

The importance of effective onboarding



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Many organizations have a formalized onboarding process to help employees adjust to their new environment and function. Yet, personal experience has identified areas where these onboarding practices could be enhanced. Human Resources (HR) plays an important role in ensuring that employees' paperwork is done, they have signed up for benefits and have received a briefing regarding the overall business direction. HR may even co-ordinate a more detailed plan and agenda for the initial weeks or months to confirm that all the right people are set up to meet the new hire and that the manager has a specific plan; but onboarding shouldn't end there.

Although there is a great deal of information exchanged during the recruitment process, there will still be an incomplete picture of the business: its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; the vision and values that exist, the strategies that will deliver on the vision and how people can succeed. A new employee will build their credibility by understanding the issues, solving these problems quickly and having a few quick wins.

How do you set them up for success and gain engagement right from the first day of employment? The most obvious would be a great deal of involvement with their manager. The first step for a manager is to set up one-on-ones at the end of each day during their first week. After that, the discussions can be spread out to once a week and should continue over

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the course of their first three months. Also, it is critical to explain and review the company's performance appraisal form and/or system. This is often neglected but is very important as it helps the new employee understand your performance expectations in order to ensure they are aligned to the role and objectives.

The second key to engagement and success is the importance of assigning a buddy. For employees who have been with the organization for a longer period of time, most of what they do, who they speak to or how they interact has been well established. For the new person, there is no context. They do not know who the relevant stakeholders are or how to navigate the matrix of different organizations. The buddy can shed light on what cultural norms exist and let the new hire know about any unspoken rules, both of which will lead to a much smoother transition.

When an organization fills a position, they have satisfied their need for a certain skillset, but soon after want to see a return on investment. Meanwhile, the new hire is likely experiencing a level of tension related to their ability to ramp up quickly, while learning what is critical for them to accomplish in their job. Having a buddy to turn to, who provides understanding and context, will speed up their ability to contribute.

Thirdly, an understanding of how the new employee's role fits within the company is important. This will help them gain greater awareness of the big picture and context and enable them to add value sooner.

Finally, are you asking your current employees, after six months in the role, what worked well for them? They are the best barometer for understanding their level of engagement, and of what went well and what could have been done better. With the changing of demographics and shifting in attitudes, the onboarding process can never be a static situation and should be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

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