THE EPIC FAIL SERIES: 
Onboarding Gone Wrong
When Onboarding Goes Terribly Wrong

We've all experienced this at some point in our careers. Today, you’re starting a new job and you step into the building, filled with excitement, nervousness, and a bit of trepidation, hoping that your first day goes well. After all, you had a great experience working with the recruiter and learning all about the role, your team, and the company culture. You came in for interviews a few weeks ago and were impressed with everything—the space, the team, and the vibe. This job seems like the perfect fit and you’re really looking forward to getting started.

You walk up to the reception desk and tell them that you’re here. The receptionist doesn’t know who you are and wasn’t given the heads-up that you’re starting today. You are placed in an empty conference room where you sit for hours, waiting for someone to tell you where to go, who to meet, and where you’re going to sit. No one greets you. Your space is not ready. No one is taking you to lunch, showing you around, or introducing you to the extended team. Crestfallen, frustrated, and bored, you wonder if you made the right decision.

A bad onboarding experience not only leaves a negative impression on your new employee, but it also hinders their time-to-productivity and can result in a shorter stay at the company. The last thing that you want is for a new hire to walk out the door and you’re forced to start the search all over again—losing both time and money.

Did You Know?

- 69% of employees are more likely to stay with a company for three years if they experienced great onboarding
- 20% of employee turnover happens in the first 45 days
- 35% of companies spend zero dollars on onboarding and $11,000 to hire someone

(Source: Lessonly, 2014)
Getting onboarding right is tough, so it’s important to avoid these pitfalls at all costs.

1. **Confusing Orientation with Onboarding**

   Onboarding is more than just new hire orientation. Onboarding is a *process* while orientation is an *event*—just one step in the overall onboarding process. The goals of traditional orientations are relatively narrow: to get new hires on the payroll, signed up for benefits, and to provide basic information about the company. Onboarding, on the other hand, conveys your organizational brand and values, explains your people and professional culture, aligns institutional expectations and performance, and provides the tools for the employee to be successfully assimilated into his or her position with a quicker ramp-up to productivity. Onboarding can take weeks or months, and should reinforce everything the new hire was told in the recruiting phase to avoid “buyer’s remorse.”
2. **Abandoning Candidates After Offer is Accepted**

While many recruiters consider their job done once a candidate accepts an offer, they should instead help prepare their candidates for the first few days at their new job and share information like dress code, lunch policies, parking, and any other day-to-day things a new employee should understand. Also, it’s great when recruiters check in with the new hire on their first day, and a few additional times over the next few weeks, to make sure that they are settling in well and that the onboarding process is seamless.

3. **Overloading New Hires with Too Much Information**

How many times have you started a new job and felt immediately overwhelmed because you’re drinking from a big fire hose? It’s a common mistake. Because new hires are apprehensive, putting them under this kind of pressure makes it unlikely that they will ask questions or remember a majority of the information they receive. The best onboarding programs limit the amount of information provided, and the number of forms, required so that they encompass less than two hours on the first day. It’s important to get the paperwork taken care of, but the most critical thing that needs to happen is to make a new hire feel welcome and good about their decision to join your company.

4. **Overlooking Pre-Boarding Activities**

To help alleviate the big “data dump” on the first day, pre-boarding eases new hires into their job even before they start, laying the groundwork for a fantastic first day. Pre-boarding often includes information about the company, its culture, products, team members, benefits, and other first day logistics. It also may involve pairing the new employee with a sponsor, or buddy, to help them “learn the ropes” of the organization. More importantly, pre-boarding helps generate excitement, engagement, and a sense of corporate belonging.

5. **Not Making Onboarding Digital or Mobile**

The best onboarding experiences puts all required information online where it is more easily accessed and searched before and after new hires start. Beyond the traditional forms and policies, the best onboarding experiences also include team profiles, org charts, information about upcoming company events, and showcase unique aspects of the culture. Make sure that your new hire portal is also available on mobile so that everything that a new hire might need is always at their fingertips.
6. **Onboarding Teams are Unorganized**

Successful onboarding programs make a special effort to integrate and coordinate what are traditionally independent activities such as payroll registration, security clearances, technology set-up, office assignments, etc. and involves multiple teams including HR, finance, IT, managers, team members, and many more. Things get even more complicated and challenging when the new hire is remote or working out of a satellite office. Without a clear, streamlined, and organized onboarding process, teams often fumble the first few days and prevent a new hire from getting up and running quickly.

7. **Their Manager is Missing in Action**

The most common fault that occurs at “departmental level” onboarding (and the one with the most negative impact) is not having the employee’s direct manager present on the first day. With the manager absent, new hires often feel unimportant and frustrated. Invariably, in the absence of the manager, new hires are shown their cubicle, given “a manual” to read, and told to be patient until their manager returns. The best onboarding programs do not allow a new hire to start without their manager present and a plan of action for the first month. Once a new hire is through the orientation process, the manager should share corporate success measures, departmental plans, strategies and goals, how this individual’s performance will be assessed, their bonus and promotion criteria, and specifically, what is expected from them during their first weeks and months on the job.
8. **Not Offering Onboarding for Each Organizational Level**

Organizations are complex and giving new hires an understanding of what’s critical at each level in the organization in terms of strategic direction, key challenges, emerging opportunities, top priorities, etc., is very important. The five organizational “levels” of onboarding include: corporate, location, departmental, team, and individual. This information gives new hires a roadmap of how the business is structured and how their role fits into the bigger strategic picture.

9. **Onboarding Happens a Week or a Month Later**

Organizations frequently postpone most onboarding components until a large group of new hires can participate in a single session. Any delay can negatively impact new hire productivity and provide an opportunity to make mistakes that will later be difficult to erase. As a result, effective programs offer online onboarding or do not delay onboarding beyond the first week after the employee is hired. An alternative approach, that works well for many companies, is to have batches of new hires start on a Monday morning so that they can be onboarded in groups, maximizing your resources and time.
10. Metrics and Feedback Don’t Matter
Most orientation and onboarding programs are not designed and run like standard business processes. Few have any objective results metrics that make a specific individual accountable for producing measurable business impacts. Don’t forget to ask for feedback from everyone involved—to continue to improve and streamline the onboarding process. It’s important to include metrics that cover time to productivity, new hire retention/termination rates, new hire error rates, new-hire referrals, and the ROI. Hiring managers also need to be held accountable by including their onboarding success rates in their performance appraisals and their bonus formula.
Onboarding is About Instilling a Sense of Belonging

A great onboarding process should help an employee identify with the company and feel a sense of belonging—like joining a family that welcomes you with open arms. Find ways of making people immediately feel invested—heart, hands, and minds—in the new company. Present the history of the company and share compelling success stories. Focus on your vision, mission, and values, and how they connect to the strategy and corporate goals. These things will help keep new hires inspired to get up in the morning, go to work, and give it all they've got.

Jobvite Can Help You Create a Winning Onboarding Program

Jobvite Onboard is a comprehensive onboarding solution that makes their first few days, weeks, and months as engaging, efficient, and productive as possible—leading to long term job satisfaction and retention.

To learn more, get in touch with us at sales@jobvite-inc.com.
About Jobvite

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