How to Uplevel Your Onboarding in 2023

And What We Learned in 2022
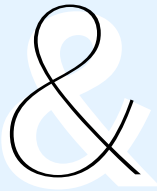
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Introduction

Even after the whirlwind years of 2020 and 2021, 2022 had its own set of HR challenges. With the impacts of the Great Resignation lingering and new workplace trends emerging, such as shift shock and overemployment, HR teams had to be quick on their feet and revamp their strategies in order to attract and retain top talent.

As many of them continued to hire for remote positions, it became clear that one HR process in particular can have a significant impact on how long employees stay at a company: onboarding.

In this eBook, we'll recap the lessons we learned in 2022, and explore how you can apply them to uplevel your onboarding process and retain new hires in 2023.
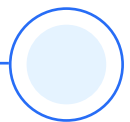
Takeaways From 2022 & How to Apply Them in 2023

Onboarding Starts Before Day One

During the pandemic, companies quickly realized that onboarding new hires remotely was very different than onboarding them in-person. They could no longer kick off onboarding by greeting new hires in the lobby, walking them around the office, and introducing them to their coworkers face-to-face.

Not being able to do so led HR teams to find new ways to welcome new hires. This highlighted the importance of starting the onboarding process before day one—also known as the pre-onboarding stage.

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Pre-onboarding begins as soon as candidates sign their offer letters. This first phase of the onboarding process is the perfect opportunity for HR teams to start new hires' experiences off of the right foot. During pre-onboarding, you can send new hires laptops and other work equipment, your employee handbook and policies, and company swag. By using paperless HR software, you can have them electronically sign employee onboarding paperwork and complete training sessions and courses through the solution's Learning Management System. Doing all of this before their first day enables HR teams to focus on benefits and other critical topics during actual onboarding sessions.

This first step of the onboarding process is also the perfect time to introduce new hires to your company culture. Encouraging their managers to send them a welcome email can help set expectations and ease first-day butterflies. In this welcome message, managers can introduce themselves and walk new hires through their first day schedule. To welcome them to the team, you can encourage new hires' coworkers to reach out to them via email, too. Since these will be some of the first emails new hires receive at your company, they'll set the tone for their entire employee experience.

Even though it's a critical step in the onboarding process, many companies don't take advantage of pre-onboarding. In fact, a 2021 study found that 64 percent of new hires did not have a pre-onboarding experience. Looking ahead into 2023, more companies should recognize the importance of starting onboarding before day one and strategically plan their pre-onboarding process.

Orientation ≠ Onboarding

As companies reevaluated their processes to onboard remote or hybrid workforces in 2022, many of them realized that they had been using "orientation" and "onboarding" as synonyms.

This is one of the most common mistakes HR teams make when it comes to welcoming new hires. To put it simply, the difference between orientation and onboarding can be thought about as such: orientation is like a first date, whereas onboarding is the beginning of the "honeymoon phase" of a longer term relationship. Orientation is only a part of the overall onboarding process.

Once a new hire's first day rolls around, it's time for orientation. Orientation only lasts for one day and helps new hires get to know the basics: learning how to navigate the office (or Slack spaces), meeting colleagues, exploring company policies, and signing any remaining paperwork. HR teams also use orientation to walk new hires through a high-level overview of a company's cul-

ture, including core values, mission and vision statements, and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). To give them insight into how the company is structured, new hires are introduced to their executive team and other leaders across the organization as well.

On the other hand, onboarding new hires is a longer-term play where the relationship really starts to develop. This can take place over weeks, months, or even an entire year. During this slow, but very important process, new hires are integrated into the fabric of the organization. You want them to take on their role with confidence while providing them with ongoing education, accessible resources, and a support system to help accelerate their success.

Understanding the difference between orientation and onboarding will enable HR teams to optimize their processes in 2023. Focusing on each phase of onboarding is the key to setting new hires up for success and ultimately retaining them in the long run.

Company Culture is Paramount

In addition to introducing new hires to their teammates, it's also important to introduce them to your company's mission and culture. During your onboarding training, discuss your company's core values and how your employees embody them. Describe your Employee Resource Groups, company sports teams, and local community service opportunities and explain how new hires can get involved. Whether you have Bagel Mondays or weekly yoga sessions, mention all of your workplace perks so that new employees can get a feel for your culture right away.

Meeting a lot of people at once can be overwhelming, so provide your new hires with proper onboarding resources, like a company org chart. To give them insight into every department, invite employees across your organization to introduce themselves during sessions.

Long story short? Focus on what makes your company unique and what makes your employees unique and you'll be on your way to knowing what cultural initiatives will propel your organization forward. There are several factors that contribute to an employee "clicking" within an organization. Part of it is job fit, part is raw smarts, part is employee motivation, and part is fit to the culture. When a unique company pairs itself to each employee's unique wants, everybody wins.
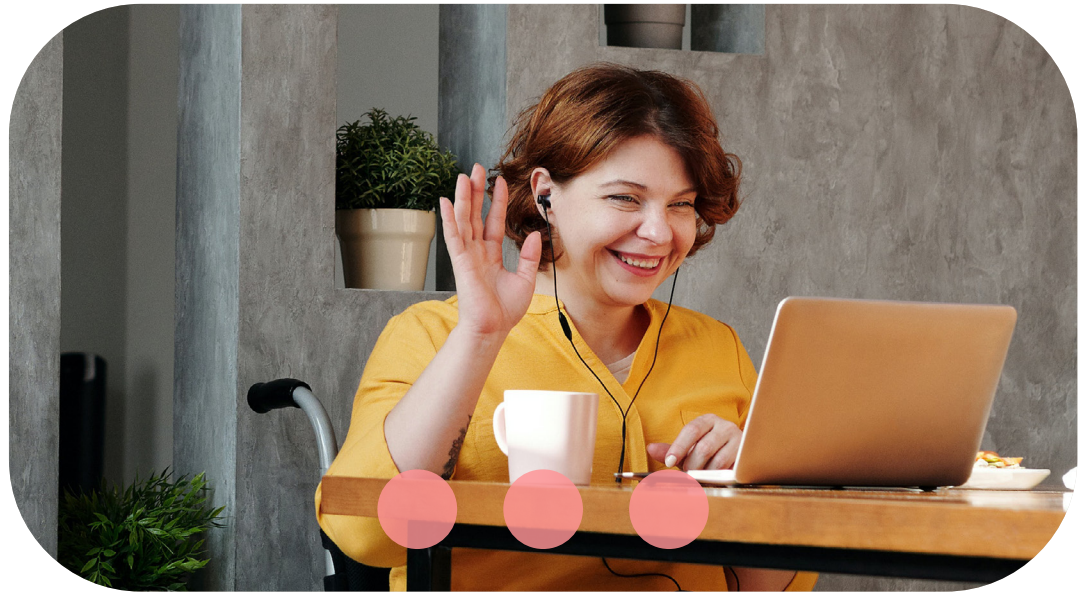
Virtual Onboarding is the Future

As we all transition to remote work, businesses need to optimize their existing onboarding programs for a now-digital audience. From welcoming new hires to refining benefits enrollment, here's everything you need to keep in mind when building out your virtual onboarding experience.

Virtual onboarding is very similar to traditional in-person onboarding. It gives your new employees an overview of your company, mission, values, business goals, etc.—the only difference is that these sessions are held virtually.

Companies use video conferencing, webinars, videos, text resources, and interactive exercises that new hires can access via their desktop, tablet, or mobile device and revisit them even after onboarding has ended. Virtual onboarding allows you to connect with and engage new employees no matter where they are, letting you easily scale your current onboarding process to keep up with hiring rates and allowing you to find talent in new markets.

Onboarding remote employees should be very similar to your in-person onboarding. You should have sessions that explain your company's mission and core values, as well as walk through your employee handbook, internal policies, and benefits plans. Show them how to set up their laptops, how to download any programs and applications they might need, as well as how to access their pay stubs. In their downtime, give employees a list of online compliance or skills training they should complete.

But don't feel like you have to do it all alone.

Reach out to different department heads to see if they can send a representative from their team to provide an overview of their department, what they do for the company, and what their team goals are. This will help your new employees learn about the company and meet employees from different sides of the business. You'll also want to set up remote sessions with new hire's managers so they can provide an overview of their new team, walk through their role, assign projects, and set performance goals.

Lastly, onboarding should be a very personal experience. It's your new hire's first day at your company, so you want to engage them from day-one. Without face-to-face time, it can be even more challenging to bring them into the fold and make them feel part of the team.

To help them get to know their team on a more personal level, encourage team leads to organize a virtual team lunch or happy hour during their first few days. This can give everyone an opportunity to meet your new hire and give your new hire a chance to get to know their new teammates on a personal level. Managers should also set up brief 1:1 meetings between the new hire and their coworkers so they can learn about other roles on the team and understand how they will work with their colleagues.
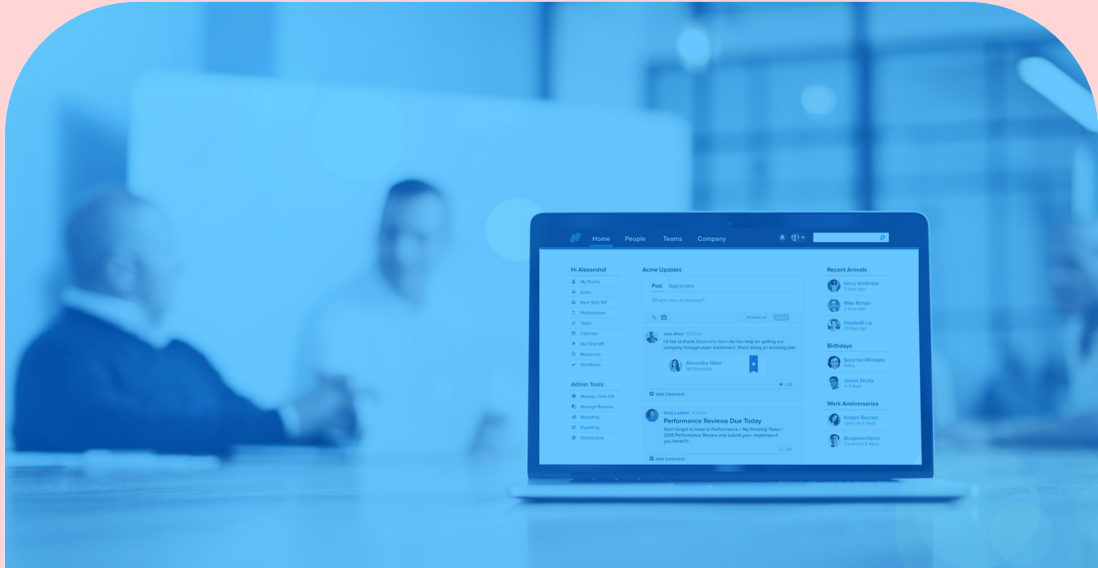
Since onboarding helps retain employees, you can reduce turnover costs and save time spent on recruiting by building a successful program. On average, it takes employers $4,000 and 24 days to hire a new employee. Therefore, it's less expensive to invest in onboarding a current employee than it is to find and hire a new one.

But why? Well, an effective onboarding program includes not only the benefits, cultural, and legal aspects. It also sets employees up for professional success by including things like 30-60-90 day plans.

The first 3 months can either make or break an employee's experience at an organization. Broken into 3 parts, these plans clearly outline new hires' tasks and priorities, along with any training they will go through.

To give them metrics to strive towards, these plans should also list out new hires' goals. Simply writing down goals makes employees 42 percent more likely to achieve them. These goals should be SMART: specific, relevant, measurable, attainable, and time-based.

At the 30-, 60-, and 90-day marks, managers should check in with employees. During these one-on-ones, they can discuss their progress towards goals and any roadblocks they may be encountering. This will help keep employees motivated and set them up for success, increasing the chances of retaining them.

Onboarding is Key to Retention

Prioritizing the importance of onboarding new hires effectively increases the chance of transforming them into long-term employees. In fact, a successful onboarding program can boost employee retention by 82 percent. If a new hire doesn't have a positive onboarding experience, they are twice as likely to search for other job opportunities and leave your company.

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