



You may have heard of “waterboarding,” but have you heard of *onboarding*? Onboarding is a relatively new concept in new employee orientation. Instead of emphasizing the same old, boring (and somewhat torturous) policies and procedures regimen, onboarding integrates employees in an exciting way from the last stage of recruitment through retention. New employees become engaged, educated and motivated from day one, modeling desired behaviors from the start.

What leaders do not always understand is that studies have shown effective onboarding or orientation programs can actually deliver positive performance outcomes. A Westwood Dynamics report reveals that:

- ◆ New employees who went through structured orientation programs were 69% more likely to be with a company after three years than those who did not undergo such a program.
- ◆ Employees who were carefully oriented to both the company and the job reached full productivity two months sooner than those who did not.
- ◆ Employees who attended orientation were better socialized in areas of company goals, values, and history, formed better relationships, and displayed a higher commitment to their employer.

What does an effective onboarding program look like? Remember, orienting new employees is a process, not just an event. Here are a few tips:

Recruitment to hire

Onboarding helps create brand ambassadors from the point of recruitment. Good practices weave the same positive brand messages throughout the interview process and point of hire.

How are you “wowing” candidates from the start? Are your communications encouraging and personable? Do they receive a nice packet of information about your program? What special way are you saying “Congratulations, you’re hired!” Some new hires receive welcome cards signed by other employees or leaders, a logo specialty item mailed to their home, or a program T-shirt.

First day introductions

Think back on what impressions were communicated to you on your first day. What can you do to prepare your new employees for their first day to make that day memorable? Have someone greet them and spend the day introducing them to people, tools and resources. Allow them to shadow another employee who has a similar job so they can assess the environment, ask plenty of questions and learn the ropes. Other ideas include:

- ◆ Take them to lunch, or develop some type of meet and greet, to get to know them better.
- ◆ Have a welcome cake with candles to celebrate their first day.
- ◆ Assign them a mentor who is responsible for supporting them through their first 30 or 60 days.
- ◆ Give them some type of welcome gift certificate or silly first-day award.

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EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING

First day introductions *(continued)*

- ◆ Ask other employees to welcome them spontaneously with a unique sign such as a salute or peace sign to make them wonder what is going on!

Orientation program

Many employers offer a new employee orientation meeting at which key leaders speak, the organization/program background and vision is shared, and employees learn what they need to know to do a good job. Other elements of dynamic orientations include: compelling customer stories, games that socialize and inform, crazy orientation video clips, brand ambassador training, program philosophy and guiding principles, program goals, and creative ways of communicating what to expect (the good as well as the challenging).

These meetings of new employees are interactive and celebratory—providing opportunities to be creative. Incorporate themes in visual and verbal communication, and reinforce the excellent decision the employee made to work there.

New Employee Bingo

One of the games that can be used to induct new hires is to create a bingo card of aspects of their orientation, or people they are supposed to talk with, for clues to information they are supposed to discover. When the employee has marked off every item on the card they receive a prize (sometimes a fun, cheesy one at that!).

30-60-90 days

You may plan to mainstream new employees for up to one year. There's nothing worse than a lot of excitement the first week, then being left high and dry after that. Develop an ongoing onboarding program that spreads out activities, allows you to check in with new employees to hear (and truly listen) to how they are doing, and build their confidence over time. Again, the fun, inspiration and education does not stop after week one.

However you choose to design your onboarding program, be sure to include goals for what you want the new employee to experience and how you want them to feel. Take time to wow them from the start.

In the end, regardless of how long your employees remain, you will be creating better teachers, better social workers, and better professionals for the future. They will have been successfully introduced to the cause of after-school and will take that with them wherever they go!

