

# The Deeper Way to Onboard New Employees

New employees offer a wealth of opportunity. Don't let this chance go by.

By Cordell Riley

**T**he days and weeks after employees start at your organization are a time of unique opportunity. Can you teach them new systems and skills? Of course you can. But have you considered all the other important goals you can reach during the onboarding period? To name just a few, you can:

- **encourage** adoption of your culture
- **get new hires to understand**, promote, and believe in your mission
- **sow the seeds** for outstanding customer service
- **cultivate the kind of spirit and energy** that customers will value and love
- **hear creative ideas** from new employees who have a fresh perspective
- **build retention** by proving that your organization is a great place to work
- **set up communication channels** with new hires that will improve operations throughout your organization.

Those are only a few of the opportunities you have. But how can you take advantage of these few precious weeks? Here are approaches that work:

## Create an Onboarding & Training System

Many organizations just wing it. Still others see onboarding as little more than filling out forms, setting up e-mail accounts, and showing new employees to their desks. In both cases, people start their jobs without a deeper

“Set up onboarding that functions as high-level training.”

understanding of what's expected of them. As a result, they make mistakes that quickly become costly habits. Correcting those habits later costs far more time and energy than preventing them in the first place.

Many problems can be avoided if you set up a structured onboarding system that functions as high-level training. For example:

**On their first morning**, new hires can watch videos and learn about your organization, its mission, and its values.

**After lunch**, they can be trained in the basic skills their jobs demand, watch training videos, engage in work simulations, and work alongside current employees.

**After day one**, they should attend regular follow-ups to address problems and reinforce basic concepts and skills.

The operative strategy is to define ahead of time the behaviors you need, and then create a concise mini-curriculum that tracks to them.

## Set Up Mentoring Relationships

Genuine mentoring relationships between new hires and successful current employees will pay great dividends. Remember, mentors' goals shouldn't be to get new hires to



imitate what they do or even to adhere to organizational systems. Their purpose is to discover what new employees would like to accomplish at your organization and to help them reach those goals. In short, mentoring isn't about the mentors or strictly about your organization but about the employees who are being mentored.

## Find Ways to De-layer & Free Up Communications

Invite new employees to brainstorming sessions where their new ideas are collected, posted, discussed – and put into action when appropriate. Also consider setting up de-layered systems – like virtual suggestion boxes on your organization's intranet – where employees at all levels can present suggestions.

## Don't Skimp on Training

One thing's for certain: If you're only handing out employee handbooks, you're missing out on some great opportunities. Spending time and money to deliver great training is a money-maker, not a cost.

It pays to customize training, as much as possible, for each employee. Even "standardized" training can be enriched by creating individualized training elements for each new hire. You can evaluate people's skills and address them directly, for example, or help employees overcome anxiety about performing certain parts of their new jobs. Investing just a little time to give training extra value can go a long way toward getting new employees up to speed faster.

## Reinforce Your Mission, Vision, & Strategic Plan

The onboarding period is a highly effective time to share the big picture about your organization and to get employees to buy into your most important goals and priorities. Instead of waiting for employees to discover these critical priorities, start talking about them right after new hires come on board.

## Consider Creating a Career Plan for All New Employees

You won't want to do this for seasonal or short-term employees. But for employees you'd like to stay with you for the long term, consider sitting down with each of them to create individual career-development plans that spell out what they need to do to be promoted within your organization. You could say, for example, that your


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organization will provide technical training to help them move into their desired career path. Millennials, especially, are more likely to stay with your organization for the long term if they know the ropes and understand what it takes to build a long-term relationship with your organization.

## Evaluate Whether You're Acting Like a Great Employer

Take the time to benchmark your organization's climate, benefits, work-life balance, and other factors against other organizations. Unless you have the best of everything, you can't expect employees to commit their hearts and minds to working with you for the long term.

You see, retention starts with you, not with your employees. Unless you commit your efforts to becoming an “employer of choice” – an organization that people talk about and would love to work for – you're damaging your operations and, ultimately, your success. 

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