

The unemployment rate is at a historical high and is expected to remain for some time, even as the economy begins to improve. During this era of economic uncertainty, organizations are focusing less on recruiting and onboarding and more on surviving and maintaining current employees. Yet the current economic climate has made it even more important for companies to ensure those that are hired adapt quickly to their position, become more productive than ever and stay on board.

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Fifty-five percent of company executives surveyed in a study by the Aberdeen Group show that the current state of the economy will **increase the importance their organization places on onboarding**. Integrating new employees and preparing them to succeed via a well-executed onboarding program can improve employee productivity and retention, resulting in higher profits and reduced costs.

Start Onboarding Immediately After Hiring

A study conducted by Leadership IQ found that an estimated 46% of all newly hired employees fail within 18 months. Because most employees decide whether or not they want to stay with a company within the first six months of their hiring, companies need to carefully execute an effective onboarding strategy during this fragile window of time.

The onboarding process should begin before the new hire's start date. Prior to the employee's first day, make sure they meet with their immediate supervisor to discuss job details and expectations, including training and orientation schedules, project deadlines and timetables. Some discussions may consist of supervisors asking new employees the following questions:

- What is important for me to know about you?
- How do you like to receive communication?
- What opportunities within this organization are you most interested in?
- How can I be of help to you?

Before an employee sets foot at their new workplace, new hire paperwork should be completed, name badges and time keeping cards need to be created, business cards ordered and a workstation/computer should be ready for them. Taking care

of these administrative tasks before they arrive will allow the new employee to concentrate on the job at hand from the get-go.

It is also important to make sure they feel valued and appreciated right away. This will lessen the new hire's anxiety on the first day of work and kick start key working relationships. Appoint a warm, friendly associate to take them to lunch on their first day. This new "buddy" can introduce them to other employees, conduct on-the-job-training and answer any questions they may have. It is also wise to notify current employees of their new teammate and provide them with some background on this individual before they arrive.

According to the Aberdeen Group's Onboarding Benchmark Report, those who are immediately engaged on the first day of work have a greater incentive to stay. That said, first impressions are important. Prevent "buyer's remorse" from day one by creating an experience that reassures new hires they made the right choice by accepting this new job. Include them in meaningful tasks and projects from the start, making sure they have the necessary tools and training to get the job done. These activities may seem small and insignificant, but they will inspire new employees, fuel their confidence and guide them to become productive members of the organization.

Onboarding as an Ongoing Process

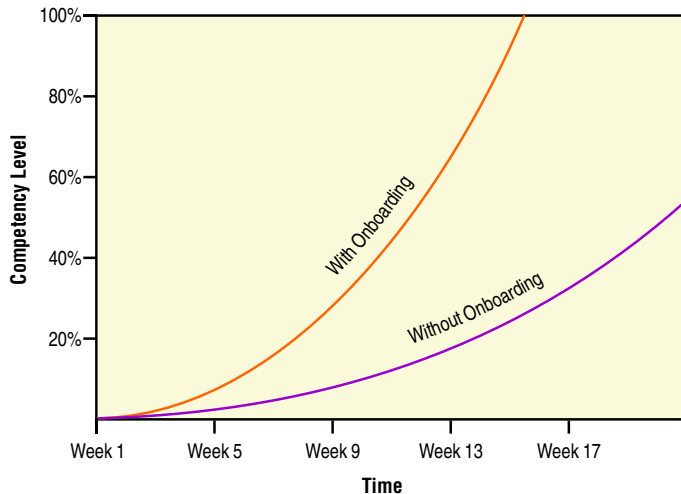
Onboarding should not be considered a short-term process but a long-term goal and take multiple weeks to a year, depending on the new hire's position. This allows them to become fully integrated within their new role and familiar with regular business routines. As time progresses, don't expect employees to absorb a full year's worth of knowledge and experience within their first few weeks on the job. Regular milestones such as 30, 60, 90 day check-ins should be pre-determined and supervisor/employee meetings need to be regularly scheduled to assess progress and discuss obstacles.

Also make sure to revisit the onboarding process as employees are promoted or moved to a new department or team. In today's economy it's also important for companies to ensure that those affected by mergers and acquisitions are still engaged and productive while undergoing multiple changes in the workplace.

Relationship Between Onboarding, Retention & Productivity

Ensuring a new hire's ability to succeed within their role and maximize productivity is more important than ever in today's marketplace. The Human Resources Corporate Leadership Council states "increasing an employee's level of engagement can potentially improve performance by 20%." Another study shows competency levels are achieved at a much faster rate for those who undergo an onboarding program than those who don't.

Speed Time to Competency



Recruiting software company Taleo, recently stated that their customer Rockwell Collins saved approximately \$200,000 in shipping fees due to proper order fulfillment and employee retention. They went on even further to attribute their onboarding program as a key component to this success. El Paso Corporation has also reported savings ranging from \$15 - \$100 per employee due to a successful onboarding program.

On the other end of the spectrum, a number of costs are associated with turnover and on-the-job mistakes attributed to the lack of onboarding and thorough employee guidance and training. It's no surprise that most employees are non-profitable when they first come on board. The better they are assimilated within the organization, trained and equipped with the tools they need to excel, the more quickly they will become a company asset. Poor orientation and training

will extend the amount of time it takes before an employee can positively contribute to a company's bottom line.

Turnover can also result from an employee's lack of orientation. New hires that feel lost, ignored, unfocused and ill prepared within the first few days will be less valuable and may start looking for greener pastures. As mentioned, to retain a high-potential employee, it is important that managers and teams go out of their way to make a newly hired employee feel welcome, supported, fully aware of what is expected of them and prepared to meet and exceed those expectations.

Onboarding Temporary Employees

Companies working with a contingent workforce or those that supervise a massive group of employees may feel the above practices are overwhelming. However when direct managers, in conjunction with their human resources department execute onboarding plans, they can be less cumbersome. Bringing in outside assistance to train and develop employees and handle any inconsistencies or concerns may also prove to be successful. While such a service may seem an unnecessary cost, the recruitment funding saved by retaining quality workers will have a positive long-term effect a company's bottom line.

Organizations across the world invest millions of dollars in recruiting and hiring the best people, but what are they doing to keep them engaged from the moment they come on board? The recruitment process shouldn't stop the moment a new employee signs their offer letter – it just begins! While recruitment is vital, the key to a successful workforce often lies in what happens once new employees are added to a company's payroll.

PS. For additional articles of interest, see prostaff.com.