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Onboarding remote employees: How to get it right

Jennise Chaffold

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Onboarding remote employees: How to get it right

by [Jennise Chaffold](#) | Manager, Performance Improvement | [Insperity, Houston, Texas](#)

Now that your company has fully embraced work-from-home options for your team, it's time to dive deeper into onboarding for remote employees.

While it takes a bit of extra effort and creativity, successfully onboarding remote employees doesn't have to be complex. After all, plenty of all-remote companies have been making employees feel welcome and included from a distance for several years.

And the more organized you are when onboarding remote employees, the better the likely outcome for you and your staff.

Below are a few strategies that will help new remote workers:

- Feel clear about their respective roles
- Be engaged with their work
- Make productive contributions to your team

Onboarding remote employees: Same goals, different format

The main goal of employee onboarding is to give your new hires a thorough understanding of their role and empower them with confidence and clarity. This can enable them to put their full energy into their work and truly excel.

Remote employee onboarding should have the same goals.

While you can't take away the natural anxiety that comes when someone steps into a new role, you can help alleviate worries new hires may feel about learning the basics of their job.

Yes, even in a virtual context, you can scaffold new employee success by providing structure and support, communicating well and helping them engage socially with your team.

Your remote onboarding team

Having a great system for onboarding remote employees means having a great team to support the process and the new hires.

Ideally, each new hire would receive remote onboarding support from three people:

- **A designated HR representative** (possibly their recruiter) provides continued support related to early HR issues, like selecting benefits options.
- **A designated IT representative** assists with the new employee's remote office setup.
- **The manager or direct supervisor** serves as the primary onboarding guide, helping the employee adapt quickly to the organization and connecting their work to your company's vision.

For IT and HR onboarding support, it's best to give new remote employees specific names and contact information, not just a number to call or a link to click. Personalizing these forms of support can help remote employees feel more connected.

Proactive pre-employment strategies

Prepping new hires for day one of any job is an important step for promoting engagement from the start. When onboarding remote workers specifically, being proactive – and collegial – between acceptance of the job offer and the first day, helps sets the right professional tone. In a remote context, managers should put a little extra effort in helping their new hires get ready to start. Here's a timeline outlining some important touch points to make during this pre-employment period.

Pre-employment timeline:

1. Two weeks before the first day

Email the employee and let them know the date their office equipment will be delivered (if your company is providing it).

2. Following equipment delivery

Call the employee to ensure they received their office equipment.

3. One week before the first day

Have a video call with the employee to ensure they can log onto their computer and phone systems. This is a good time to see if anything seems to be missing from their setup.

4. One day before

Send a quick “see you tomorrow” message.

Remote employee welcome kit

If you are providing your new remote employee with company-issued office equipment, you can utilize the shipment of their equipment as an opportunity to provide additional onboarding information.

Here are some ideas of things to include in a remote employee welcome kit:

- All necessary office equipment – laptop, phone and any other hardware
- A printed roadmap detailing how to set up their home office and log onto your company's systems for the first time
- A reminder to have everything set up one week prior to their start date
- Reference guide to all of the tools and resources available to them (e.g., contact information for their supervisor, HR and IT support persons)
- Schedule of meetings for their first day or week

Those are the essentials, but you might also include items or t-shirts branded with your company logo, gift certificates to a meal delivery service in their area or other simple gifts.

The goal? To show your enthusiasm for their pending arrival.

If you put in extra effort to make this package smooth and welcoming, not only will your new remote hires feel reassured that they've made the right choice but also they may spread the word in your profession that your company treats its people well.

Down the road, that positive, welcoming vibe might help you lure an elusive purple squirrel and other desirable candidates to your workplace.

First day tips

For your new hire, the first day of a remote position should feel similar to a typical first day working in your office.

At the start, plan for the employee to have one-on-one time with their supervisor in a videoconference. There should also be time available for the employee to meet informally with their immediate co-workers, either in groups or one-on-one.

If you would typically take a new hire out to lunch with other members of your team, consider fun ways you might do this virtually.

For instance, plan a time for a meet-and-greet and have food delivered from a restaurant to the new employee and each member from the team. Then, have everyone get on a virtual call and enjoy dining together.

For new hires in your office, do you typically walk them through your offices, introducing them briefly to people from other departments? You can do something similar virtually, too.

Stroll through the building using a handheld device's video camera. Or, create and present a pictorial slideshow that outlines important areas and highlights your organizational chart.

Early opportunities

To build on the engagement you worked to establish on your remote worker's first day, continue to host virtual opportunities for new employees to mesh with your team.

For example, host a Zoom coffee break every Friday morning, assigning one person on your team to lead a discussion of a fun topic. You could also give these meetings a theme (e.g., wear your favorite hat) or center them on a light-hearted contest (e.g., bring your best drawing).

After a few weeks – and once they've gotten their bearing, give your new hire a mini leadership opportunity, like moderating your coffee break discussion. This will discourage them from simply listening and hanging in the background on calls, helping everyone to get to know them personally.

Sidestepping a potential pitfall

Silence from a supervisor is probably the biggest mistake you can make when onboarding – and supervising – remote employees.

Without a warm, regular connection to a key point of contact in your organization, it's easy for a new remote worker to feel aimless and detached from your company's mission.

Whether they're scheduled weekly, daily or biweekly, having regular check-ins scheduled from the outset can strengthen ties between managers and remote team members. One-on-one standing meetings can help. Through them, managers and employees can address questions and troubleshoot problems.

Over time and when paired with other retention strategies, these interactions can help keep your latest hire around for years to come – and perhaps minimize staff turnover among your remote team.

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