a company-wide program, it's a smart idea to test and learn a pilot with a smaller sample size, either in a specific location or function. This allows the opportunity to catch gaps and incorporate learnings along the way. It requires program evaluations, qualitative and quantitative research, coupled with HR business intelligence metrics. While it does add more time, it's a much more cost effective and efficient solution in the long-term, especially in our digital era.

Developing a new program or evolving an existing program needs to be grounded in fact-based data – realistic objectives and measurable key performance indicators, with systems and resources in place to track metrics and report on progress over time. Given the financial investment of recruiting and training new employees, and the financial deficit of attrition, onboarding needs to be a priority. The investment in a strategic, employee-focused onboarding program will pay dividends in the individual's success and the company's business results. The metrics speak for themselves:

8 MONTHS	**33-66%**	**100-300%**
AVG TIME TO FULL PRODUCTIVITY (Source: OC Tanner)	**EMPLOYEES LEAVE IN FIRST YEAR** (Source: Gallop)	**OF ANNUAL SALARY TO REPLACE EMPLOYEE** (Source: SHRM)

In a tight labour market, companies across different industries are competing for the same talent, offering more choices for candidates than ever before. An organization's reputation travels fast, and it starts with first impressions. Onboarding is an opportunity to welcome employees into the employer community and help reinforce why they joined in the first place. The first 30-60-90 days is a critical time period where employees make the decision to leave or stay.

Onboarding, or *organizational socialization*, integrates new employees into an organization's culture with the necessary knowledge, skills, connections and behaviours that lead to positive outcomes:

- higher job satisfaction – contentment, positive emotional state, job level/company level
- better job performance – personal and team goals to meet or exceed company goals
- greater organizational commitment – psychological attachment, citizenship, empowerment
- reduced occupational stress – coping mechanisms, alignment of responsibilities or pressures based on skills, knowledge and expectations
- reduced turnover – job abandonment, no shows, early exits
- increased manager effectiveness – engagement, retention, promotions
- increased support structures – connections, team building, relationships
- higher employee net promoter score (eNPS) – recommend employer to friends and family

Follow these *6 best practices* to create and implement a highly relevant and beneficial onboarding program for long-term, sustainable success:

BASICS

Often overlooked, the fundamentals or "housekeeping" items are some of the simplest items to institute in an onboarding program. From parking, security protocols, lock-up procedures, to nearby amenities, kitchen use and washroom locations, technology and web conference tools, to health and safety procedures, keep "back to basics" top of mind. Make it easy for employees to navigate the work environment with ease.

BUDDY/COACH

A buddy or mentor during the first 30-60 days can drastically reduce new hire anxiety and increase proficiency. It provides an opportunity for new employees to connect with a tenured employee who knows the ins and outs, a confidant other than a direct supervisor. Job shadowing is also an effective means for new hires to learn the ropes, given most adult learning happens through on-the-job experiences versus formal in-classroom training. Some companies have even implemented onboarding coaches.

CONNECTION

Provide a forum and activities for new hires to get to know each other, and more tenured employees and leaders, on a personal level. Strong emotional bonds and personal connections created in the early days help people feel more comfortable, increase collaboration, confidence and productivity. Friendships at work can play a large role in an employee's overall job satisfaction.

*Gallop's research indicates **88%** of employees say their company does not provide a good onboarding program.*

CONTINUOUS

Onboarding isn't a one-day event and isn't orientation, solely focused on forms, benefits election, payroll set-up and systems set-up. Some organizations consider onboarding the first week, others the first 90 days, and more progressive companies the first year. Whatever the duration, onboarding needs to be a continuous journey, deliberately designed based on each company's uniqueness, role-type and employee-specific needs, with regular check-ins by the manager.
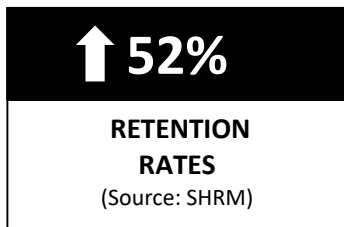
CROSS-BOARDING

Training new hires only on their role and responsibilities can create tunnel vision and lead to silos. Providing cross-functional training across departments and business units in the early days provides employees with a broad understanding of the business, leading to a greater appreciation for those on the front-lines or those in the back-office, and the unique role everyone holds in the company to help meet business goals.

PERSONALIZATION

While culture, values and policies are foundational for all new hires to know, it's important to personalize the experience based on role and individual. For example, hourly workers in retail require different training than a director in technology, a leader without previous leadership experience requires different support than a seasoned leader. And let's not forget about trainers or session facilitators – program components should be customized for each delivery role as well.

Not convinced? When onboarding is done effectively, the metrics speak for themselves:

↑ 52%	↓ 60%	↑ 53%
RETENTION RATES	**TIME TO PRODUCTIVITY**	**OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**
(Source: SHRM)	(Source: SHRM)	(Source: SHRM)

Orientation vs Onboarding

Orientation is a part of onboarding and shouldn't be considered the sole means to induct new employees into a company. A quick refresher on the differences:

ORIENTATION		ONBOARDING
Moment-in-time / Several Days	**DURATION**	Continuous / Up to a Year
Transactional, Functional & Operational	**APPROACH**	Relational, Emotional & Strategic
Jammed on First Day	**PAPERWORK**	Streamlined in Pre-Boarding
Handbook of Policies and Procedures	**POLICIES**	Experiential & Engaging Induction
One-size Fits All	**DESIGN**	Personalized to Role and Individual
Figure it Out	**SUPPORT**	Coaching, Mentoring
Learn Job Expectations	**JOB LEARNING**	Immersive on-the-job Experiences

ABOUT ML6

ML6 is a talent advisory and recruitment firm providing customized talent solutions to help build *extraordinary employer communities*. We help our clients manage change and drive growth through people – from advising on people processes and practices to hiring. **Our services include:**

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- Employer Branding
- Talent Acquisition Optimization
- Talent Management

Search
- Executive
- Retained
- Contingency

Pique your interest? If you would like to schedule a meeting to discuss an audit of your current program and metrics, or would like more information on building an employee-centered onboarding experience, contact:

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