

# How Culture Affects Onboarding

By Michael Rosenberg

I read on the Internet that 80 percent of all new employees decide within the first six months if they are going to stay with their current employers or begin looking for “new opportunities.” Whether this figure is the result of research or not (or simply overblown), it does point out the importance of quickly incorporating new hires into the workplace. Onboarding, or the formalized process of incorporating talent into the organization, is the hot topic right now in human resources. From a strategic view, it makes a lot of sense. You go through a long, formalized hiring process that takes months (far too long in my opinion—but that’s the subject of another column). You have hired the people whom you think are the best fit for the organization. It only makes sense to ensure that you can fit them into the organization and “ramp them up” as quickly as possible. We also know the other reasons why onboarding them into the organization is important—they become quickly engaged and productive and the time for return on investment in those employees is greatly enhanced. Hey, you hired them for a reason!

The question is, then, what do you need to create an effective onboarding program?

## **Understand Your Culture**

There are two types of programs that no organization should ever purchase “off-the-shelf.” One is leadership. What makes a leader in one organization may not work in another. Leadership is a unique combination of organizational values/ethics and deliverables. The other is onboarding.

What is it that makes a person succeed in an organization? What are the norms that can blindsides new employees and isolate them from their colleagues? What processes are necessary for them to know? Whom do they go to and for what? Who are the “real leaders” in the organization?

Here is where tools such as [stay interviews](#) become so important. By understanding what the strengths of your organization are and your corporate culture, why people are motivated to stay and what works for them, you can build an onboarding program that incorporates those attributes for new hires so that their success is ensured.

This is a very powerful tool in the selection process. Hard skills may land a person the job, but it is the soft skills that will make them successful. A person can easily learn new hard skills. What you can’t teach them is the attitude and “softer” skills that are really essential to succeed within the organization. When you know what those skills are, you understand what type of person will be successful within your organization.

## **Blended Learning Strategy**

In addition to a "Welcome to the Company" half-day session that provides the new hire a general introduction to the organization and a chance to understand more about the company (i.e. organizational goals, important processes, general hire information, etc.), each person should be assigned a mentor to help with the transition. The mentor should not be the new hire's direct supervisor but a peer who is not in competition with the new hire.

Remember, the new hire really has no idea what you expect unless you tell him or her. For the first two weeks or so, the mentor should be setting up lunches and meetings with various clients, staff, etc. so the new hire can get to know both the business/projects and people that he will be working with.

### **Clear Expectations with a 100 Day Plan**

Here is where the role of the manager becomes very important. On the first day on the job, the manager should sit down with the new hire and spend time going over his role within the team and the job expectations, and then work with him to create a 100 day plan. This plan should include description of roles and responsibilities as well as deliverables.

### **Set Up for Success**

Success breeds success. A person who is successful will be engaged and feel bonded to the organization. Pick a project or task for the new hire that clearly works to his strength (and is supposedly the reason you hired him). This will allow him to feel like he is a part of the organization and build his self-confidence. In addition, it will have significant impact on his engagement. After all, most people want to feel like they are important and have an impact on the organization, and by setting the new employee up for success right away, he will want to utilize his skills to the fullest extent possible to create more successes for both himself, his team and the organization.

### **Celebrate**

There is no nicer way to welcome somebody to the organization than to celebrate his arrival. This can mean providing a reception in the boardroom with snacks and drinks to welcome the new hire and give people in the organization an opportunity to get to know him. It also says very clearly that you are glad that he is part of the organization and an important part of the team.