Planning for Employee Onboarding

Finding Ways to Increase New Employee Success and Long-Term Retention

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Excitement! Anticipation! Sharing! Learning! Contributing!

Are your new campus employees experiencing and acting on these positive feelings as they assume their new roles? Could you be doing more to build on these positive inclinations and motivations? And would expending extra effort to capitalize on the enthusiasm of new hires pay dividends in the long run?

Well, yes, it would. Research says it does. Let's explore how to do it.

Onboarding defined

Employee orientation programs are nothing new. No one questions the value of investing time and effort to make sure new employees are given a hearty welcome and "shown the ropes."

But employee onboarding is different. Onboarding involves a **special, conscious effort** to make a new employee quickly become a productive member of the organization, laying a solid foundation for a long-term relationship.

At the heart of onboarding is careful attention to the success of desirable new employees over a period of time. Onboarding goes beyond orientation to provide an *integration* program that equips new hires with the resources to become fully engaged and culturally aware members of a productive workforce.

Onboarding also includes a longer-term continuum of planned actions aimed at positive new employee experiences. These begin during the pre-employment phase of a prospect's contacts with the employer and can extend to a period that lasts up to a year or more. The focus of onboarding programs is to quickly and fully integrate the new hire into the organization—its operating structure and systems, its physical facilities, its culture—and everything in-between.

Finally, onboarding is made possible by a program that is designed to equip the employee with necessary business tools and strategies and a social network to accomplish the desired ends.

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Research is conclusive: Onboarding works!

Research shows that how someone feels about his or her new job is a key factor in how productive and how long-lived the relationship is destined to be. The first 30 days matter the most.

The Finnegan/Mackenzie Retention Firm investigated this topic. In one case they cite, researchers at the University of Florida studied the employment longevity records of 1,000 accountants, IT professionals, and consultants across seven organizations. They found that these professionals originally planned to stay an average of seven years. However, many left sooner, heavily influenced by the experiences of their first 30 days.

High-quality employees quit jobs because they *can*. Talented people know their competitive position in the employment marketplace, and they are on the quest to find a place they like, not just one that will have them.

Conversely, research has shown that the number one reason employees stay is for things they get uniquely from you. The one unique thing all organizations can provide for each employee is a high-quality relationship with one's immediate supervisor.

Also worth noting is that research shows an important positive relationship between employees' involvement within their institution and employee satisfaction. So building a quick and full integration is of high potential benefit.

10 elements of a successful onboarding process

There are many different types of organizations, and their structures and cultures require many nuances. However, some basic content elements of successful onboarding processes apply to the majority of organizations.

The following listing of key elements is designed to trigger discussion and development of local programs that can result in a comprehensive onboarding process with impressive benefits.

1. Develop a short- and longer-term plan for integrating the new employee into the organization.

2. Define the job accurately and completely.

3. Clarify the new employee's role within the department and organization.

4. Introduce the new hire—within and across functional teams.

5. Explain and provide documentation on standard operating policies and procedures. Make sure both references and coaching are readily available.

6. Provide a sequence of training and development opportunities to make the job easier and to enhance the employee's career path.

7. Clarify and provide documentation on emergency procedures as well as guidelines to empower employees where appropriate.

8. Help the new employee understand your unique campus mission, vision, and service culture, as well as the employee's vital contribution to campus success.

9. Make the job manageable.

10. Clearly define performance standards and measurement. Identify formal evaluation milestones and, in addition, seize opportunities for frequent feedback.

An example worth considering

One organization that has made onboarding a priority is the University of Houston—Downtown.

Some key words and phrases found in the University of Houston-Downtown's onboarding manual are listed below as food for thought. These provide a sense of the onboarding program's thrust.

- pre-hire—first impressions are critically important
- completion of employment forms
- organization's structure, vision, and mission
- provide school-wide orientation (luncheon)
- departmental orientation
- introductions
- breakfast meeting to welcome into department
- long-term process
- phased implementation over time (one year)
- loyal and productive employee

- quick and full assimilation
- role within department; role of department within organization
- systems, policies, procedures
- human resources—benefits, training opportunities, performance appraisal process
- campus tour
- continuously engage new employees
- coaching, training, and other developmental programs
- benefits—reduced costs, faster productivity, return on salary and recruiting costs, and increased employee retention
- standardized onboarding process across departments

Clearly, this university has made onboarding a high priority. After completing this ongoing program of integration, its new employees are undoubtedly more likely to remain loyal and to more quickly and fully contribute to the university's mission.

What about employees transitioning to new roles on campus? Engaging current employees in critical pieces of the onboarding process can further their commitment and broaden their understanding.

Conclusion

It should be clear that there is a lot to think about with regard to the best way to help new employees become productive, long-term members of the campus. Employee engagement doesn't just happen; it is dependent upon the attitudes and actions of the institution. A deliberate onboarding process that considers available research and emulates best practices can make all the difference in attracting new employees and keeping the good ones for a long time. Providing new employees with support and training so they can become the best possible employees creates a long-term, win-win scenario.

References/additional readings

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