

Employee Onboarding Best Practices Guide

Evidence-based strategies for creating an exceptional onboarding experience

Why This Matters: Organizations with strong onboarding processes improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%. This guide consolidates proven practices to help you build a world-class onboarding program.

82%

Better retention with strong onboarding

70%

Higher productivity gains

69%

Stay 3+ years with great onboarding

Top 10 Onboarding Best Practices

1

Start Before Day One (Preboarding)

Don't wait until the first day. Send welcome materials, complete paperwork digitally, set up accounts, and build excitement before they arrive. This reduces Day 1 overwhelm and shows you're prepared.

2

Make Day One Memorable

First impressions matter. Prepare their workspace, have the team ready to greet them, plan a welcome lunch, and avoid drowning them in paperwork. Create an experience they'll remember positively.

3

Assign an Onboarding Buddy

Pair every new hire with a peer buddy—someone who can answer the "stupid questions," provide informal guidance, and help them navigate the social landscape. This accelerates integration and reduces isolation.

4

Create a 30-60-90 Day Plan

Set clear, documented expectations for what success looks like at each milestone. This gives new hires direction, enables progress tracking, and ensures alignment between employee and manager expectations.

5

Balance Training with Real Work

Avoid weeks of passive training. Mix learning with hands-on tasks that let new hires contribute early. Quick wins build confidence and help them feel like valued team members faster.

6

Schedule Regular Check-Ins

Don't disappear after Day 1. Schedule frequent touchpoints: daily in Week 1, then weekly through Month 1, bi-weekly through Month 3. Consistent communication prevents small issues from becoming big problems.

7

Involve Multiple Stakeholders

Onboarding isn't just HR's job. Engage hiring managers, team members, IT, and leadership. Each plays a role in welcoming and integrating the new hire. Use a RACI matrix to clarify responsibilities.

8

Focus on Culture, Not Just Compliance

Paperwork and policies are necessary but insufficient. Dedicate time to sharing your company's mission, values, and unwritten norms. Help new hires understand "how things really work here."

9

Collect and Act on Feedback

Survey new hires at key points (Week 1, Day 30, Day 90). Ask what worked and what didn't. Use this data to continuously improve your onboarding program. What you measure, you can improve.

10

Extend Beyond 90 Days

Onboarding shouldn't end abruptly. Schedule 6-month and 1-year check-ins to ensure continued development and engagement. This signals ongoing investment in the employee's growth.

Do's and Don'ts

DO

- Prepare everything before Day 1
- Create a structured but flexible plan
- Introduce company culture early
- Assign a dedicated buddy or mentor
- Set clear, measurable goals
- Provide access to documentation
- Encourage questions at all times
- Celebrate small wins and progress
- Gather feedback and iterate
- Personalize the experience when possible

DON'T

- Leave new hires waiting for access
- Overload with information on Day 1
- Skip introductions to key people
- Abandon them after the first week
- Assume they'll "figure it out"
- Focus only on paperwork and policies
- Treat onboarding as a one-day event
- Ignore feedback or complaints
- Use a one-size-fits-all approach
- Forget remote/hybrid employees

Quick Wins for Immediate Impact



Send a warm welcome email 3–5 days before start

Include Day 1 logistics, what to expect, and a personal note from their manager.



Prepare a welcome kit on their desk

Company swag, supplies, snacks, and a handwritten welcome note go a long way.



Create a simple first-week checklist

Give new hires a clear roadmap of what to accomplish and who to meet.



Schedule informal coffee chats

Set up 15-minute meetings with key stakeholders to build relationships early.



Document tribal knowledge

Create a "New Hire FAQ" with answers to common questions and unwritten rules.

Key Metrics to Track

METRIC	WHAT IT MEASURES	TARGET
Time to Productivity	Days until new hire works independently	≤ 90 days
90-Day Retention Rate	% of new hires still employed at 90 days	≥ 95%
New Hire Satisfaction	Survey score on onboarding experience	≥ 4.0 / 5.0
Training Completion Rate	% of required training done on time	100% by Day 30
Manager Satisfaction	Manager rating of new hire readiness	≥ 4.0 / 5.0

REMEMBER

Great onboarding isn't about perfection—it's about showing new hires they made the right choice. Focus on making them feel welcomed, prepared, and valued, and the rest will follow.

Employee Onboarding Best Practices Guide • Sources: SHRM, Gallup, Brandon Hall Group research

