



Odell Companies

660 N. Central Expressway, Suite 240
Plano, TX 75074
469-246-4500 (Local)
800-880-7900 (Toll-free)
FAX: 972-233-1215
info@odellsearch.com

The 10 Commandments of Employee Onboarding

www.careerbuilder.com

Effective employee onboarding has a positive domino effect: it ensures that new hires feel welcome and prepared in their new positions, in turn giving them the confidence and resources to make an impact within the organization, and ultimately allowing the company to continue carrying out its mission.

Much like the dreaded first day of school, the first day at a new job is rife with potential for embarrassing oneself – from getting lost on the way to the bathroom, to forgetting important paperwork, to not knowing the rules (both explicit and unspoken). But as nerve-racking as starting a new job is for new employees, this time is no trip to wine country for managers either.

Charged with the task of making new employees feel welcome, establishing their responsibilities, orienting them in their new position and familiarizing them with the company culture, there's a lot to cover and the process is often overwhelming.

"Transitions are periods of opportunity, a chance to start afresh and to make needed changes in an organization. But they are also periods of acute vulnerability, because you lack established working relationships and a detailed understanding of your new role."

The preceding is an excerpt from *The First 90 Days*, written by Michael Watkins, a professor at the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne, Switzerland and renowned leadership transition expert. As Watkins points out – and as talent management experts have long asserted – employee onboarding, the orientation or mainstreaming process of a new position, is a crucial element in both individual and organizational development and establishes a foundation for future success.

Onboarding: Not just for employees anymore

True, employee orientation centers around and exists to help the individual employee, but it is the company that ultimately reaps the benefits of this practice. Consider the following benefits of proper orientation:

- Reduces costs associated with learning on the job
- Saves co-workers and supervisors time training the new employee, thereby increasing production
- Increases morale and reduces turnover by showing the employee he/she is valued

Not convinced? U.S. and U.K. employees cost businesses an estimated \$37 billion every year because they do not fully understand their jobs, according to IDC. Their recently released white paper, "\$37 billion: Counting the Cost of Employee Misunderstanding," commissioned by international intelligent assessment company Cognisco, quantifies the losses that occur as a result of "actions taken by employees who have misunderstood or misinterpreted — or were misinformed about or lack confidence in their understanding — of company policies, business processes, job function or a combination of the three." Effective onboarding helps workers understand their roles and the company they work for, thereby significantly cutting these losses.

The 10 Commandments of Onboarding

Rules to live – and work – by for a divine onboarding experience.

1. **Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy employee.** Few things are more disappointing than the realization that the job you thought you were hired to do is sorely different than what you're actually doing. As an employer, misrepresenting your employee's new role destroys trust in you immediately, after which no amount of orientation efforts can undo the initial damage.
2. **Thou shalt give a written plan of employee objectives and responsibilities.** A written plan detailing objectives, strategy and expectations of future results helps diminish any confusion about a new employee's job functions and instead opens up the floor to discuss concerns or new opportunities.
3. **Thou shalt give thy employ thy undivided attention.** Letting email, phone calls or other employees distract you during orientation sessions sends the message, "I'm just not that into you" and kills morale. Prepare a checklist of subjects to review with your new employees, set aside the appropriate amount of time to do it, and let others know that you are not to be interrupted while you are orienting your new workers. This gives new employees the message that they are the most important item on your agenda. (Or: this lets new employees know that...)
4. **Thou shalt have relevant paperwork ready.** Make sure all administrative forms—such as employment, direct deposit, and benefits—are ready to be completed on day one so you don't have to waste time dealing with it later, and so that your employee can start getting these important matters taken care of right away.
5. **Thou shalt introduce thy employee to thy neighbors.** Provide staff members with the new employee's résumé and job description and advise them to follow a meeting format that includes sharing a description of their own positions, ways in which their roles interact with that of the new hire, and how they might expect to work together in the future. (This is also a good time to assign a mentor or buddy to the new hire as an immediate resource for any questions and key information about organizational culture and goals.)
6. **Thou shall set up thy employee's workstation.** An empty workstation is to a new employee what an unkempt home is to a houseguest. Before the employee arrives on day one, stock his or her workstation with everything from paper and pens to keys and, if possible, business cards. Make sure the phone and computer, complete with voicemail and e-mail accounts, are set up. Leave a copy of an organizational chart, staff list, and phone directory on the new hire's desk.

7. **Thou shalt schedule one-on-one time to ensure you connect regularly with the new employee.** If you can't do this on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, schedule meetings to provide feedback at 30- and 90-day checkpoints, or before a semi-annual review.
8. **Thou shalt create a balance.** The first day is always tough. Vary the first day's schedule by including less formal gatherings between meetings. Arrange for a group of staff members to treat the new hire to lunch on the first day to provide a little non-meeting relief and levity.
9. **Thou shalt clarify the company culture.** Again, to avoid future confusion (or embarrassment), provide the employee with company information, policies – including dress code and late policies – and benefits. If your organization has a new employee handbook, leave that on the desk as well.
10. **Thou shalt think beyond the first few days.** After 90 days, request formal feedback on the new hire's performance from his or her supervisor, and be sure to solicit feedback from the employee as well. Take this opportunity to address any issues of concern as well as note any accomplishments so that all parties are confident that the new hire is poised for success in his or her role.



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