

10 Key Features That Create a Future-Proof Onboarding Experience

Onboarding is a vital part of the new employee experience at your organization. A successful onboarding experience will acclimate a new starter to their role, your organization's culture and brand, and what your company has to offer.

Great onboarding engages people, resulting in employees who are performing optimally, and are committed to your organization's success. It also sets the groundwork for retaining new people in the long term, helping them to feel like important, valued members of the team. A strong onboarding experience can lay solid foundations for your new starter's learning journey, and will lead to lasting behavior change.



What Does the Future of Onboarding Look Like?

The future of onboarding will involve welcoming a diverse range of people to your organization, whether that be in an office-based environment, remotely, or hybrid.

The onboarding experience of the future is a highly personalized journey that addresses exactly what your new starters need. It focuses on ensuring your new people feel included, welcomed, and part of the organization.

Read on to discover the 10 key features of a future-proof onboarding experience. Though this checklist isn't exhaustive, these tried and tested items all come from successful programs we've developed with our customers.



10 Crucial Onboarding Features (at a glance)

- Adopt a Buddy System
- Personalize the Experience
- Deliver Richer Onboarding Through Stories
- Prepare an Exciting Welcome Pack
- Provide Easy Access to Tools and Equipment
- Organize Regular Check-ins
- Share a 'Day in the Life' of Your Leaders
- Align, Deliver, Sustain—Our ADS Model
- Reflect and Measure—Evaluate Your Onboarding
- Support, Support, Support

10

Crucial Onboarding Features (in more detail)



Adopt a Buddy System

An onboarding buddy serves as a new employee's support system through their onboarding process. As their go-to person, a buddy can assist a new recruit in getting used to the organization and their specific role, and make them feel welcome.

There are many benefits to using an onboarding buddy system, such as providing context regarding the company's key stakeholders, the staffing structure, company culture rules and policies, and other information. A buddy system can also boost productivity. Allowing new employees to shadow current workers, ask questions, and collaborate on appropriate tasks, can help them feel comfortable in their new role and with the company. It can also enable them to be productive more quickly.

Responsibilities of an onboarding buddy:

1. Meet the new person on their first day at work
2. Introduce the new starter to their colleagues
3. Give the new person a tour of the premises and/or your intranet
4. Answer questions about the job and organization
5. Cover company guidelines and culture
6. Host weekly meetings to check in with the new employee

An ambassador program is similar to a buddy system and can allow new employees to learn from experts in specific areas or with specific skills.



2

Onboarding shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all experience for all new employees. Instead, there should be a tailored element that is designed for the new starter's specific role and for them as an individual. Here are several ways to create a personalized onboarding program for your new starters:

i. Encourage Your Team to Welcome the New Starter Personally

To add a personal touch—as well as truly personalize your new starter's onboarding experience, consider asking current employees to write handwritten notes to their new colleague. Handwritten notes can make a person feel welcome and part of the team. You could also give the new starter some company-specific gifts such as pens and notepads.

ii. Streamline the Onboarding Experience for Each Department

If your organization has more than one department, it can help to tailor a separate onboarding process for each. In the same way, it's also good to personalize the experience for each of your different teams or company locations.

iii. Encourage the New Starter to Speak and Contribute

As we all know, every person is different, so it's important to take the time to learn about your new employee. What are their goals? Do they have any worries about their new job? By encouraging people to be themselves at work, they're likely to feel more comfortable and settle into the new job more quickly.

iv. Welcome New Starters in Your Team Meetings

A great way to make new starters feel welcome is to greet them and introduce them by name each week at the team meeting. A special call-out is likely to make them feel included and like an important part of the team.

3

Deliver Richer Onboarding Through Stories

Storytelling is one of the oldest and most engaging forms of communication. Stories can be used in an onboarding experience to communicate facts in a way that's more memorable to the new starter, while demonstrating elements of the company culture and vision.

Deliberately sharing stories during onboarding allows new recruits to understand the company culture, and their new job, in a powerful way.

It's important that the onboarding experience includes personal stories from the people who have been key to the direction of the organization or team, such as founders, leaders or visionaries, or those who are in very senior leadership roles. Relatable stories can help a new starter to feel that:

- The business is run by real people
- There's a way for them to achieve their goals and reach senior positions

4

Prepare an Exciting Welcome Pack

Before a new person has their first day at work, they may have already received their welcome pack to introduce them to the company, the people, and the culture. This pack should be personalized where possible.

A carefully-considered welcome pack will contain both useful and fun items, which will in turn help your new colleague feel like a valued part of the team, and excited to start working with you.

Ideas for a New Starter Welcome Pack

1. Important information about the company—employee handbook, HR forms such as contract and benefits, agenda for the first few weeks (what to expect), office map, login details, local guide to cafes, parks, etc.
2. Practical items that will help your new employee—IT hardware, ID badge and lanyard, notebooks and pens, mouse pads, coasters, mugs, and desk tidies.
3. Branded items—A personalized welcome letter, business cards, personalized drinks bottles, hoodies, mugs.

5

Provide Easy Access to Tools and Equipment

It's become a cliché that all new starters in any company spend a good few days just trying to get access to the correct logins and company software. However, prompt access to equipment and software is vital in allowing your new recruit to feel empowered, valued, and comfortable.

It can be tempting to send a new starter to IT, or direct them to raise an IT ticket, to get their systems up and running. However, ideally, this shouldn't happen during onboarding. Instead, proactively support your new colleague with their access. IT should then contact the new starter and ask if everything is working, and if they were able to access everything they needed.

Gaining access to tools and equipment should be a seamless, hassle-free experience, and people should be allowed enough time to get to grips with new systems, with the appropriate training and support.

This is also where a buddy system comes into play –it's important that a new starter has someone they can approach with questions, for example, if they're unsure how to use a system or where to find certain information.

It can be helpful to provide a new starter with a checklist of tools and systems they need to familiarize themselves with and work with, so they're clear about what is expected and what they need to work through.



6

Organize Regular Check-ins

Maintaining connections with colleagues is vital for a new starter to feel settled and welcome in the organization. The person should have regular check-ins with their line manager as well as with their buddy and any other colleagues they have regular contact with. They should also be encouraged to form professional connections with other members of the wider team.

It can be valuable for new starters to connect with other new starters, stay connected with regular check-ins, and support each other as they settle into the company.

These regular check-ins will provide opportunities to ask questions and to talk with others about their experience in the company, as well as their personal life.

Regular check-ins aren't just important during the onboarding process. Check-ins should continue throughout the employee lifecycle, providing employees with ongoing support from line-managers, peers, and mentors.

7

Share a 'Day in the Life' of Your Leaders

New employees may benefit from gaining a real sense of what a day looks like for a person working at their new company. It can be especially helpful to hear these 'day in the life' experiences from people in similar roles to the new starter, but hearing from leaders and managers can also serve as an inspiration. For example, a video of your CEO sharing what they're up to can give new starters an idea of what they could pursue in their own careers within your company.

A 'day in the life' can and should also contribute to the new starter gaining a better sense of what it's like to work at the organization and make them feel good about working at your company.

8

Align, Deliver, Sustain—Our ADS Model

The phases of a well-designed onboarding serve an overarching purpose—to introduce a new team member to their role, your company culture, and why they’ll love working for your organization. We have devised a design strategy to meet these aims that we call: Align, Deliver, Sustain.

Align

This can often start in a pre-joining context, when a potential new team member is energized about their new job and ready to take on board foundation information as they prepare to join a new organization. Enabled by an enthusiastic and positive mindset, this part of onboarding can often be focused on culture, stories, background, and introductions.

Deliver

This stage of onboarding is more functional. It begins on the day that your new starter joins the company and may last around four to six weeks. ‘Deliver’ helps the new employee to learn your organization’s processes and procedures, and gain an understanding of their role-specific expectations. This is a critical phase of onboarding where a new employee understands all the key parameters and expectations of their role. It needs full support and engagement from managers, but may include digital learning and networking as well. This is where we bring the full range of blended learning touchpoints to play.

Sustain

This final stage involves helping the team member to transition from an onboarding learning mindset to a BAU growth mindset. It’s important to ensure the energies and approaches of the positive onboarding experience are carried on into the future. Coaching, mentoring, and reflection are core to this phase of engagement.



9

Reflect and Measure—Evaluate Your Onboarding

Part of delivering a valuable, successful onboarding experience for your new starters is to measure how it's going. Using a data-led approach, you can monitor how your colleague is settling into the company by monitoring goals and accomplishments via annual appraisals.

To ensure you're on the right track and to allow you to continuously improve your processes, be sure to evaluate the onboarding experience. Surveys can be a useful tool in obtaining feedback from new recruits and measuring success. By investigating whether your onboarding was delivered successfully and what you could do better in the future, you can adjust your processes accordingly to create the very best experience for your employees.

10

Support, Support, Support

Support is an ongoing theme in this checklist and a cornerstone of a successful onboarding experience.

Appropriate and unwavering support needs to be provided for the new employee on a personal level, from day one, and continuing at regular intervals. This support can come from a variety of people such as line managers, buddies, mentors, colleagues, fellow new starters, and others.

It's vital that the new starter genuinely feels they're held within a support network and that they're not alone at any point. This is even more important for new starters who are working remotely.

A great way of creating a support network is to make a group chat for new starters. This way, those who are new to the company and who are going through onboarding can connect with each other, swap notes, and discuss their experiences.

And, support doesn't end after onboarding. You should continue to support your new employees throughout their careers.



Extra Considerations When Onboarding Remote Workers

- Onboarding needs a consistent approach, whether your new starters are going through a remote, hybrid, or office onboarding experience. Think about how you can recreate each touchpoint in a face-to-face onboarding program in a virtual way.
- Technology can be challenging when joining remotely—people are isolated when problems arise, so make sure your team is always available to support them.
- Do a fun virtual activity together—for example, online gaming or a virtual escape room. This helps people settle in and feel comfortable, while letting them get to know one another.
- Don't forget to invite new hires to team socials, even if they're remote. They need to feel like they can be part of these activities if they choose to. If possible, invite them to an in-person event in their first few weeks.
- Allow for enough time for people to connect and have virtual meetings to get to know their new colleagues—set these meetings up for them.

Ready to learn more about creating the perfect onboarding experience to meet your organization's goals?

Get in touch!



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