Onboarding: The First 90 Days are Critical

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When you bring someone new "on board" your organization, the process is often called... you guessed it... "onboarding." And the first 90 days of the onboarding process are critical because that is often the time period in which the new hire chooses to stay or cut their losses and leave. Given the amount of time and effort you and your organization put into recruiting, interviewing, vetting, and hiring new employees, it's a HUGE loss for you. It's wise to put in a little bit extra effort to ensure that the new hire's first 90 days go smoothly and that they feel they are welcome and supported in their new role.

What should happen in those first 90 days? Here are some suggestions.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

Too often, in many industries but especially in the construction industry, onboarding consists of "follow Joe around." When you are out in the field this isn't too terrible of an idea because it is a very hands-on world BUT ensure that what the new hire is learning is important and purposeful. Not random and subject to whomever they are assigned to that day.

At a minimum, pair the new hire with the same person for at least one full week (you can rotate who the "buddy" is for following weeks), make a list of things that should be learned (and introductions that should be made) in week one, week two, week three, etc. Have the new hire and the buddy check in with a supervisor/manager at the end of the week to ensure the learning took place and to answer any outstanding questions. Encourage the new hire to take notes – in fact, supply them with a company-logo note pad.

It's also a great idea to ensure that the new hire has someone new to eat lunch with and get to know each day for at least the first week. I've often seen that the lunch buddy is a different person than the learn-the-job buddy; this gives everyone a break and the new hire a different perspective. While starting a new job is exciting it is also intimidating, and if your new hire is made to feel as if they are in a sink or swim situation, they may choose to swim right out of your employment.

One well-accepted technique is to buddy someone with a "near peer." A near peer is someone who was new themselves within the last year. This person has empathy for the newbie and also knows what a new hire will need or will question in the first days and weeks on the job.

GO SLOW TO GO FAST

In 2015, HR Guru Josh Bersin wrote on LinkedIn about giving

time for new hires to learn. His article stressed the value of affording new employees the chance to "go slow" during their first 90 days and devote adequate time for learning unfamiliar systems, absorbing information, meeting co-workers, and becoming familiar with other aspects of their new employer. There is only so much that can be conveyed in a job description and interviews. Once the new hire gets on the job they begin to learn about the organization's values, culture, context, etc.

If you follow the plan suggested above and take the time to think through what someone truly needs to know in their first seven days on the job vs. their first 20 days on the job, you can mete out the "newness" in a slow and orderly fashion that is not overwhelming and that allows the new hire to truly absorb and assimilate.

EARLY PRODUCTIVITY

One of my past clients had a six week onboarding process. It was in a technical field and the learning curve was high and seemingly endless. Most new hires did not make it through the onboarding process not only because it was arduous but also because there was no real work being done. People expressed that they did not feel as though they were being "productive."

While you are outlining what the first few weeks of onboarding look like and what the new hire should learn, also think about what the new hire can do. Are there simple – but important - tasks that can be successfully completed during week one, week two, etc.? This approach not only allows the learning to be broken up, but also helps the new hire to feel as though they are a productive member of the organization.

For example:

» An in-office worker might go out on a sales call or sit in on a business development meeting.

» A field worker might log-in deliveries, take inventory, or review invoices for accuracy.

CHECK-INS AND FEEDBACK

It's important that the new hire's progress is monitored by their manager if he/she is not the one doing the onboarding. Regular weekly meetings are important to ask the new hire what they've learned, what questions they still have, and how are they feeling about their new environment and coworkers? This is especially important for GenZ, the newest employees to join the workforce, because this generation is motivated by learning and feedback. So regular weekly conversations during the onboarding/learning process play right into their preferences.

GenZers also like to give feedback so an important question to ask at the end of every week, or at the end of the process as a whole, is "How could we have improved the onboarding process for you?" or "What should we do in the future for other new hires?"

Note: I recently talked with a GenZer who left their new job after six weeks even though they felt they had made a well-informed decision to join the organization by first speaking with the person who would be their manager and speaking with incumbents (vs. just speaking with a recruiter or hiring manager) before accepting the job. The excuse they gave for leaving was that the realities of the physical work vs. what the job description said, did not jibe. So, ensure that your job descriptions are up to date and vetted by a current worker!

The first 90 days are critical for setting the foundation of a successful employee-employer relationship and ensuring that the employee feels supported and engaged in their new role. By providing your new employees with the support and resources they need, organizations can improve employee retention, productivity, and job satisfaction.

About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, The Training Doctor, she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for *Chief Learning Office magazine*, *Forbes*, and *MBA World* and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as *Inc. Radio* and *America's Workforce Radio*.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

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