

ONBOARDING – How to Get Your New Employees Up to Speed in Half the Time¹

Onboarding is the process of *acquiring, accommodating, assimilating, and accelerating* new team members, whether they come from outside or inside the organization. The prerequisite to successful onboarding is getting your organization *aligned* around the need and the role.

- *Align:* Make sure your organization agrees on the need for a new team member and the delineation of the role you seek to fill.
- *Acquire:* Identify, recruit, select, and get people to join the team.
- *Accommodate:* Give new team members the tools they need to do the work.
- *Assimilate:* Help them join with others so they can do the work together.
- *Accelerate:* Help them and their team deliver better results faster.

Effective onboarding of new team members is one of the most important contributions any hiring manager or Human Resources (HR) professional can make to long-term success. Onboarding done right drives new employee productivity, accelerates results, and significantly improves talent retention. Yet few organizations manage the pieces of onboarding well. Even fewer organizations use a strategic, integrated and consistent approach like the one described in this article.

Why? Because onboarding is not something you do every day, it's hard to get good at. With deliberate practice, however, you can accumulate best practices onboarding expertise. This article (and the book of the same title) shows you the way, step-by-step.

Total Onboarding Program (TOP)

A Total Onboarding Program will take your organization to a new level of effectiveness by improving and integrating the disconnected experiences and messages new employees get during the recruiting and on-the-job learning process. This is a powerful, vulnerable time in the life of an employee. It represents the most important “teachable moment” your organization will ever have. If you can plan and use onboarding to put each new employee and the organization in full alignment, you will make a material difference in your business results over time.

A Total Onboarding Program is not about re-inventing the wheel. Most people understand or can navigate through the basics of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating and accelerating new employees. Our premise is that things work better when all efforts point in the same direction. When onboarding efforts align you get more done in less time by:

- Compressing recruiting, hiring and assimilation time.
- Reducing hiring mistakes by making everyone, including prospective hires, fully aware of what the job requires - from the employee and from the organization.

¹ Adapted from the executive summary of *Onboarding – How to Get Your New Employees Up To Speed in Half the Time* (Bradt and Vonnegut, Wiley, 2009)

- Reducing new employee “buyer’s remorse” to greatly improve retention.
- Aligning new employees with critical business strategies.

Total Onboarding requires the hiring manager to lead each new employee’s onboarding experience from start to finish. If you are a hiring manager, start by creating the overall TOP plan. Get people aligned around your TOP onboarding plan and its importance. Take primary responsibility for execution of your TOP onboarding plan across people and functions. If you are the HR manager, help your hiring managers create and execute their TOP onboarding plans.

Total Onboarding Program Steps

PREPARE FOR YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE’S SUCCESS BEFORE YOU RECRUIT

1. Understand the organization-wide benefits of a Total Onboarding Program.

2. Clarify your destination and messages to the candidate and the organization.

Start by stopping to reconfirm your organization’s purpose, priorities and desired results. How will your new employee contribute? Think through what went well and less well when you and/or your organization onboarded new employees in the past. Map out clear, simple messages about this onboarding: your message to stakeholders, your message to candidates, and your message to your new employee.

3. Craft your onboarding plan, write a recruiting brief, and align your stakeholders.

Start by crafting a plan that builds on your recruiting brief, and a Total Onboarding Program timeline. Share your thinking with others. Get input. Align important players around your plan. Investment of time here makes everything else more effective and efficient.

RECRUIT IN A WAY THAT REINFORCES YOUR MESSAGES

4. Create a powerful slate of potential candidates.

Take charge of the employee acquisition process by creating and executing a new employee plan. Start with your target. Layout where you will “fish”, with what tools, timelines and milestones. Live your employment brand every step of the way. Create options by assembling a deep slate of strong candidates all at the same time. With options, you won’t feel you have to close the sale with your lead candidate if it’s not 100% right for everyone.

5. Evaluate candidates against the recruiting brief while pre-selling and pre-boarding.

While candidates can focus on getting the offer, and then take a step back to evaluate the opportunity, you have to buy and sell at the same time. We use a strengths-focused, targeted selection/behavioral approach to interviewing with good success. Complete the interviewing process with formal post interview de-briefs, additional information gathering, and post interview follow-ups with candidates to learn even more (and set up closing the sale later).

6. Make the right offer. Close the right sale - the right way.

You know your organization is awesome. Just remember that a potential new employee may need to be convinced. So treat the offer as just one part of a strategic sale. The way you handle the offer and support your offeree's due diligence efforts will impact the way he or she feels about you and your organization, with implications far beyond whether the answer is "yes" or "no." You want offerees to say yes if taking the job is the right move for them, their supporters, and the organization over time. You want a "no, thanks" if it's not.

GIVE YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE A BIG HEAD START BEFORE DAY ONE

7. Co-create a personal onboarding plan with your new employee.

Co-creating a personal onboarding plan starts your working relationship. Listen, and demonstrate how much you value your new employee. Work together to think through the job, and its deliverables, stakeholders, message, pre-start and day one plans. Document a 100-day action plan, and clarify who will do what next.

8. Manage the announcement to set your new employee up for success.

How you make the announcement is one of the most important ways you influence how welcome, valued and valuable your new employee feels. Think through and implement these steps:

- Map stakeholders.
- Clarify messages.
- Lock into the timing and wording of the official announcement.
- Map out whom to talk to before the announcement, when and how.
- Map out whom to talk to after the announcement, but before the new employee starts.
- Implement, track and adjust as appropriate.

9. Do what it takes to make your new employee ready, eager and able to do real work on day one.

- Accommodate work needs (desk, phone, computer, ID, payroll, forms, etc.)
- Accommodate personal needs. (family move, housing, schools, etc.)

ENABLE & INSPIRE YOUR EMPLOYEE TO DELIVER BETTER RESULTS FASTER

10. Make positive first impressions both ways.

Mind the details to prepare a first day that is in line with the opportunity/shared purpose and to put your new employee in a position to do real work starting day one.

Everything communicates. Pay attention to what people hear, see and believe. Pay attention to the impact your organization makes on the new employee. Pay attention to the impact your new employee makes on the organization. Design the day one experience as you would a customer experience. Don't leave first impressions to chance, because while people don't always remember what others did or said, they always remember how they felt.

11. Speed development of important working relationships.

Assimilation is a big deal. Doing it well makes things far easier. Getting it wrong triggers relationship risks. There are a couple of things beyond basic orientation that can make a huge difference. We suggest you set up onboarding conversations for your new employee with members of his or her formal and informal/shadow networks. Do periodic check-ins with those networks. If there are issues, you want to know about them early, so you can help your new employee adjust.

12. Provide resources, support and follow-through.

The first step in giving your new employee the resources and support he or she needs is confirming your own requirement and appetite for change. If all you need is for your new employee to assimilate into the existing culture, you can probably mentor him/her yourself or with an internal coach. However, if achieving the desired results requires your new employee to assimilate into and transform the team, you will need to bring in external assistance. (If insiders could transform your culture, they would have done so already.)

Make sure your new employee garners needed resources and establishes the building blocks of a high performing team, as appropriate to his or her position²:

- What most needs to be accomplished (in place by day 30)
- Clarity around what's getting done, when, by whom (by day 45)
- 1-2 strongly symbolic early wins (identified by day 60, delivered by month six)
- The right people in the right roles with the right support (by day 70)
- A communication plan implemented on an ongoing basis.

Leadership is about inspiring and enabling others. How you handle the acquisition, accommodation, assimilation and acceleration of new employees communicates volumes to everyone. In many ways, this is one of the acid tests of leadership. With the help of the Total Onboarding Program, you will demonstrate consistent, exemplary leadership.

George Bradt and Mary Vonnegut are partners in PrimeGenesis, an executive onboarding and transition acceleration group that drives new leaders and their teams to deliver better results faster by jump-starting key strategic, operational and organizational processes in the first 100 days. Specialists in onboarding senior leaders moving into particularly complex situations, PrimeGenesis' experienced operating executives and organizational development experts work in dedicated alliance with each new leader to create two-way transformations.

www.primegenesis.com

² See *The New Leader's 100-Day Action Plan* or www.primegenesis.com for more on these building blocks.