

The Definitive Guide to Onboarding

Everything you
need to know to
onboard like a pro.



Imagine your first day at a new job, working for a totally new company.

Now rewind a week or so.

Imagine you're waiting to hear from a company about a job. You've been searching forever, sent dozens (or hundreds) of resumes, stressed and sweated your way through multiple rounds of interviews, and now, you're wishing you had extra fingers and toes to cross because you think you might have found The One.

But—did they like you? Did you have what they're looking for? Did you have a tidy enough Zoom background? Did you say the right things, dress the right way, come across as the humble, motivated, proactive, outside-the-box-thinking team player you know you are?

Good or bad, what happens next is important.



The First Impression

02

Now, imagine you're on the other side of this scenario, preparing to make the hire. For the employer, this is another step in the process, but the candidate is probably on pins and needles waiting to hear back.

What happens next—everything from the initial offer to the first day and onward until every form, training session, and introduction is complete—is the onboarding process.

And it's very important.

In this guide, we'll show you how critical onboarding is: how it shapes the employee experience both initially and far into the future, and how dramatically a positive or negative onboarding experience can impact performance, the employee life cycle, and your organization's bottom line.

With that in mind, let's start the guide by asking some critical questions like:

- **Where does onboarding start and end?**
- **What kind of impact does onboarding have?**
- **What aspects of onboarding are the most important?**
- **What do I need to build a positive onboarding experience?**
- **How can I ensure a smooth transition from onboarding into the full-time work environment?**

When we're finished, you'll be a master of onboarding knowledge, with a brain full of facts and ideas about how you can build, support, and speed up your organization's onboarding process.

Let's get started.



It's All Onboarding

(Well, A Lot of It Is)

03

Here's a quick list of what onboarding encompasses:

Before the First Day

- **Job offers**
- **Salary negotiation**
- **New hire paperwork**

New Hire Training

- **Policy and culture training**
- **Job training**
- **Employee handbook training**
- **Benefits paperwork**
- **Benefits education**

New Hire Introductions

- **In-person or virtual facility tours**
- **Executive introductions**
- **Team introductions**

Your company may have more steps that are unique to your company or industry or include more or less training, but everything above falls under the general definition of onboarding processes.

Whether or not you consider all of it to be onboarding isn't really the point. The point is, everything on the list is experienced by new employees, and that means every element impacts a new hire's perception of their upcoming job—a job they may not have even performed yet, with people they've met only briefly—and of the organization itself, for better or worse.

A BambooHR study found that employees who felt that they received effective onboarding are **18 times more likely to feel committed** to their organization than employees who felt their onboarding process was less effective.

Clearly, if you want to get the best return on your investment in hiring a new employee, effective onboarding is crucial.

* Boushey, Heather and Glynn, Sarah Jane, [There Are Significant Business Costs to Replacing Employees](#) (Center for American Progress, 2012)

After the First Impression

The Second Date

At this point, we've identified what onboarding covers. The next question is: **why does onboarding matter?**

Well, think of the time before onboarding during the courtship period of recruiting and interviewing—nobody would argue that making a good impression doesn't matter for candidates and employers during this phase.

Well, onboarding is really just an extension of your recruiting and hiring process—a time when candidates are still assessing you as much as you're assessing them. The only difference with onboarding is both of you are past the decision point, and now you're trying to decide if you made a good decision.

During onboarding, new employees are getting the first glimpse at the reality of life in your organization. It's the first day of the honeymoon, and while it can be tempting to lift the veil, this is not the time for either of you to start drinking milk straight from the carton and walking around in sweatpants.

In a survey BambooHR conducted, over **80 percent** of employees who rated their onboarding experience highly continue to hold their organizations in high regard—not only that, but they feel strongly committed to their jobs and have higher role clarity.

Compare that to employees who gave their onboarding experience a low rating, and the contrast becomes even more stark: Employees who felt their onboarding experience was effective were **over 29 times more likely to feel satisfied with their jobs.***

Over half of employees who received ineffective onboarding (52 percent) feel their employers don't provide adequate support overall, and feel their organizations are generally poor performers in their industries. Whether or not ineffective onboarding is the sole factor in that perception, it's sobering to think how this perceived lack of support affects employee performance, engagement, and longevity in your organization, let alone how negative perceptions can corrode workplace culture.

But, causative or not, here's a stat that hits even closer to home for HR professionals: 53 percent of employees who gave a low rating for their onboarding experience feel their HR departments are generally lacking in capability.* Ouch.

Let's return to the sunnier side of things. When you ask people who had a highly effective onboarding experience how they feel about other aspects of their jobs, the results are overwhelmingly positive:



Feel they have strong role clarity



feel very engaged in their work



feel a strong sense of connection to their organization



feel they understand and utilize their benefits fully



think their HR departments are very capable

So, if you haven't already, you now have a ton of reasons to look at your onboarding process and see where and how you can take steps to improve it.

* Holiday, Steven, *Onboarding Research Survey* raw data (BambooHR, 2018)

Onboarding Step-By-Step

A Series of Best Practices

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The Offer

The moment you decide to offer a candidate a job, onboarding has started. The offer letter also happens to be an easy way to start off on the right foot.

Best Practices

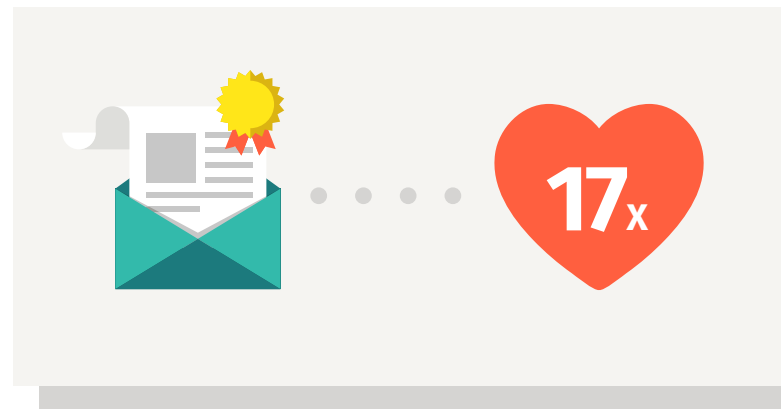
What makes a great offer letter? First, an air of professionalism and attention to detail can't hurt. That means:

- **Proper spelling**
- **Accurate information**
- **Letterhead or company branding**
- **Proper letter formatting**

Remember, you're welcoming a new person into your organization. The offer should do more than describe the position and salary; it should also express your enthusiasm. A year from now, your new employee might not remember what the letter said, but they'll remember if it made them feel good about joining your team.

You already know what makes a good letter—you may have just never thought about incorporating that into an offer letter. Think: personal, genuine, positive, and specific. If you met a candidate during the interview phase, mention it. If you didn't, have the recruiter or hiring manager write the letter. Talk about how

their specific skills will contribute to the efforts of their department, and mention that you're looking forward to getting to know them better. Easy stuff like this goes a long way: In our study, **employees who received a highly effective offer letter were over 17 times more likely to report feeling emotionally connected to their organization.**



Finally, there's nothing less professional than communication delays. If you're using email, have the offer prepared to send and send it after your final phone call with the candidate. Monitor it often and send a read receipt when it's returned. Even better, make sure there's an automatic offer letter feature in your applicant tracking system, and use it.

If you're using an actual stamped letter...that's quaint. We wish favorable winds upon your fleet and success to your spice trading endeavors.

* Holiday, S. (BambooHR, 2018)

Onboarding Step-By-Step

A Series of Best Practices

• • • 2 Information Gathering or Preboarding

A big part of onboarding involves collecting information about a new hire, and while we don't have any proof, we're also confident it's the most dry and boring part of the process.

Best Practices

Ask any new employee what they'd rather do:

- Spend an hour or longer filling out a stack of forms and signing paperwork by hand on their first day at work.
- Spend a few minutes online filling out one form and electronically signing the rest in the comfort of their own home.

We're guessing the second answer will be popular with most people, excluding, of course, calligraphy enthusiasts and people in the office supply industry.

An emailed preboarding packet and e-signature software can save time and patience better spent on valuable training and introductions.

Need a number to drive it home? How about this: A company of 100 employees can save as much as **40 hours per month by using e-signature software.**

All the gold star stickers in the world can't make filling out and signing documents enjoyable. What you can do is take care of it beforehand, make it convenient and flexible, and speed up the process. If you're still doing it the old-fashioned way, one demo of electronic preboarding and e-signature software will make a believer out of you.



* Byrom, *Matt The Real Cost of Productivity* (Business 2 Community, 2014)

Onboarding Step-By-Step

A Series of Best Practices

3 Culture and Policy Training

Chances are, the first extended face-to-face interaction HR will have with new employees is during in-person or virtual training on company policies outlined in the employee handbook. Sounds like a good opportunity to make an impact.

Best Practices

Training new employees on company culture and policies is important for two main reasons:

- **It establishes what the company stands for and against**
- **It outlines expectations for employee behavior**

But there's also a third reason that may not be as apparent:

- **It's an opportunity for HR to showcase the human side of the organization**

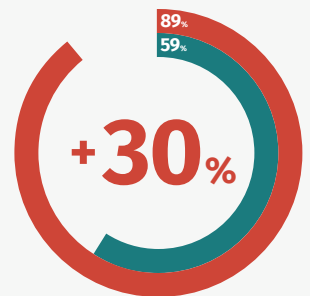
Remember, new employees are getting to know you at the same time they're getting to know your company. And unless you only hire alpha types, it stands to reason some of your new hires are probably apprehensive of how they'll be treated by their new employer.

While policy training has a reputation for being devoid of charisma, it's possible to cover many subjects in engaging, inviting, and even funny ways. A well-written and up-to-date handbook or a funny video on IT procedures can go a long way towards showing your organization is made up of real people, not robots.

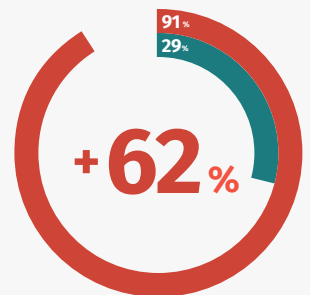
Making issues like standard procedures, mission statements, and other important information engaging also makes them memorable, furthering the primary goal of any training exercise.

*In fact, in our survey, employees who received effective culture training were over 12 times as likely to feel committed to their organizations versus poorly trained employees.**

- Effectively Trained
- Ineffectively Trained



more people feel strong cultural integration



more people feel very connected

* Holiday, S. (BambooHR, 2018)

Onboarding Step-By-Step

A Series of Best Practices

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Benefits Training

We've touted the importance of benefits education for years because it just makes sense. Happy, healthy employees are more productive, and teaching new hires how to fully utilize their benefits ensures they'll get off on the right foot.

Best Practices

Even the best benefits package is only beneficial if people know about it. Too many companies pay thousands or even millions of dollars in premiums without bothering to ensure their people fully understand the packages and programs being provided to them. That's not only a waste of money, it's a missed opportunity to improve employee wellbeing, which is directly tied to performance and engagement.

Take time to fully explain your benefits package—and not just yours, specifically, but also how benefits work in general. In group situations, most people would rather stay uninformed than ask a question revealing their lack of knowledge; your willingness to take the time to explain the fundamentals helps employees make better choices for themselves.

If you're speaking to a group, schedule a break following the presentation and offer employees the chance to approach with any questions. Let them know you understand it's important to get input from their families, and give them a day or two to do so.

Finally, self-service software is HR's best friend for dealing with new hires and when enrollment rolls around. It allows you to stay on top of employees without physically chasing them down over missing paperwork, saving you time and frustration.

*The numbers agree:
High-quality benefits training
during onboarding leads to
significantly higher usage
of benefits.**

Employees with good
benefits training:

70.3%

**say they fully utilize
their benefits**

Employees with bad
Benefits training:

26.6%

**say they fully utilize
their benefits**

* Holiday, S. (BambooHR, 2018)

Onboarding Step-By-Step

A Series of Best Practices

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Team Introductions

When it comes time to say goodbye to your litter of new employees, you (and they) want to know they're headed to a good home. Making introductions a part of the onboarding process helps smooth the transition from orientation into actually performing the job they were hired to do.

Small companies often handle introductions intuitively, with zero instruction or issues. Shake hands all around, make some small talk, then take the new person out for lunch (if you're in-office) or schedule a Zoom coffee chat (for those working remotely). Simple.

But as companies grow, welcoming new employees gets harder. The team gets too big to all go out for lunch, or schedules don't match up enough to get everyone together for more than a quick zoom call, but there's no other plan in place. Introductions go from personal greetings to asking the new people to say hello during the monthly meeting for a round of applause. If you're growing fast enough, veteran employees may even start to think of their green teammates as being "just more new hires" as a way to excuse themselves from the challenge of befriending a stranger (which gets even more challenging when employees are remote).

Best Practices

Introductions are important no matter the size of your organization. It's up to you to make them easier on both candidates and the employees and executives you're introducing to them, and that means two things: having a process and communicating it clearly.

One way to ease introductions is by including an ice-breaker in your preboarding information gathering. A get-to-know-you questionnaire—something BambooHR offers built in—about the new employee's hobbies, favorite foods, hometown, and other details provides information you can distribute to existing team members. This gives current employees opportunities to initiate conversations about common interests.

Prescribing a standard welcome activity, like a lunch meeting with a selected number of team members, takes the question out of what to do when new people come on board and ensures that you do something. HR and management should also encourage regular team meetings, outside-the-office activities, or virtual get-togethers focused on building personal connections, so new employees have ample opportunities to get acquainted with their teammates.

Meeting executives one-on-one or even in a small group is a rarity in larger organizations, and can be tough to coordinate. But it's a great way to make new employees feel valued while giving them a chance to get to know who is leading the organization they've just joined.

out of employees who had a highly effective onboarding experience, **99%**

- 1. received introductions to key people
- 2. participated in get-to-know-you activities

All Aboard!

The real first day

If you want to practice strategic HR, it should be obvious by now that onboarding is a big part of an effective employee experience initiative. And that's just a jargon-heavy way of reinforcing the time-worn lesson that first impressions matter. The critical misstep organizations make is in thinking that the first impression ends after the acceptance of a job offer, when in fact there's still a lot of space between signing the offer and starting the job. Our survey and others prove that a highly effective onboarding experience has lasting positive effects on performance, engagement, time-to-contribution, and the employee lifecycle. Another takeaway from our study is that in order to be truly effective in your onboarding effort, you need two things: time and a process.

Automated onboarding can reduce turnover by an estimated

30%

Onboarding software is the key to both. A thoughtfully designed system allows you to speed up time-consuming tasks through automation and creates a consistent process you can easily repeat throughout multiple hiring seasons. And quality does matter when it comes to onboarding software.

With the right mindset and the right tools, you can create a memorable onboarding experience that will have a long-lasting positive influence on new employees, and one that will echo in the employment market as they recommend your organization as a great place to work.

* *Onboarding* (iCims, 2016)

** Holiday, S. (BambooHR, 2018)

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Effective onboarding software:

77%

of employees feel strong commitment to their organization.

Ineffective onboarding software:

23%

of employees feel strong commitment to their organization.



The right tools help you create the best experience.

It's simple. Effective onboarding leads to better outcomes for employers, managers and employees.

With the tools offered in the BambooHR platform, you can make your onboarding process not only effective, but efficient, repeatable, and friendly for both your existing staff and your new hires.

BambooHR Onboarding:

- **Automated offer letters**
- **Get-to-know-you emails**
- **Digital preboarding packet**
- **Seamless data integration**
- **Benefits enrollment**
- **Automatic reminders and status alerts**
- **E-signatures**
- **Award-winning customer service**



Get the tools you need to get the most out of new talent. Get BambooHR.

We set you free to do great work.