

Talent Mindset

The Business Owner's Guide to
Building Bench Strength

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Onboarding: Generating Energy, From Day One

The first few days of an employee's life at a business represent a rare, untapped window of time where the new hire enters a fresh environment shining, inspired and ready to make a difference. The organization gets a shot in the arm; an instant infusion of talent and energy. Properly channeled and leveraged, this new-hire vitality and vigor can permeate the culture and positively impact people at all levels of your organization. This period of welcome and orientation is an incredible opportunity to revive your team. It's a one-time chance to roll out the red carpet for that new employee—to show your team that this promising, thoughtfully selected person matters. It should remind others of their first day, and if it was memorable (as it should be), then everyone will have something to share that revives them.

The process of orienting a new hire is formally called Onboarding. When done effectively, Onboarding will set the tone for the new employee's role, efficiently orient the person to the job and culture, cement the existing team, and improve the overall productivity of your operations.

Many organizations implement a watered-down Onboarding that has the potential of leaving their new blood

feeling jilted at the altar. This is it? This is what I've been waiting for? I went through all that to get this? Clearly, this is not the impression any leader wants a new hire to gather on the first days, or any day for that matter.

Effective Onboarding accelerates productivity and generates energy. An employee hits the ground running the first day because he or she connected with the company's mindset at the first interview. Their first day was actually that initial interview, as they got to know your company better and began to learn about its culture. The training/onboarding process began during Recruiting. In fact, Onboarding is a continuation—albeit a more formal start—of the orientation that began when you opened the door to first speak with the candidate. Doesn't this mindset change the Talent Acquisition focus completely? Doesn't it underscore the value of a rigorous Recruiting and Selection process leading up to Onboarding? And, doesn't it make sense that doing so changes the Onboarding experience completely, because candidates are in the game before they ever start the job?

Research and conventional wisdom suggest that employees get about 90 days to prove themselves in a new job. The faster new hires feel welcome and prepared for their jobs, the faster they will be able to successfully contribute to the firm's mission. Let's talk about the cost of ineffective onboarding, in a word: turnover. According to a 2012 Allied Workforce Mobility Study, companies lose 25 percent of all new hires within a year. The average cost to fill one position is \$11,000, the study says. Thirty percent of companies say it takes a year or longer for a new employee to reach full productivity, and 25 percent of respondents said they have no formal training program. Meanwhile, 60 percent do not set goals or milestones for new hires.

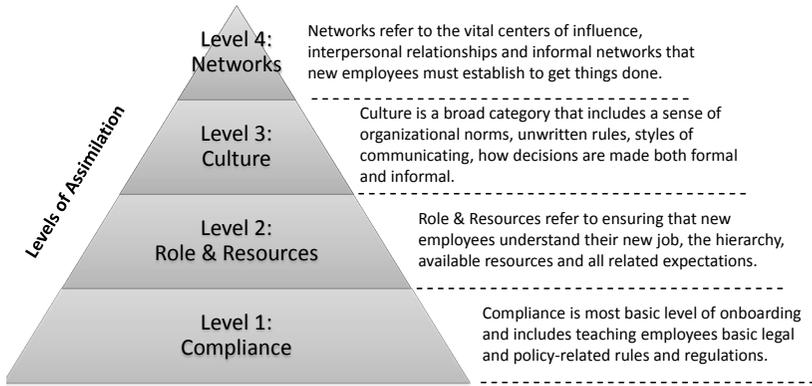


Figure 9: Onboarding—four levels of assimilation

Onboarding should be optimized to engage the new hire, express the value of this talent to the entire team, and integrate the person into the culture. This generates lasting, productive energy. This is onboarding the Strategic Talent Management way.

Optimize Onboarding

How Selection is executed directly impacts onboarding success. During the Selection process, you brought together a hiring committee or informal team that performed the assessments and conducted the interviews to help choose this employee. These stakeholders came to an agreement on what qualities and skills the new hire needs to perform in the position; and the expectations superiors, peers and the organization at-large have for this person as they work in their new role. Ultimately, the incoming employee is a new resource—and before he or she walks in the door, there should be a clearly communicated set of goals and objectives for that person.

Unfortunately, Onboarding is often merely, “Welcome to our company. Here’s the coffee room. There are the restrooms. And this is your cube.” It’s basic orientation. Onboarding optimization requires resetting these behaviors and expectations, and setting goals. When Selection is conducted with a Strategic Talent Management mindset, as a critical working part of an overall plan to build bench strength, Onboarding becomes a powerful time when three things happen: 1) trust is built; 2) energy is created; and 3) productivity begins immediately. Ultimately, Onboarding is when the agreement between the company and candidate is met. The company can expect 100 percent from the new hire; and that individual can expect to fulfill career aspirations based on the opportunity.

Further, every bit of data gathered about the new hire during Recruiting and Selection is translated into the Onboarding plan. You invested in rigorous due diligence. The brilliance of that process is material that can and should be recycled for Onboarding—a continued return on your Strategic Talent Management investment. Here is how one company recognized that two false starts—new-hires that left 18 months after joining the organization—were the cause of a failed Talent Acquisition process.

Before Tom could transition the family business to his son, Mark, the fourth generation, a crucial step was necessary: backfilling Mark’s position as head of operations. The plan was for Tom to move into the role of chairman, and for Mark to ascend to the position of CEO. But many steps were necessary before this succession plan could be executed, and finding the right fit for a key leadership role always looks easier on paper than it really is. Adding to the complexity was Tom and

Mark's distinctly different management styles, and they knew this. Tom was a benevolent leader who walked the shop floor and knew everyone's name and details about employees' lives and families. He had a for-the-people reputation. In return, his people were dedicated and hardworking, positive and grateful. It was important to have Tom's approval and to be seen as a team player.

Mark was a driven leader who asked lots of questions. He knew people by the quality of their work and their interest in advancing in the company. Mark made his employees feel useful and he had a reputation for being focused on results. In return Mark's people were conscientious and deliberate, hardworking and alert.

Together, Tom and Mark were a good team, and their different skills were complementary for the five years they prepared for the transition. They agreed early on that when Mark became CEO, his replacement would have a leadership profile more like Tom's and foster a similarly balanced partnership.

The question was, could someone within the organization fill the operations role? Two years into the five-year transition plan, Tom and Mark determined that none of the division vice presidents were a fit for the VP operations job that Mark would be leaving. So they decided to conduct a search through an executive recruiting firm—and the effort turned out to be a complete debacle. They had two false starts, actually bringing on candidates that left the company within 18 months of being hired. Tom and Mark were frustrated, confused and, quite frankly, embarrassed. They reached out to Tom's peer advisory group, and a member suggested coaching and Strategic Talent Management

as a potential solution for shedding light on the recruiting problem and taking a different approach.

The process began with analyzing the situation: Did they hire the wrong recruiting firm? Were they seeking a leader to fill the operations position who did not exist? Did the new-hires leave so quickly because division heads were setting them up to fail? Mark speculated that his division vice presidents were looking for a candidate who would maintain the status quo. But Tom and Mark were seeking someone approachable like Tom, but tougher—someone who would push for accountability, like Mark did. The hiring missteps created some complicated, unintended consequences. One, the management team was becoming too powerful in the hiring decision; and two, Tom and Mark were beginning to feel that the company was not worthy of retaining a quality VP operations hire.

This discovery process sparked the reinvention of the company's talent acquisition process. They needed a better way of identifying, selecting and onboarding a new VP of operations. First, a hiring committee of key stakeholders was established. Through a series of facilitated conversations and a job survey, the team of leadership, management and human resources members came to consensus on the core capabilities for the VP operations. In retrospect, the team realized that they each had vastly different views and expectations for the position that were even contradictory. Competing agendas could have set up the prior two executives for failure.

The team also learned through this process that past interviews involved asking the same questions

to the candidates. In two cases, the interviews had only reviewed the résumé five minutes before the interview. This lack of preparation was evidence that the managers were not engaged, and interviewers were unintentionally communicating to candidates that the company didn't care. As a result, hiring decisions were at risk for being random and out of control. This discourages top candidates from performing at their best during an interview.

Ultimately, the hiring committee came to consensus on the job profile of the VP operations, the interviewing process, the division of labor for the hiring committee, and the performance expectations that each member of the hiring committee diligently collect relevant data to compare with each other after their interviews.

The team agreed that the company could outsource the heavy lifting of recruiting to fill the candidate pool: identifying, screening and evaluating passive and active candidates. The recruiting firm was provided with clear directions concerning the position's core competencies, necessary leadership attributes and potential for growth and success the role could bring. The company was seeking someone who would fit the job requirements, culture and future potential for succession planning.

A benchmark was also identified for the recruiting process. "No casualties." Every candidate who touched the company would have a positive experience. Every candidate would walk out of an interview with a good feeling about the company. Ultimately, the talent acquisition process became more of a marketing initiative than a human resource initiative. The team took ownership and accountability for the success of

filling the VP operations role. And, they were proud of the new system for selecting a candidate. With this process, an ideal fit for the VP operations was identified and ushered through the interview and selection processes. And, with attention to the Onboarding process in the Strategic Talent Management process, the company successfully integrated the new hire into the company culture.

Build Trust

Trust is a series of experiences among people that sets the tone for what can be expected. Trust is built during the Selection process, and it is cemented during Onboarding. The more interactions and opportunities you have to demonstrate your credibility, the deeper this trust will become, even during this early stage of a new employee's time at the company—literally, the first few days.

Trust is directly related to credibility, which is necessary if you are to influence your people in a positive way to drive the team towards meeting goals. If your new hire is a resource—and indeed, this is the case—that resource must be tapped by proving credibility and earning trust. This occurs during the Selection process with interviews that peel away the layers of a person and promote engagement and authentic sharing. The sharing goes both ways, as you and interviewees set expectations of the job, paint a true picture of the culture, address the company's strengths and weaknesses and how this role will bolster the organization.

During Onboarding, trust-building continues at a fast rate as soon as that new hire walks in the door. When the team is prepared to embrace the new talent as a resource

who will help the organization grow and thrive (along with the people involved in it), then trust flourishes quickly. Trust empowers people to peak perform.

Create Energy

How have you prepared your people to welcome the incoming member of the team? What does your staff expect from this new person? Do they understand why the employee was hired? Why his or her talents are a match for the organization? I believe this is important information to share with your team before a new employee's first day on the job. At the very least, direct reports, colleagues who will work frequently alongside this new hire, and superiors should understand the value of the employee before he or she walks in the door.

Seeing the new hire as a resource before they start generates excitement among the team: We have a new member joining us who will help us do our jobs faster/better/smarter and who will work with us to reach company goals/objectives/growth targets, etc. This positive measure of simply introducing and validating the hire to stakeholders goes a long way toward creating Onboarding energy. And as illustrated, when that person walks into the door on the first day, you want him or her to feel like this was the best decision both parties could have made. You want all new hires to feel (I'll say it again) that their presence matters.

Jumpstart Productivity

Effective Onboarding gets employees up to speed in minimal time—that means sparking productivity quickly, while there is energy and momentum and buy-in from

team members. We all strive to find ways to maximize our time, because it is effectively the one resource we have no control over. We can't expand it. We can't grow more of it. We can't buy more of it (but we can sell it). Time is everything. Profitability is dependent on making the best use of time, and the people we employ in our businesses are responsible for using time wisely, producing capably and efficiently during the time they do have.

Now, are you checking your watch? Tapping your finger on your desk at the thought of this? Feeling a sense of urgency to motivate your team? When we onboard a new employee, every minute of their orientation counts.

We generate a 180-day plan, beginning from the Selection date, for this orientation period. And, if we have prepared them for their role during Selection, we are already ahead of the game because they'll onboard more efficiently. If we have built energy among the team, we are fast-forwarding the onboarding process by establishing early connections between the new hire and his or her new teammates. We've primed the pump.

Onboarding Checklist

The first eighteen months, the long-term onboarding period, are critical to a new employee's success and entire life at your organization. After that time, the employee will have been "baked," so to speak—he or she will have formed a role, an attitude, a way of doing things, whether or not it was what you intended. That is why Onboarding is absolutely critical to the Strategic Talent Management process. You can't have productive Onboarding without effective Selection. You can't move on and develop employees that were never

properly onboarded—and if you do develop them, you’ll find that you’ve got a lot of extra work to do.

So, what exactly needs to happen during Onboarding? This sample schedule is a reference. As with every Center of Excellence in the Strategic Talent Management process, you’ll put your stamp on it. Use it as a resource, a loose outline. Customize it and collaborate with key stakeholders to determine how the Onboarding timeline aligns with your goals for productivity and growth.

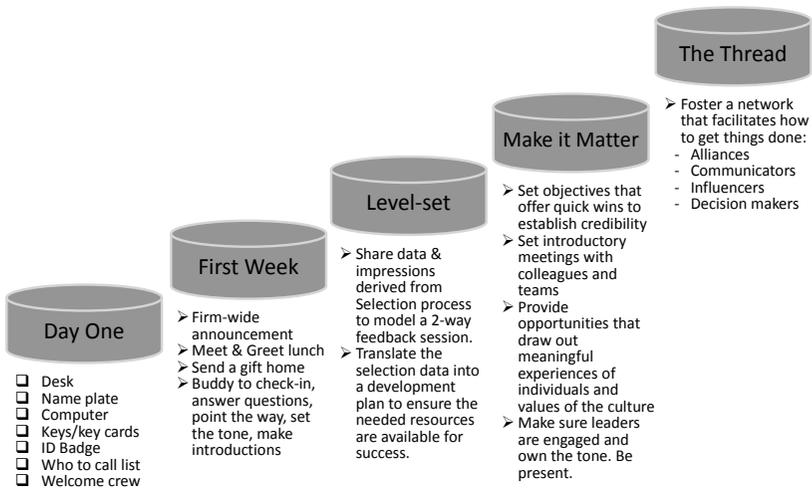


Figure 10: Onboarding checklist

Strategic Schedule of Introductions:

1:1s with direct reports

- Tell me what you’re working on that you really enjoy and would not want to lose touch with.
- Tell me what you’re doing that isn’t enjoyable or isn’t advancing in the way you want. Can I help?
- Is there an idea or project you’ve wanted to initiate but can’t get any traction on? Can I help?

- In what ways could you feel more satisfied in your job?

1:1 with shared services

- What is your highest level of value to the business?
- How does your department succeed?
- How do you like to work with the departments you support?

1:1 with superiors

- What is your leadership style?
- How do you prefer to communicate?
- What things do I do that directly impact your objectives?

Regular check-ins:

1:1 with HR or sponsor

- Help advocate and navigate, and protect against bottle-necks

1:1 with hiring manager

- Facilitate relationships, ensure early wins, build confidence, reinforce commitment

Talent Insight:

The first day on the job is not the new employee's start date—it was the day that the initial interview was conducted and the individual was introduced to your company, your culture and your team.

Onboarding happens throughout the Talent Acquisition process, beginning with rigorous Recruiting and careful Selection. During all this time, the candidate is becoming oriented to your values and mission so that when the official Onboarding time comes, he or she hits the ground running.