

A new hire's first six months: 10 key pitfalls to avoid



It doesn't take long for people to decide if they'll be short-term or long-term employees.

Especially during the first six months of employment, employees are highly alert to signals and experiences—however minor—that will help them navigate their new work environment.

In this impressionable state, they are more likely to jump to conclusions about their employer before having all the data.

For employers, making a favorable impression during these first six months is critical to employee retention, engagement and productivity.

The problem: Most employers focus on making good first impressions during the recruitment process. They neglect to think about what will happen once the employee accepts the job and arrives ready for work.

Employees who attended a structured orientation program are 69% more likely to remain with the company after three years than those who do not, according to research conducted by Corning Glass.

What's more, organizations with structured onboarding programs enjoy a 60% year-over-year improvement in revenue per full-time employee and a 63% year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction, according to a study by The Aberdeen Group.

If you are going to spend money and time acquiring top talent and paying them to work, why not prepare them to succeed and stay?

Cost of bad onboarding

All employers have new-hire onboarding (i.e., the process of integrating new hires into an organization), whether they manage it or not.

The costs of a poorly managed program are significant to a company's bottom line, and include:

- Increased turnover

- Diminished productivity
- Reduced employee engagement
- Loss of respect for the management and company
- Degradation of the company brand.

No one-size-fits-all approach

There is no single “correct” approach to employee onboarding. Every situation is unique and an effective onboarding program will have direct alignment to a company’s long-term strategy and goals.

That being said, the following pitfalls to avoid apply to all conditions:

1. Not having a clean and ready workstation on day one.
2. Assuming a new hire cannot be productive in his or her job from day one.
3. Cramming 20 hours of information into four dull hours of orientation.
4. Neglecting the importance of cultural adaptation to the new hire’s success.
5. Ignoring the onboarding needs of mid- and senior-level employees.
6. Relying on organizational charts, rather than cultural norms and behavior, to explain lines of communication.
7. Failing to address generational needs and differences in the onboarding process.
8. Starting new hires when their supervisor is absent.
9. Running a disorganized program.
10. Adopting a “sink or swim” approach because it worked for you!

The bottom line

Employees who feel challenged, empowered and acknowledged during the first year of employment will reward companies with loyalty and productivity.

Those who feel overlooked or marginalized will eventually leave for opportunities that better meet their needs.

To what extent does your onboarding process fit the needs and expectations of your top talent?

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Key phases of onboarding: The first year

Before first day

- Assign buddy to employee
- Extend personal welcome to employee
- Communicate first day logistics to employee
- Send paperwork in advance or online portal access
- Prepare for employee
- Identify transition risks

First day

- Introduce employee to buddy and colleagues

- Meet immediate requirements for employment
- Situate employee with resources or networks required for work
- Orient employee to organization and culture

First week

- Set performance expectations & job scope
- Explain performance appraisal process
- Assign meaningful work
- Ensure direct managerial involvement
- Schedule meetings with senior leadership

First 90 days

- Create employee development plan
- Provide essential training
- Assign mentor(s)
- Plan team activities & interdepartmental mixers
- Monitor performance & provide feedback
- Obtain feedback through new hire survey & other means

First year

- Recognize positive employee contributions
- Provide formal & informal feedback on performance
- Assess future training & development needs