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GUIDE

# 4 Reasons for a Learning-First Onboarding Experience

# Why Learning Matters in Onboarding

Every organization wants the same thing for their new hires: streamline the paperwork, quickly assess and close any knowledge gaps, integrate with the team, and reduce the time to productivity as much as possible.

The strange reality is just how wildly different the new employee experience can be. Some organizations have firmly established protocols, while others struggle to create a repeatable process.

Beginning learning and development (L&D) efforts early on in the onboarding process can bolster new hires' success and reduce their ramp time. The timespan for "onboarding" is flexible — the process is different for everyone, and there are many paths to success. It often begins with orientation — where new hires complete first-day documents and meet their team — continues with skills development, and ends when they're fully contributing team members.

This crucial on-ramp time period is different for everyone, yet many companies tend to be a bit impatient with this process.

A study by Gallup shows that new employees typically take around 12 months to reach their full performance potential in a role — driving a clear need for efficient, engaging, and productive onboarding.

In this guide, we'll break down four ways that attaching learning opportunities early on in the onboarding process can improve the new hire experience. We'll also talk about why using superior HR and learning technology is necessary to drive that change.



## REASON 1

### First Impressions Are Lasting

It can be difficult to grasp just how influential the first few days are in shaping the employee journey.

New hires are immediately exposed to the professionalism and efficiency of the administration via their human resources onboarding experience.

Concurrent with that is the social aspect of meeting their new team members. Any sort of stumble here will impact how the organization is viewed.

# 85%

Although **85% of employees are enthusiastic about their new positions and companies**, only **72% feel the first few weeks were a positive experience.**

Companies that have developed a successful and repeatable onboarding experience often offer an intuitive checklist of activities to begin the employee's journey. This often starts with basic employment forms and procedural documentation. Adding learning and development opportunities to this checklist conveys two important messages to new employees:

1. Employee learning is important to the company, and specifically their success within it.
2. Training and development is easy to access, timely, and tailored to their positions and goals.

Creating learning opportunities early in this experience showcases on Day 1 just how much the organization values learning.

Think of onboarding as a late-stage audition where the former job applicant (now the new hire) extends their evaluation of the company they just joined. If the company doesn't meet them where they are with learning opportunities, it could diminish their engagement.

### Remote Onboarding Programs

The rise of remote work has further altered that first-day experience. A **2023 Gallup** report states that 29% of jobs are performed remotely, and 52% utilize a hybrid option. Though there are fewer variables to overcome compared to onsite work, like commute times or workplace conditions, other factors impact the new employee experience equally.

New hires' first interactions with HR technology on day one are critical to shaping their journey. As they complete their welcome tasks, the next few steps of the onboarding process should be a seamless and intuitive experience. This could include assigning the new hire to cohort-based learning, where they can foster relationships with their coworkers to build trust and collaboration in a remote environment. Scheduling these meetings could easily be built into onboarding programs as virtual instructor-led training sessions and documented in the **learning management system (LMS)** for reporting purposes.

Onboarding is an essential part of company culture. New hires need to understand the resources they can access to affect change and become full contributors in their roles. Learning is a critical step to increase employee confidence and motivation of new hires.

## REASON 2

# L&D Quickly Closes Skill Gaps Among Incoming Employees

Let's expand on the premise that the onboarding process is a continuation of the evaluation stage.

This time, it's the company's turn to further evaluate the new hire for skill or knowledge gaps and work quickly to close them. Throughout the hiring process, the stakeholders involved typically take notes on each candidate regarding their capabilities, proficiencies, and areas of improvement. In an ideal setting, learning leaders use the data created from this candidate evaluation to help guide the personalized onboarding experience.

This level of personalized learning requires extensive cooperation and collaboration among talent acquisition, hiring managers, and learning leaders. Executing this plan may require a powerful LMS, access to a library of learning content, and the ability to create and deploy custom learning opportunities. Doing this at scale means the process must be repeatable and augmented by automation. The learning experience can even be personalized at scale by recommending relevant content with machine learning tools.

## Learning Preferences Matter

Going even further, learning leaders should be hip to the different learning preferences that may exist among new hires. The digital natives may have differing expectations around how they consume learning resources than other generations. While some may prefer long-form training, others may prefer to access specific content based on their moment of need. While pleasing everyone may be impossible, planning for these preferences with multiple formats (where appropriate) may be a head start.



Managers can bolster success with considerations toward cameras, headsets, and monitors that reduce physical barriers to learning. The same could be said for neurodivergent learners and helping to optimize learning environments for their needs.

Incorporating prescribed training early in the onboarding experience reinforces a culture of learning by emphasizing its importance. Scheduled learning during regular work hours shows that growth is a priority for the company and positively impacts the employee experience.



## REASON 3

# New Hires Need Company-Specific Training

During onboarding, new hires need to familiarize themselves with the individual programs, software, and procedures their employer uses.

The modern knowledge worker uses many tools throughout their workday: email, web browsers, instant messaging, document storage, project and task management, phones, video conferencing, and more. What's more is that new hires might be knowledgeable of one program, but the organization uses a different product that they must now be trained on, such as Zoom vs. Microsoft Teams.

Before requiring new hires to use org-specific tools, close knowledge gaps during the formal onboarding period. Though the learning curve may be quite steep for these learning opportunities, the reality is that they are essential to complete and should be factored into the onboarding process.

### Cybersecurity: The Moving Target

Most organizations have company-specific policies and procedures that need to be communicated to new hires. Cybersecurity is a mainstay for many as the fight to maintain data security is an ongoing and often unique strategy. A well-trained employee is the last line of defense against data breaches.

### What To Do With Gen AI?

A newer topic that falls under the company policy umbrella is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace.

While many companies are gaining tremendous efficiencies by using generative AI (GenAI), there is not yet a general consensus on acceptable use. Communicating policy early on in a new hire's tenure is imperative to their success.

### Proficiency Exams Matter

Many technical jobs could benefit from a formal proficiency assessment during onboarding. High growth organizations are **1.4 times more likely** to give assessments throughout the employee lifecycle. For employees who might use dangerous or expensive equipment, this could be a critical part of a blended learning approach to the new hire training program.

A common learning path here would be to deliver individual learning opportunities first, followed by a demonstrative step with a knowledgeable stakeholder such as a manager. Assessments like these can help to streamline the onboarding journey and deliver a more personalized approach, all the while reinforcing organizational standards.

Ensuring that hiring managers, learning leaders, and mentors are involved in the onboarding process can help provide a clearer vision of employee preparedness. Delivering the necessary information to learners from a centralized platform can help make them more productive in a fraction of the time.



## REASON 4

# L&D Helps New Employees Integrate With Their Teams

When a new employee starts, it's not just the employee that is onboarding — the entire team is onboarding to a newly redefined team.

The new hire is joining a pack with its own relationships, microculture, and quirks.

The future of work looks like networks of teams working closely together, but poor relationships can increase turnover. Work relationships are a significant indicator when it comes to engagement in one's work. **48% of employees** said they've left a job due to poor cultural fit.

Without good relationships, employees are more prone to leave their jobs. Unfortunately, the social aspect of learning in the onboarding phase is extremely important but often neglected.

Relationships are everything in team-based work. Keep this in mind while onboarding new hires. Help them learn about their new team members with a modern learning management system. Use the technology to create team level learning resources such as job aids, external links to useful resources, and the ability to schedule ongoing in-person or virtual training sessions for real-time Q&A.

## Empowering Team Members

Team members should be involved in creating stronger team cohesion by using the LMS to their advantage. For example, using a video upload tool to create a repository of best practices from peers would boost both productivity and social cohesion — new hires could learn about cultural norms as well as practical tips for succeeding in their new roles.

Failing to integrate new hires with their team leaves them feeling like they're taking a test without a study guide. When new hires get learning content built for onboarding into their teams — not just their hard skills — they can acclimate to their new surroundings, warming up the social dynamics and improving team cohesion.

The onboarding process starts on day one, and so should personalized learning opportunities for each new team member. When employee learning and onboarding converge, new hires ramp faster, feel they're part of company culture, and better understand their path to success.

Deploying the right technology is mission-critical. HR technology must work in concert to deliver real results for the administrative teams and the learners themselves to create an agile workforce, close skills gaps, and drive business success.



# Employee Learning at Every Stage

ClearCo unifies the employee experience with holistic solutions for recruiting, onboarding, learning, and performance management.

Design an engaging, empowering employee experience with L&D opportunities that start on Day 1.

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