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GUIDE

HR's Guide To Employee Onboarding

Why Effective Onboarding Matters

Onboarding new employees at your organization is one of the most critical parts of the employee journey.

It's your chance to properly train new hires in company policy, integrate them into the company culture, and help them reach optimal productivity as soon as possible. However, only 12% of employees think their company does onboarding well, and retaining new hires is a challenge — up to 20% of costly **employee turnover** happens within the first 45 days in their role.

Though it may take a little more time in the first few months, an onboarding process is worth it. Research shows that organizations with a standard onboarding process can **increase retention by 50%** and even experience 62% greater new hire productivity. An **excellent onboarding plan also increases employee engagement** long-term.

Learn more about the importance of onboarding with our guide. Then, build your own engaging, comprehensive onboarding plan that leaves your employees confident and prepared to take on their new roles.

Research shows a standard onboarding process can:



Increase retention by **50%**



Increase new hire productivity by **62%**



What Is Employee Onboarding?

Employee onboarding is the process of transitioning from candidate to employee, settling into a new role, and taking on the role's responsibilities.

It begins as soon as a candidate accepts an employer's offer and continues as they become "onboarded" into the company as employees. Onboarding tasks range from completing new hire paperwork to learning the company software and systems, meeting the team, setting new hire performance goals, and getting familiar with company culture.

The length of onboarding processes varies, but experts recommend it lasts at least 90 days for most roles. The more complex the role, the longer their onboarding program should be. In some cases, that could mean onboarding lasts six months or more.

Onboarding software, typically as part of a larger HR technology ecosystem, helps facilitate the process by streamlining tasks and simplifying communication. Often, onboarding software features a digital dashboard that gives talent acquisition teams a single source of truth. The dashboard allows them to track each hire's progress as they move through the onboarding stage of employment.

HR and new hire tasks you can track with an onboarding system include:

- I-9 verification
- Background checks
- Form completion (tax forms, policy documents, etc.)
- New hire goal completion
- Compliance insight and tools
- Payroll and benefits enrollment

Some software even acts as a connection between the organization's applicant tracking, performance management, and employee engagement systems. When these systems are connected, it's far easier to maintain accuracy, eliminate redundancies, and effortlessly create detailed records of employee journeys.

You can also gain far more insight into:

- Employee performance and engagement over time
- The most effective way to onboard employees
- The time it takes for employees to become fully ramped (or productive)



Why Is Onboarding Important?

There are many reasons why it's important to give your new employees a thorough introduction to their new roles, colleagues, and company culture. Your onboarding plan gives new hires a blueprint for how to succeed and sparks the connections that help them thrive.

1. Better New Hire and Employee Retention

As we mentioned, it's not uncommon to lose new hires during their first few weeks or months at a job. Increase the chances that they'll stay with a formal onboarding process: some companies have seen **retention increase** by as much as 50% when they started their own.

An excellent onboarding experience has a ripple effect — 69% of employees will still be at your company three years later if they say their onboarding experience was a good one.



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2. Reduced Time to Productivity

Time-to-productivity refers to the length of time it takes employees to reach their full performance potential in a new role. **According to Gallup research**, that's usually around 12 months — one full year. While it doesn't need to last 12 months, the average length of a good onboarding program is 90 days.

Unfortunately, lots of employees don't get more than one full day of onboarding, with 43% saying their "onboarding program" was comprised of just one day of orientation (which isn't the same thing) and a welcome packet. That's no doubt why many say they feel unprepared after onboarding.

You can help employees reach full productivity faster when you set performance goals in the onboarding process. That helps managers quickly see if employees are on track to be ready to take on their roles or if they need to adapt onboarding plans to address any challenges. Either way, you can get employees fully ramped far more quickly when you're following a plan. You're also likely to see increased productivity, with companies reporting up to 62% higher productivity with an onboarding plan.

3. Increased Engagement

Onboarding is your chance to capture new employees' enthusiasm by setting expectations and establishing strong connections that keep them interested in their work and loyal to your company. Great onboarding can lead to a **54% increase in engagement**.



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4. Improved Company Culture

How you manage the employee lifecycle impacts your culture, and onboarding is a foundational part of that lifecycle. As such, it's not too bold to claim that onboarding is part of the very foundation of company culture. Culture is often a factor in why employees accept job offers, and onboarding is when you can reinforce what they already know and love about it.

5. ROI That Grows

Investing in an onboarding system isn't an insignificant business cost, but that's because it generates ROI indefinitely. An onboarding system won't have high returns the first year, then start to drop off.

If you're using it wisely, you can expect to see ROI climb year after year due to many factors:

- Better employee retention over a sustained period leads to lower hiring costs and an invaluable depth of knowledge among your workforce.
- Engaging employees from their first day helps maintain motivation, leading to increased innovation.
- Employees who have excellent onboarding experiences talk about them, becoming brand ambassadors whose endorsements attract more top talent to your organization.

Onboarding vs. Orientation

Orientation is just one part of the larger employee onboarding process. **Orientation programs** typically take place on employees' first day or over their first few days. They are a series of events and tasks that focus on getting employees the equipment and access they need — whether that's a laptop, logins for software programs, personal protective equipment (PPE), or a PIN number to use when clocking in and out.

Onboarding, on the other hand, is the period when new hires become involved in company culture, grow their relationships with their coworkers, learn policies and procedures, and start taking on the responsibilities of their role.

What Is the Average Cost of Onboarding?

The cost of hiring a new employee varies greatly depending on the type of role, their experience level, your industry, and many other factors.

When you calculate the cost of hiring for your organization, be sure to factor in the costs of recruitment, training, lost productivity, administrative work, and operational costs.

The average cost of hiring **ranges from \$4,700** to as much as two times the employee's salary. If your new hires have a negative onboarding experience that results in them quitting, the time and costs of hiring could be effectively doubled.

These onboarding statistics can help you determine your real cost of hiring and onboarding:

50% of employees who had a poor onboarding experience **plan to quit**.

90% of new hires say it takes **six months to decide** if they'll stay in a new role.

44 days The **average time-to-hire is 44 days**, a one-day increase from recent years.

Who Is Responsible for the Onboarding Process?

The HR department is largely responsible for onboarding new hires, but hiring managers must also be involved.

When they take an active role in onboarding, new hires are **3.4 times more likely** to say they had an exceptional onboarding experience. The responsibility even extends to other employees. Get your whole team involved by asking them to introduce themselves, whether digitally via your onboarding software, in person, or over a phone or video call.

When starting a new job, new hires often have many questions, some of which they need to ask more than once. They typically ask HR by default, but by making sure your managers are involved in the process, new hires will feel comfortable going to their managers. And with a top-notch onboarding process, you may never hear these questions again.

Anticipate the most common questions so you can answer them ahead of time and ensure your employees can quickly find the answers on their own without taking valuable time away from your HR team. This also serves to make your new hires feel empowered, prepared, and supported.

Common questions when starting a new job include:

1. When will I get my computer?
2. How do I access my new work email?
3. How do I enroll in direct deposit?
4. What are my options for health insurance?
5. Who can I contact in my department, HR, or other departments for help?
6. What is the organizational structure of my department and the company?
7. What do I need to accomplish during onboarding?
8. How long does onboarding last?

If you're working in person, you'll need to answer questions like:

1. Where is the bathroom?
2. What do people usually do for lunch?
3. Where should I park?

Employee Onboarding Best Practices

What does it take to create a successful onboarding process?

Understand the strategies that are proven to be effective in preparing, engaging, and retaining new employees. We'll share a few best practices and methods for ensuring your onboarding plan is as effective as possible.

1. Don't Stop — Or Start — At Day One

A great new hire onboarding plan consists of more than just one day of doing paperwork and meeting the team. It takes more than a few days for new hires to acclimate to their workload, company culture, and team processes. Extending the onboarding process to **months instead of weeks** helps increase the likelihood that your new employees will be more successful in their roles in the long term.

New hire onboarding plans that start prior to day one help employees focus on meeting their coworkers, learning about company values, and preparing for their roles. Before their first day, send new hires their paperwork to complete and have managers reach out with a welcome message. Their equipment, company swag, and onboarding plan should also be prepared before their first day arrives.

2. Set Onboarding Objectives

To effectively onboard new hires, give them goals to work toward right off the bat. Providing direction right away can help calm nerves and give employees a clear picture of what they're expected to accomplish during onboarding. Set short-term goals like scheduling a week-one chat with someone from a different department. Long-term goals might include understanding the company's mission, vision, and values.

Achieving goals during the onboarding process helps new hires jump right into their role and gives them a sense of accomplishment. It also helps them become more familiar with the company.

3. Incorporate a Mentorship Program

Bringing a mentorship component to your onboarding plan for new hires is beneficial in several ways:

- Gives employees a head start on building relationships with coworkers
- Provides opportunities for professional development
- Facilitates trust between employees

Pairing new hires with a mentor shows that you care about their growth and success, which is exactly what job seekers today are looking for. Mentors are a great resource for new hires. Beyond answering questions and being a friendly face, mentors help new employees develop a connection with their workplace.

A mentorship program is **beneficial for employees in remote positions** whose hiring and onboarding take place virtually and who may never step foot in an office. It's also another impactful retention tool, with mentors and mentees showing far higher retention rates (69% and 72%, respectively) than employees without mentors (49%).

4. Give Feedback and Recognition

Offering feedback and recognizing accomplishments have a positive impact on new hire onboarding. Meet with new employees often during their onboarding to answer questions and offer guidance. When they complete training or their first project, recognizing their achievements helps them feel more connected to their work from the start.

Incorporating feedback and recognition in your onboarding plan for new hires makes it clear that those are important components of company culture. That matters to your new employees: those who don't feel recognized are **twice as likely to quit** within their first year.



5. Use Software for New Hire Onboarding

Utilizing technology in the employee onboarding process can make a huge difference in completing the required documentation quickly. With onboarding software, new employees use an employee portal to complete the required paperwork before their first day of work — no paper required. HR teams can easily access digital files and spend less time tracking down documents and entering new hires' personal information manually.

HR can use an onboarding system to set up team member introductions to help new employees get to know their coworkers before their first day. Hiring managers can set goals for new hires to meet during onboarding. Schedule check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days to ensure new employees are on track for a successful onboarding process.

The 4 Cs of Employee Onboarding

The 4 Cs are the building blocks of a successful onboarding program. The 4 Cs can help your hiring team set goals for new hires to motivate them and ensure the onboarding process stays on track.

- ✓ Level 1: **Compliance**
- ✓ Level 2: **Clarification**
- ✓ Level 3: **Culture**
- ✓ Level 4: **Connection**

Virtual or Remote Onboarding Tips

During onboarding, you're building a foundation for new hires' relationships in the workplace and giving them a voice. That's even more important when you're bringing them into a remote work environment or if any part of onboarding takes place virtually.

- Virtual onboarding should never be a “one-and-done” video session or phone call. Conduct onboarding over several interactive video sessions to provide an overview of the company, its products and services, and incorporate meetings with managers, team members, and even business leaders and executives.
- Using video is critical to virtual onboarding. Create a series of short videos on induction topics, which can be sent to the new hire each day to complement virtual sessions.
- Schedule full days of engagements so new hires don't feel neglected.
- Create a structured calendar with separate links for each session and stress punctuality to internal colleagues tapped for presentations.
- Do not show up late or cancel — leave a good impression on the new employee by sticking to the schedule.
- Schedule video chats between new hires and partners from across the organization. Ensure they get a chance to meet both their team and a selection of the other colleagues they'll be working with.
- Host additional sessions or office hours, where employees can ask additional questions and hear from some other organizations within the company.



- Include scheduled training sessions, one-on-one meetings with the new hire's manager and onboarding buddy, an all-team presentation, and a virtual happy hour with the team so they can get to know their new coworkers in a more casual setting.
- Include regular check-ins and touchpoints with HR and the hiring manager to make sure new hires don't feel forgotten or overlooked.
- Begin with a one-hour live session covering the company culture, values, and products and conclude with a question-and-answer session with a benefits expert who helps new hires finish enrollment. During the week, other activities could include an introduction video from the CEO, a session with a company executive, and a scavenger hunt within the company's online resources.
- Enable company-specific software and programs to be loaded remotely. When remote workers open their laptops, they can download needed software and programs just by entering the right credentials.
- Ask new hires if there are other tools or technology they need to be successful in their roles.
- Coach managers on the importance of their involvement with new hire onboarding.
- Don't overschedule. Give new hires time to settle in without being overwhelmed.
- Put together new hire onboarding groups so that new hires have a chance to meet each other and build relationships.
- Schedule virtual lunches and coffee breaks and cover the cost for the new employee.
- Send a welcome basket with branded gear to new workers' homes to get them excited and help them feel included.
- Before the new hire's first day, have managers send a welcome message and select a team member as an onboarding buddy to share advice and navigate the new hire's experience.
- Send an engagement survey to get feedback on the overall onboarding experience after one week and again at 45 days.
- Space out virtual training and exercises, and give new hires some free time during the day to absorb the information and ask questions.
- Take steps to ensure that the company culture shines through during virtual onboarding.

Executive Onboarding Tips

Onboarding executives or new leaders is even more complex than typical onboarding programs.

Here are some ways to tailor onboarding plans to higher-level roles:

- Identify the executive's leadership and anyone who is a key stakeholder in their development and success.
- Prepare the business strategy relevant to the executive's KPIs and goals.
- Outline how the performance management process works for the executive's role.
- Outline any performance management tactics the executive will deliver and hold their direct reports accountable for.
- Build the introductory period plan that will facilitate relationship development between the executive and their subordinates.
- Align the boundaries for the executive's position, both in terms of employees' and leaders' rights.



Develop a Unique Welcome Process

When onboarding an executive, the first glimpse into the company culture is critical. Highlight what makes your organization so unique. Benefits and perks are great, but those are in your company handbook. Focus on intangibles like leadership's open-door policy or company-wide social responsibility programs.

UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School of Executive Development suggests **HR get in on the action** as well, working with the incoming executive by giving them key questions to ask their new bosses and colleagues:

- What is the guidance from your boss (your boss's boss)?
- What are the informal keys to success?
- Where is the strategy working well, and where can it be improved?
- What are the organization's strengths and challenges?
- What metrics does the organization use to track progress?

Lauby is right: onboarding truly touches every step in an employee's time within the organization. When welcoming a new executive, the stakes only get higher. Following the tips above can provide a more positive experience for new leaders.

“On some level, much of onboarding touches every single component in the employee life cycle. Yet, when it comes to manager onboarding, we do nothing or very little.”

Sharlyn Lauby (@HRbartender)

HR & Management Expert



Bonus Tip

You can use these tips when onboarding a promoted manager, too. Just because this individual has been working with your company and understands the job better than someone hired externally doesn't mean they don't need an introduction to the role.

Some pieces of onboarding might be redundant and therefore left out, but overall, promoted employees still need set expectations, support, and a friendly team welcome.



Onboarding Plan Checklist

Onboarding new employees is complex, so we created this checklist to help you design your own process. Get an idea of what you should expect your HR team and new hires to accomplish at each stage of onboarding.

Onboarding Part 1: Before the First Day

Do your efforts to **retain new hires** start before their first day? Unfortunately, 20% of employees quit before they even begin. Start their employee experience off right and increase the odds of them staying with your organization by beginning the onboarding process before day one with pre-boarding.

Here are some pre-boarding steps you can take to engage your new hire and make them feel welcome:

☐ Send a welcome email.

Send a personalized email from the HR team welcoming your new hire to the company and providing them with all the information they need for the first day. Hiring managers should also send a welcome email and tell new hires what to expect on their first day, especially if employees are remote.

☐ Set up their workspace or send equipment.

Ensure new employees have everything they'll need for their first day: a laptop and accessories, a desk or workspace, and whatever else is necessary to do their job. If your new hire will work remotely, send all accessories, screens, and equipment to their house before their start date.

☐ Set them up in your systems.

Ensure the employee has access to your intranet, voicemail, and email. Make instructional videos if necessary, and set up a password management system to ensure security.

☐ Plan important introductions.

Schedule meetings with any managers, team members, and colleagues from other departments the new hire will interact with regularly. Set these up before the new hire's start date so they meet their closest coworkers ASAP.

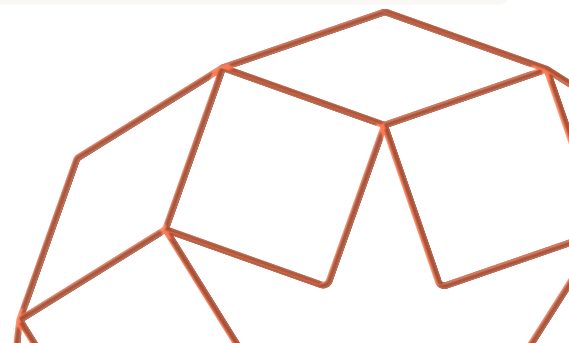
☐ Send them their paperwork.

A paperless onboarding system makes it easy for your new employees to fill out and sign all the necessary paperwork before arriving on their first day. These include I-9 compliance, E-Verify, W2 form, benefits and 401(k) enrollment, direct deposit, emergency contact information, etc. Why spend hours filling out and signing paperwork when you could be celebrating the employee's first day?



Bonus Tip

Ditch the actual paper trail and embrace a digital onboarding process! With paperless onboarding, you and your employees can save time and reduce clutter.



Onboarding Part 2: The First Day

No matter how long you've been in the workforce, the first day at a new job is a little anxiety-inducing, especially if you don't know what to expect. Help beat first-day jitters by planning out the first day so new hires aren't overwhelmed and have a chance to get to know their new team.

☐ Make an announcement.

HR or hiring managers should send out a welcome message and a short introduction for new hires via email or Slack, whether you're in-office or remote. Then, invite employees to say hi to their new colleagues via Slack or Zoom, or stop by their desks at the office.

☐ Provide an onboarding schedule.

You should give your new hire a schedule for their first week, including any required or suggested training. You can also discuss the rest of their onboarding program, but don't overwhelm them with too much information.

☐ Assign a mentor.

Pair new hires with a senior team member to mentor them and schedule regular check-ins. This one works: 91% of employees who participate in a mentorship program are satisfied with their jobs.

☐ Take a moment to relax.

If possible, take the employee to lunch with their main teammates to bond and integrate into the company culture. Remote teams might consider a team lunch or happy hour over Zoom.



Onboarding Part 3: The First Week

The first few days at a new position are difficult — there's not much that employees can start working on, and they're often still working their way through orientation and training courses.

To ensure your new hire has a great week, you should focus on ensuring they have what they need, their questions are answered, and they're not feeling too overwhelmed or lost. The first week is also great for more team introductions and a deeper dive into company history, culture, and more.

☐ Set up the new hire with any training materials.

Get started on training modules or classes during week one and communicate any deadlines for completing training.

☐ Check in with new hires.

Set up a time to check in, ensure they have everything they need, including equipment and system access, and answer any questions.

☐ Dig into the company's mission, vision, and values.

Help employees understand the history of the company, as well as its mission, vision, and values, and how their work plays a part in the organization's success.

☐ Explain performance reviews.

Set some time to go over your performance review and goal-setting processes. Make sure they know what's expected of them.

☐ Give an assignment.

Let new hires hit the ground running with a simple task or project they can complete in a few hours or a day. Make it a joint effort with their new teammates to introduce your collaborative work environment and start building relationships.

☐ Walk them through policies and procedures.

Cover policies and procedures to help your new employee feel comfortable getting started on the real work. Go over the rules and processes for internet usage, email communication, breaks, etc., and start familiarizing them with the technology they will use daily.



Bonus Tip

No matter what task you give your new hire, offer them a set time to complete and check back in with you. This can help them understand how projects and feedback are handled at your organization.



Onboarding Part 4: The First Month and Beyond

Gallup estimates that it takes some employees around 12 months to reach full productivity. While that doesn't mean your onboarding program needs to last an entire year, onboarding that lasts at least 90 days is recommended. Continue check-ins and goal-setting through these months to ensure the employee reaches total productivity as planned and stays engaged throughout the process.

☐ Set performance goals.

Keeping your new employees engaged with goals will point them in the right direction and give them something to work towards from the start. Set a few SMART goals for new hires to accomplish within their first 90 days.

☐ Build a career path.

Once your employee knows more about their role and your company, work with them to develop a career plan that fits their personal goals. Designate career goals to help new hires visualize their path at your company.

☐ Establish open communication.

As onboarding progresses, open up some dialogue to gauge how the experience is going for new hires. Find out what is going well and what could be better, and encourage them to ask questions.

☐ Send an onboarding survey.

Find out about the new hire's first-week experience with an [employee survey](#). What would they improve? What worked well for them?

☐ Give constructive feedback and recognition.

Make time for frequent [one-on-one meetings](#) to discuss the employee's progress. Get updates from those who work closely with the new hire to learn more about onboarding progress and give constructive feedback. Give positive feedback using employee recognition to kickstart engagement.

☐ Encourage independence.

With training, introductions, and communication all covered, it's time to start letting your new employees practice what you hired them for. Since they are still relatively new, you'll want to continue checking their work and providing feedback, but use this time to increase their projects and tasks with supervision.

☐ Give new hires their first performance review

After 90 days, the new hire should feel comfortable in their role. The first review is the best time to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and determine if they're on track for success.



Bonus Tip

Try an "entry interview." Much like an exit interview, this can gauge the new hire's interview and candidate experience and determine whether they feel ready to tackle their new position. In addition, ask if they have the tools and resources they need to do so.

Don't lose another employee to a negative onboarding experience. By completing this checklist, you'll connect your employees to the organization and the company culture from day one.

How To Find the Best Onboarding Software for Your Company

Now that you know how to design an excellent onboarding experience, you need the right software solution to execute your plan. Digitizing your onboarding process and documents provides a better experience for your new hires and allows HR to spend time on more meaningful tasks like performance management and employee engagement.

[ClearCo's Onboarding System Buyer's Guide](#) can help you understand how to get stakeholder buy-in, define your goals, and the features you need to have vs. those that are nice to have.

Onboarding Software Features

The most effective onboarding toolkit is one you know how to use. For that reason, it's critical to find an intuitive, user friendly tool that helps you start retaining and engaging top talent from before day one. Whether you're looking to add or update your existing onboarding system, make sure you're prepared when you begin your search.

- ✓ Attractive, User-Friendly Interface
- ✓ HRIS/Payroll Synchronization
- ✓ Intelligent, Customizable Forms
- ✓ Customizable Welcome Packet Templates
- ✓ Electronic Welcome Packet Delivery
- ✓ Comprehensive Task Tracking and Automated Task Notifications
- ✓ Compliant Forms by State and Province

- ✓ Mobile-Friendly Packets and Forms
- ✓ E-Signature Acceptance
- ✓ Comprehensive Forms Library
- ✓ Introductions to Teammates and Goals
- ✓ E-Verify, WOTC, and Background Checks
- ✓ Device and Equipment Management
- ✓ Friendly, Accessible Support Team
- ✓ Help Materials and Resources



Start Your Search for the Right Onboarding System

Remember, the best onboarding software is the one that solves your company's problems.

Get a demo of ClearCo's Onboarding platform to start your journey toward finding the best software solution that best fits your organization.

[Book a free demo](#)

