



Is Your Onboarding Process Optimal or AWOL?

By Scott Sette, CPC

My neighbor is an engineer for one of the big oil companies. Recently, he decided it was time for a change and he began interviewing at other organizations. He was offered, and accepted, a new opportunity with another major oil company. This new position was located in Europe, so he had a big move ahead of him. He was so excited about his new position and spoke about it (and the company) with such enthusiasm! However, soon after accepting the job, his excitement started to wane. There were problems popping up every few days — they didn't send him paperwork he needed to fill out, they were late in returning his phone calls when he had a question, and he had no communication with the person who hired him. These issues made him seriously question his decision to work there. In fact, he told me that he almost picked up the phone several times to tell them that he wasn't going to take the job, after all.

Unfortunately, my neighbor's experience is not an isolated incident. Many companies become MIA after an offer has been accepted by a new employee. They feel like the "deal is done." That couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, much of the work has just begun. That is where onboarding comes in. Onboarding is the process of assimilating new employees into your company culture and making them productive members of your team as quickly as possible. Onboarding starts the moment the candidate accepts your offer and continues well into the first year of his/her employment at your organization.

Onboarding can be divided into 3 distinct parts: before the employee starts work, the employee's first day of work, and the employee's first 90+ days of work. Let's look at what you can do to maximize each step in the onboarding process.

Before the employee starts work:

1. Stay in touch with him — The new employee's direct supervisor should call him at least once a week during his notice period. This is a very vulnerable time for your new hire. He is excited, but nervous. He is leaving his comfort zone and going to a new place where he knows no one. All the while, his friends, coworkers, and supervisors are telling him not to

leave and, possibly, making him a counter offer. Don't leave him stranded on an island all by himself. Call him at least once a week. Let him know how excited you are to have him joining your team. Ask if there is anything you can do to make the transition easier for him. He will thank you for it.

2. Include him in correspondence — If you are sending emails to the group about any project/issue that the new hire will be involved in, then include him in that email. He will feel like part of your team before he arrives on his first day.
3. Invite him to meetings — Is your group having a meeting about an upcoming project? Are you going to a retreat, a conference, or just getting together for happy hour? Invite your new hire! Building camaraderie with his future co-workers before he starts work will pay you dividends immediately.

The employee's first day of work:

1. Have her workspace set up — This is easy to do, yet many companies don't do it. I can't tell you how many times I have heard about new employees waiting days (or weeks) to get a computer. This is ridiculous. Have her workspace completely set up and waiting for her on her first day. This includes having the desk cleaned out, computer and phone installed, email address working, and business cards on hand.
2. Take her to lunch — On her first day, your new employee probably spent the morning filling out paperwork and choosing benefits plans. Necessary, but not exciting. Welcome her to your company by taking her to lunch or setting up a group lunch. Her first day of work should be a celebration — treat it as such.
3. Executive introductions — Have the company President (or most senior executive in your office) come by and welcome your new hire to the team. She will appreciate the fact that the President knows her name and took time out of his busy schedule to meet her.

The employee's first 90+ days of work:

1. Have weekly progress meetings — Most companies have a 90-day probationary period. To ensure that your new hire knows exactly what is expected of him, create a list of clear, specific objectives and meet with him weekly to ensure that he is on the right path to achieving those goals.
2. Assign a mentor — Choose an exemplary employee to act as a mentor to your new hire. This mentor should possess the attitude and achievement that you strive to find in all of your employees. The role of the mentor will be to teach the new hire and assist in acclimating him to your company culture. This can be done through a formal process or as informally as meeting over lunch.

When done properly, onboarding is powerful tool for improving retention, productivity, and happiness in your workplace.

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