

Onboarding and Engaging New Employees

Onboarding is the process of helping new employees become full contributors to the institution. During onboarding, new employees evolve from institutional outsiders to institutional insiders. The process of onboarding and engaging new employees is important because it helps create connections with the institution which can result in higher productivity, satisfaction, and retention.

The first six months on the job are critical, because new employees are forming impressions that will have a lasting impact on whether they stay with the institution. New employees want to confirm they made the right decision to join our organization, but often experience anxiety and discomfort when they find things are different than expected. To address new employees' concerns, we can take steps to help them learn about their job, manager, team and college. This document describes four opportunities for onboarding and engaging employees:

- Orientation
- Conversations with New Employees
- Coaching/Mentoring/Tutoring
- New Leader Integration

The onboarding process begins when initial contact is made between a prospective new employee and the institution. An individual starts to form first impressions during the interview process. This overview, however, assumes that the individual has already been hired. It is designed to provide guidance from the first day of employment through the time when the employee is deemed a full contributor to the institution.

Institutional leaders must view the onboarding process as important for retaining top talent and should be committed to developing onboarding strategies.

Onboarding is difficult and time-consuming for everyone! Employees often experience a wide range of emotions. Going through so many "firsts" is challenging because new employees lack the context of, and history with, the institution. It is important for new hires to be aware of this so that they don't feel overwhelmed and frustrated. Moreover, an awareness of the challenges that new hires face on the part of managers and team members can create an environment likely to be more supportive of the onboarding process.

Contact your HR Consultant if you have any questions.



Common Myths Related to Onboarding New Employees	
MYTH	REALITY
A newly hired senior leader needs less help onboarding to the institution than an entry-level employee because he/she has more experience and greater confidence.	Research suggests that new employees at all levels need help overcoming the challenges of entering a new institution. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that some senior leaders may rely too much upon what worked for them in the past, which may no longer work in their new institution.
There is no need to cover the same information that has already been discussed during the interview process once the employee is on the job.	It is better to assume that most new employees do not remember everything told to them during the interview process. Some redundancy is okay for a new employee because it reinforces key messages.
If our selection process works, then new employees should have accurate perceptions of the workplace.	Even if you have an excellent selection system, employees are likely to fail to learn some information about the institution.
Anyone at a manager level or above should already possess the skills they need to network with key players in the institution.	New hires, including managers, can benefit from early assistance in reaching out to new colleagues and creating new networks.
Onboarding is the HR or training department's problem.	HR professionals and hiring managers both play a critical role in the onboarding process. Partnering together offers the greatest opportunity for successful onboarding.

Orientation

Upon entry to the institution, new employees want to confirm they made the right decision to join our organization. They may have gone through a rigorous screening process or moved hundreds of miles to take this job. Therefore, it is important for the institution to make a good first impression when the new employee starts.

All employees should go through an orientation program to obtain basic information about our institution and get started on the right track. Orientation is

part of the larger onboarding process, but orientation itself is not enough to ensure success over time. Orientation tends to be an event, whereas onboarding is a strategic process to help new hires become productive members of the institution. However, orientation is important because it is typically the first institutionally sponsored program the employee experiences and can leave a lasting impression.

- It may be helpful to prepare new employees (especially new leaders) with information prior to their first day of employment (e.g., annual reports, notes from strategic meetings, biographies of key players, relevant presentations, current projects or institutional-wide initiatives).
- HR professionals can help prepare a team for the arrival of a new team member or leader before his/her first day on the job. For instance, if a new team leader is joining the institution, HR can have a formal meeting with the team to explain the rationale for the hire and allow team members to express any concerns about the transition. If possible, it is helpful to gain the outgoing leader's support too. HR should share any constructive "insights" from this meeting with the new leader.
- If internal candidates were considered for the job but a decision was made to choose an external candidate, be sure to pay special attention to people inside the institution who were not chosen for the job. If they do not have a good understanding of the rationale behind the hiring decision, these individuals could be resentful. Make the new employee aware of these kinds of dynamics so he can be sensitive to any issues that may arise.

Orientation topics should include

- Background Information about the institution
- Institution's culture and traditions
- Institution structure and governance
- Health and non-health related benefits
- Important Resources
- What new employees should expect
- Who to contact for help

Conversations with New Employees

Managers of new employees should initiate conversations with new hires during the first one to three months on the job to help assimilate new employees to their new job, the organization, the culture, and the work environment. It is important for managers to share basic information (e.g., about the institution, team) and then ask questions to confirm the new hire's understanding of that information and uncover any additional questions, concerns and expectations.

One way HR professionals can support managers of new employees is by helping to gather relevant information, specifically information that relates to the institution or business unit, that the manager can share with the new employee. In addition, you may want to work with the manager to help identify appropriate topics for discussion which may include the following:

- **Strategy:** Managers should explain the strategy of the institution/department to new hires so they understand the direction the institution is headed and can better understand its goals and priorities. Creating a “line of sight” from the new hire's individual goals to institution success clarifies his/her relationship to the institution (and team), helps him/her feel connected to it, and gives a sense of purpose to what he/she does. At a minimum, it's important for the new hire to understand how his/her job contributes to how the team accomplishes its goals.
- **Culture:** Culture is comprised of the shared assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions and norms that define a group of people. Culture can be thought of as the “personality” of the institution, which emerges as people interact with each other. The culture of an institution changes as people enter and leave it, and some individuals have more influence over an institution's culture than others. When new employees enter the institution, their interpretation of the culture will, in part, depend upon their prior experiences. In addition, the experiences that a new hire goes through (e.g., orientation) contain some early clues about the institution's values (e.g., we value our employees). Our perception of the culture influences our behavior and our interpretation of what's happening around us.
- **Performance Expectations:** An essential part of onboarding is clarifying performance expectations. Clarifying performance expectations and establishing clear, challenging goals provides the foundation for performance evaluations and feedback. New employees are eager to know what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated.
- **The Team:** New hires who work in a team environment need to have an understanding of the team's roles, responsibilities and norms. Teams that share a common understanding of how the team works (i.e., have a shared mental model) work together more effectively and perform better. Ideally, each team member knows what the others do, the interdependencies that exist, who makes decisions, and how the team prefers to work together. The greater the shared knowledge that team members have, the more time and energy is spent on accomplishing the task at hand instead of resolving conflicts or duplicating effort. For these reasons, it's critical for new hires to share in this common understanding of the team.
- **Communication:** Effective communication is essential for institutional success. Unfortunately, communication can often breakdown due to a number of factors (e.g., shortage of time, cultural differences, misunderstandings). Communication breakdowns can result in poor decisions and strained relationships. One way to address communication

challenges is to understand the way people prefer to communicate. During this conversation the manager should convey how he likes to communicate and learn more about how the new hire likes to communicate, with the goal of establishing expectations and minimizing the communication problems that can emerge under stressful conditions.

- **Motivation:** Understanding what motivates the new hire is important for many reasons. Employees that are very satisfied with how their organization recognizes their efforts are more satisfied with their jobs, feel more valued, and are more likely to have a “career” with the organization. It is important to have a conversation with the new hire to learn what he/she values because different people are motivated by different things. For instance, what might be perceived as a reward to one individual could be considered unrewarding (or even punitive) to another. Therefore, one goal of the manager’s conversation with a new hire is to learn what would be meaningful motivators for him/her.

After three to six months on the job, managers should initiate a conversation about the new employees’ learning and development.

- **Learning & Development:** Different people have different learning styles. Some individuals learn most effectively through seeing, some prefer to learn by listening, and other people want to learn by doing. Therefore, to maximize learning and development on the job, it is important to find out more about how the new hire likes to learn, and what skills or abilities he is interested in developing in order to do his job more effectively. The purpose of this conversation is to explore what the new hire needs to learn, how he/she will learn it, and how he/she will be able to tell he/she has learned it. It is also a good opportunity to explain what the employee will need to learn to do his job well and prepare for future opportunities.
 - HR professionals should check in with both the manager and the new employee periodically to see how these conversations are going.
 - New employees often worry that if they ask questions, they will be viewed as incompetent. HR professionals and managers need to create a non-threatening environment where new employees feel comfortable asking questions.
 - Consider holding managers accountable for the onboarding process of their new hires by linking onboarding to managers’ performance appraisals.

Coaching/Mentoring/Tutoring

When individuals first start a new job, they want to learn “the way things get done around here,” which can include general information about the institution and/or specific information about performing that job. One way to help sensitize the new hire to institutional dynamics is by providing them with coaching or mentoring. Coaching and mentoring can provide the new hire with the “big picture” or some

of the more “organic” or informal information that can be crucial to successful onboarding. Another way to help the new hire learn specific ways to perform his/her job is through tutoring to build specific job skills. HR professionals and hiring managers should work together to determine whether the new hire can benefit from coaching, mentoring and/or tutoring. For guidance on making this determination, consider:

- What does the new employee need to know or be able to do?
- Who is the best person(s) to teach the new employee? Is that person(s) available? How can we prepare him/her?
- When is the best time to introduce the new employee to tutoring, mentoring or coaching?

New Leader Integration

Special consideration should be made to help assimilate and engage new leaders when they join the institution. One way to accelerate the integration of a new leader is by conducting a leader integration session, a process to help a team to learn about its new leader and to reach a common understanding about his/her expectations and operating style. This type of session can help avoid any early misperceptions and help the leader get off to a fast start.

Other ways for HR and senior leaders to work together to assist the new leader include:

- Help the new leader learn from other people’s mistakes. If possible, collect stories of what other leaders have tried to do in the past and why it worked or didn’t work. The lessons learned may give the new leader insight into potential stumbling blocks.
- Encourage new leaders to spend a little time in “learning mode” prior to making wholesale changes. Advise them to get feedback on their ideas and pilot test changes where appropriate. This enables new leaders to test their assumptions and modify actions according to feedback.
- Provide opportunities for new leaders to learn about and interact with other areas of the business. This gives them a chance to network with other people and learn about the various interdependencies among key areas of the business.
- Work with the new leader to identify opportunities that can have an impact outside of his official role.
 - If possible, it may be useful for the new leader to interview his predecessor to gain his/her perspective about the job and discuss future challenges. The HR professional and manager of the new leader should discuss whether this is feasible and appropriate

In closing, the onboarding process is not over at the end of six months. HR professionals and managers need to continue to work together to meet the needs of new employees. One way to assess how well employees are being onboarded

and engaged is by surveying or interviewing new hires about their experiences. Consider the following types of questions:

- How satisfied were you with your transition into our institution during the past six months?
- What was the best/worst part of the transition?
- What enhanced your ability to integrate into the institution? What made it more difficult?
- What specific ideas do you have to improve future hires' onboarding into our institution?

When appropriate, use the results of the interview to make changes to your onboarding strategies. It may also be useful to share the results with business leaders to make the case for investing in further onboarding activities.