

# News

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## The importance of good onboarding

Many of us will have experienced a first day at work complete with awkward moments – not being sure where to sit, having to awkwardly ask where the toilets are and in some cases not even being completely clear of what you've actually been recruited to do. Most employees will have also experienced a first day induction that was less than ideal – ranging from a quick handshake then being left to it - through to something containing so much information 80% of it is forgotten by the end of the first week.

Too many organisations forget that the employee journey – including the process of onboarding - actually starts on the day that a future colleague has their very first contact with an organisation. This begins upon the point of first hearing about the job, not the day they start employment. Getting it wrong at any stage in the journey, from this critical first contact, right through until the day they join and including the first few months while they settle in, can cause lasting damage to an employee's perception of and relationship with their new employer.

The best businesses are now fully versed in the process of onboarding and believe in its importance as a holistic and long term way of welcoming new recruits into the workplace, so much so that they are working to embed it as a given as part of their hiring practice.

Key facets of onboarding include helping colleagues even before they join understand how their role fits into the wider business, what the culture is like, developing a good relationship with their line manager and team early and signposting them to the organisational support mechanisms around them.

At Morgan Sindall Construction & Infrastructure, onboarding is critical to how we bring new employees into our company. Key to our onboarding success is encouraging the right behaviours without being bureaucratic or too theoretical.

By encouraging our hiring managers, for example, to think about the wider implications of onboarding as described above, we are investing in the employees' future and immediately making them more likely to want to become a long term member of the team. We have found that where this is done well, it significantly increases recruitment attraction, time to hire and overall retention.

Based on experience, here are several key points to think about when considering onboarding in your own organisation.

### **Onboarding begins much sooner than the first day**

The time before starting a new job is usually a period of both nerves and excitement for any future colleague, regardless of type and level of job. In order to calm the former while nurturing the latter, it is critical to engage with future colleagues in an ongoing, collaborative and effective way. Even simple changes to terminology – such as referring to colleagues rather than employees - creates a sense of being more than just a number and is proven to be indicative of the company culture.

Simple touches like regular personal contact from the colleague's hiring manager prior to arrival, ensuring they are fully clear on their role and responsibilities in advance of their start date and also being clear on the company vision and values goes a long way to helping a colleague feel part of

the company quickly. This also frees up valuable time for other more practical induction activities upon arrival.

### **Instil the principles of your company culture into your new recruits**

Many of the world's happiest workers, consciously or unconsciously, derive their pleasure from the knowledge they are contributing to an endeavour greater than themselves. By introducing new recruits to your organisational culture, history and vision and values for the future, and not just your processes and procedures, they will immediately be aware of how they fit into the wider picture and what success in their role will mean for their own personal development and the company as a whole.

However, this cannot be achieved through merely listing buzzwords and phrases such as "team work" or "cohesion" or leaving it to your HR team. Actual examples must be used by hiring managers to demonstrate how colleagues support each other in the team the future colleague will be joining and how they collaborate in order to achieve a common goal. Additionally, it is important for them to meet a wide variety of experienced team members, not just from their own function but across different disciplines, who are willing to give important but concise information about the company and their experiences of it that will not overwhelm or intimidate.

It is also well known that even the wording of a job advertisement - right at the start of an onboarding process - can say a lot about a company culture. We have found, for example, that roles which indicate that the hiring manager will consider flexible working receive on average 38% more applications than those that don't.

### **Clarity is key**

Key to a successful company is a range of individuals excelling in their fields, working together to achieve a common aim. While there are benefits to all-rounders, the best companies rely on amassing brilliant operators in different disciplines working together. Therefore, it is imperative that from day one, new colleagues are fully aware of exactly what their role requires of them, and how their new organisation will support them in achieving this. There should be no room for ambiguity with regards to their objectives and responsibilities or their importance to the overall success of the organisation. Here, an assigned mentor/buddy for example, who is experienced not only functionally, but in the company as a whole, can be key in helping new colleagues contribute effectively and quickly.

### **Be innovative**

In construction, for example, there are few things more important for new colleagues than bringing them up to speed on how they can remain vigilant and be safe. Being visually aware of what safety risks look like before a job begins is a key way of knowing what to look for once work has begun. With this in mind, we have developed a cutting edge system that allows new site-based colleagues to familiarise themselves with where they will be working from the safety of a classroom environment.

New recruits are able to use a headset to virtually tour structures, and to zoom in and out to identify faults or possible safety risks. This results in an improved ability to identify problems that may occur in a live working environment while also ensuring they are welcomed to a project in a helpful and informative way. While this is a sector-specific example, it is important to constantly monitor new technological developments in order to develop new innovations that can improve the

onboarding experience.

The points I've touched on are by no means comprehensive, but are proven to help companies see improved results in both employee outcomes and specifically productivity and retention.

Onboarding is not a buzz-word or a HR 'initiative' - it is a critical first step on a new colleague's journey to a successful career.

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