



## Personalizing Onboarding While Maintaining Continuity and Consistency

Helping people deliver value to the organization as quickly as possible benefits the employee and the company. Developing a system-wide onboarding experience with personalized elements can deliver the desired results.

As organizations vie to hire and retain talent, it is important that each new-hire quickly perform at the highest level and be assimilated into the business within a short period of time. Onboarding is strategy for helping employees feel a sense of belonging while learning new job duties.

The quickest and most effective results are obtained when the process reflects the person's individual needs, but the integration into the organization occurs within the context of the business culture and goals. As a talent development strategy, onboarding programs that are centralized, but also personalized at the job level, are proving to be highly effective.

With the right approach, onboarding delivers consistency and continuity and increases productivity and talent retention.

### Meet-and-Greet to Develop Value

It is easy to confuse onboarding with orientation.

Orientation is a limited time, generalized introduction to the company, delivering information about things like benefits and organizational structure. Orientation ends once the person is familiar with certain aspects of the business.

Onboarding is a strategic process that has performance objectives and accelerates the ability of an employee to perform in a way that brings value to the business in a shorter time period than would normally occur. There are different statistics reported, but it typically takes approximately six months for an employee to begin contributing more to the business than what the business is investing in developing the new-hire.

It is clearly not possible to develop a completely unique onboarding process for each employee. In fact, that is not a wise approach, even if it were possible, because it fails to ensure consistency of message. So now the question is: What can the business do to develop a person's excitement about coming to work, acculturate the employee, and encourage rapid learning and productivity, while also providing critical job training?

One of the first strategies involves social learning. Strategic socialization is a process in which the new-hire meets a variety of people in various departments and engages with leadership across the organization in a relevant way to increase assimilation of information flows within organizational



context. In a centralized onboarding system, the new-hire systematically meets people, meaning every new-hire goes through the same networking process. Personalization then occurs when the employee networks with people directly connected to the ability of the employee to do a good job.

Communicating with various people throughout the business helps the employee understand corporate values and culture, the decision-making process, and problem-solving approaches. Offering a variety of opportunities to meet people in the organization is also effective. They can include everything from structured department meetings to informal employee meet-and-greet sessions with senior management to which all employees are invited. Social learning is also enhanced with technology through intranet blogs and social media, and employee resource groups.

Personalization ensures the employee establishes a support system that fits job needs (go-to people), speeds learning, and develops a network of people across functions and business units. L'Oréal Canada's onboarding program uses ambassadors in frontline management positions who assist with recruiting young professionals and with the new-hire onboarding process so they can more easily learn the corporate culture. During onboarding, the new-hires learn about planned product launches, marketing strategies, and the tools and processes. A "buddy" is assigned to the new employee. The buddy shares information on specific job tools needed to reach the best performance level as quickly as possible.

Networking is only one step in a personalized system-wide onboarding process designed to help people feel like they belong. A quality onboarding program can offer an array of features. They include job-specific structured group training that enables additional networking while learning job requirements; a series of Web-based courses that immerse the new-hire in the many facets of the organization, covering topics like corporate history, diversity training, communication tools, training and development opportunities; and job-specific training.

Gamification is also growing in popularity in larger corporations. A good method for ensuring a variety of units are involved in the onboarding process is to let various departments or functions participate in course delivery and management. The office of diversity would address workforce diversity policies. The IT department would deliver information on technology availability and use. Human resources can focus on the dynamics of communication, and so on.

#### **Start with Macro-Level to Protect Brand**

Managing the onboarding program as a centralized macro-level program that is adapted at the individual level is cost-efficient and ensures consistency, quality and accuracy of the information delivered. It also protects the corporate brand.

A centralized program assigns responsibility for program coordination to a managing function like human resources to minimize variances in the acculturation process and message delivery.



For example, the program can include a systematic introduction to different departments for new-hires, saving staff time in the hiring department while ensuring all critical functions are included in the tour. All departments and managers participating in the onboarding program need a high-level understanding of their support roles and should be prepared to help seamlessly execute the system-wide onboarding plan. IT, human resources, facilities, departmental or functional leadership, and even the C-suite should have a clear understanding of how they can best contribute to the employee's success.

At the job level, it is up to management to institute onboarding strategies like assigning the person to work on collaborative projects or cross-functional teams. The employee should be encouraged to participate in group events in the organization or the community. The new-hire's supervisor is responsible for ensuring the employee has what is needed to be productive and for sharing the technical expertise. </p><p>Developing a system-wide onboarding experience that is personalized at the job-specific level delivers an ROI. Almost one-in-three people hired into a company will leave before celebrating their first anniversary. The time and resources put into hiring and training the employee, and hiring and training a replacement, are real costs.

A well-designed onboarding program acculturates, assimilates, socializes, trains and develops the employee. A good indication an onboarding system is working well is when the employee says, "I know I belong here."