

Gallup's Perspective on

Creating an Exceptional Onboarding Journey for New Employees



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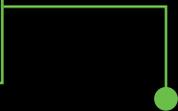
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Executive Highlights

Onboarding fulfills promises made during recruitment and lays the foundation for the rest of the employee life cycle.

Only **12%** of employees strongly agree their organization does a great job of onboarding new employees.

After experiencing onboarding at their organization, **29%** of new hires say that they feel fully prepared and supported to excel in their new role.

New employees typically take around **12 months** to reach their full performance potential within a role.

Employees who strongly agree they have a clear plan for their professional development are **3.5 times** more likely to strongly agree that their onboarding process was exceptional.

Employees with an exceptional onboarding experience are **2.6 times** as likely to be extremely satisfied with their place of work.

Employees who strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional are nearly three times as likely to say they have the best possible job.

The Problem With Onboarding

12%

Only 12% of employees strongly agree their organization does a great job of onboarding new employees.

Nearly every organization today has an onboarding program, yet few employees call their onboarding great. **The result is that many employers are losing their best people before they barely get started.**

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), employee turnover can be as much as 50% in the first four months for hourly workers, and 50% in the first 18 months for senior outside hires.¹ This problem isn't unique to "bad jobs" or "bad workplaces" — many highly reputable brands and high-mission jobs have this problem.

In other words, in many organizations, something is happening within the first year that makes half of employees run. Even if the cause isn't your onboarding program, it likely isn't helping.

And the costs of finding, hiring and training are exceptionally high. SHRM estimates that it will cost a company six to nine months of an employee's salary to identify and onboard a replacement.²

Then, once that new person goes through the same onboarding process, the cycle starts all over again, leaving you with a 50-50 chance of another early departure.

Clearly, there's more to onboarding than "Where do I sit?" It's about culture. It's about social connection. It's about helping new employees become productive team members. And it's about delivering on the brand promise you made before you hired them.

Effective onboarding requires more than an orientation day and a checklist of forms, manuals, and meet

and greets. Onboarding should be a journey that employees take with their manager and team for around a year to build a strong foundation for long-term success at the organization.

The reality is this: Gallup research shows that onboarding programs *must be exceptional or else they are working against you*. **Employees who strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional are nearly three times as likely to say they have the best possible job.** Failing to execute this first impression and ongoing experience effectively means new hires won't feel great about their job when they start or in the future.

If you want exceptional employee outcomes, you must have exceptional onboarding. Average doesn't cut it. In this paper, we present the essential elements of an onboarding program that can truly make a difference.

The Value of Creating an Onboarding Journey

Organizations that achieve world-class onboarding programs have a competitive differentiator. Effective onboarding³ — programs that clarify employees' roles, build confidence in one's capabilities and develop relationships — leads to:

- higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment
- higher performance
- lower turnover
- less stress

1 Bauer, T. N. (2010). Onboarding new employees: Maximizing success. *Society for Human Resource Management*. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents/Onboarding%20New%20Employees.pdf>

2 Kantor, J. S., & Crosser, A. (2016). High turnover costs way more than you think. *HuffPost*. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/julie-kantor/high-turnover-costs-way-more-than-you-think_b_9197238.html

3 Bauer, T. N., Bodner, T., Erdogan, B., Truxillo, D. M., & Tucker, J. S. (2007). Newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization: A meta-analytic review of antecedents, outcomes, and methods. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(3), 707-721.



Onboarding and the Employee Experience

3.3x

Those who strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional are 3.3 times as likely to strongly agree their job is as good, or better, than expected.

The *employee life cycle* defines the seven critical stages that an employee experiences with your organization. These are the stages of the employee experience in which employers have the greatest influence on how their employees perceive them. Through these critical stages, employers can make targeted efforts and apply best practices to affect engagement, performance, customers and their ability to hire great talent in the future.

Onboarding is the critical stage that connects the talent acquisition process to long-term, sustainable performance. It fulfills promises made during recruiting and hiring so employees don't experience a bait-and-switch situation, and it lays the foundation for the rest of the employee experience.

Perhaps more than any other stage, onboarding plays a critical role in your employees' perceptions of your organization. Employees often establish their opinion of your culture in the first few months, and misperceptions can take a long time to fix.

Consider the ways that experiences during onboarding influence how your employees connect to every other aspect of the employee life cycle:

Attract

Does this organization and job match what was advertised?

Hire

Did I make the right decision in accepting this job?

Engage

Do I feel connected to this organization?

Perform

What are the expectations for excellence?

Develop

Do I have a future here?

Depart

Did this organization set me up for lifelong success?



Onboarding Starts With Your Culture

Gallup defines culture broadly as “the way we do things around here.” It includes the structure of teams, who gets rewarded, how leaders make decisions and the regular rituals that define the unique, collective life of your organization. Culture is informed by the organization’s purpose (why we exist) and influences the brand (how we are known outside the organization).

Onboarding is the first chance organizations have to demonstrate their real culture, putting into action the culture they claimed to have in their attraction and hiring interactions with candidates.

To help new employees experience the culture, give them opportunities to observe how current employees live the culture, and see how it plays out in organizational decisions and values.

If you believe in “people first,” leaders should show up for onboarding and talk about how organizational values shape their daily decision-making process. Then, illustrate the point by doing hands-on activities that demonstrate how putting people first leads to greater collective success.

Communicating about your culture and putting it into action in orientation are important steps of onboarding, but culture can’t be explained in its entirety through orientation. It must be felt, experienced and lived out in the day-to-day workplace environment.

Nothing says “people first” like mentoring and teamwork. For this reason, managers and team members play a crucial role in culture transfer. They help integrate new employees into a way of thinking and doing that is essential for creating success over a long tenure. Exceptional onboarding programs facilitate this type of experiential learning and help ensure employees reflect on what they’ve learned and why it matters to them.

Onboarding Sets the Stage for Engagement, Performance and Development

Employee engagement, performance and development begin during onboarding and should be handled with care, especially during an employee’s first year on the job. New employees often experience an “engagement honeymoon period” while everything is new and exciting. But as job expectations intensify — making the learning curve more difficult — and the newness of the job fades, employees need crystal clear expectations, coaching from their managers and ongoing development to keep engagement high.

Laying the foundation for engagement during onboarding requires thoughtfully planned conversations about what motivates employees and what needs they have. Later, performance expectations and development planning should take shape as employees acclimate to their job.

It’s important that performance standards for first-year employees are set relative to others with their same tenure and responsibilities. Too often, new employees are judged against the standards of fully trained and well-experienced employees. And, while it’s early to talk career advancement, managers and new employees should create development opportunities around embracing new learning and ensuring there is a clear plan for each employee’s future.

Other Key Aspects of the Onboarding Experience

Gallup has identified aspects of the employee experience that are essential at every stage of the employee life cycle. These are particularly important to get right for new employees, as they influence everything an employee will do and experience while working for your organization.

MY MANAGER

Managers shoulder the greatest responsibility for the success of new hires. Ultimately, it's their job to ensure that employees are brought up to speed, developed and supported. Gallup research shows that the effectiveness of an onboarding program is largely contingent on the manager's active involvement in the process.

ROLE

There is no more important objective of onboarding than helping new employees fit into their new role. The point of onboarding is to "show them the ropes." That begins with making sure they know why you hired them and what they need to get done.

TEAM

Work gets done in teams. Socialization of new hires to their team is critical. It's difficult to feel a strong sense of belonging if your teammates don't accept you. When teammates go the extra mile to welcome and mentor their newest members, trust and team cohesion form more quickly. As time passes, strong partnerships play a significant role in helping both new employees and the team accomplish their best work.

WORKSPACE

There's nothing worse than showing up for a new job and feeling like nobody knew you were coming. Employees need to feel comfortable in their new work environment. That starts with ensuring their workspaces are inviting and provide everything they need.

WELLBEING

An effective onboarding journey promotes wellbeing by helping employees adjust to the job, position themselves to do what they do best and plan for a thriving life at work. Emphasizing wellbeing empowers employees to reduce stress and promotes good long-term work habits.⁴ Gallup finds that when onboarding programs are exceptional, employees experience improvement in their work-life balance during their first year on the job. However, when onboarding falls short, employees' work-life balance gets progressively worse throughout their first 12 months.

4 Liang, S., & Hsieh, A. (2008). The role of organizational socialization in burnout: A Taiwanese example. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, 36(2), 197-216.

Make Onboarding a Journey

Events and processes like preboarding, orientation day, compliance training and informal lunches with team members are important initial steps for new employees, but on their own, they are not sufficient mechanisms for preparing employees to excel in their new roles.

Exceptional, journey-based onboarding programs help employees learn and grow throughout their first year on the job, placing special focus on check-ins and key experiences that matter most. For example, in front-line, high-turnover roles in which lots of employees leave during the first three months of the job, organizations should place special emphasis in the first 90 days on proactively addressing the most common reasons people leave. In contrast, complex roles that require nine to 12 months of training and job shadowing require a longer-term plan that emphasizes progressive learning goals and adapts to continually changing responsibilities.

Failed Onboarding — From Excitement to Disillusionment

- "I'm so excited about my job! I hope I made the right choice."
- "They don't seem ready for me to be here."
- "Onboarding is over. Was that all?"
- "My manager doesn't seem to have time for me."
- "I've been here a month, and I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing."
- "This isn't what I expected. Maybe there's a better place for me."

vs.

The Journey From Excitement to Long-Term Commitment

- "I'm so excited about my job! I hope I made the right choice."
- "Wow! I really feel like they are excited to have me here."
- "Orientation is over. Now look at all these activities and resources to help me learn more."
- "My manager and teammates are so accessible and seem to appreciate my contributions."
- "I've been here a month, and I feel like I'm finding my groove. It's great to feel like I belong here."
- "This is better than I expected. I think I have a future here!"

Fulfill the Promise of Your Employee Value Proposition

When you attract and hire someone for your organization, you make explicit and implicit promises to them based on your employee value proposition (EVP). Your EVP is what employees “get” from working with you. This includes pay and benefits, but it also can include opportunities to grow, flexibility, a manager who cares and purposeful work with an inspiring mission.

Onboarding is the first time your new employees experience your EVP in action. It's no longer a claim being made to a candidate — it's your promises being lived out day to day through your culture. It starts with providing the compensation, benefits, work experiences and culture that employees expect. As the year goes on, delivering on an engaging EVP strengthens the employee's tie to your culture, and failing to deliver weakens the connection.

If your EVP provides opportunities to learn and grow, your onboarding program should include experiences of self-discovery and self-improvement. Within the first few weeks of an employee's new job, sign them up for your organization's development programs and services.

Reboarding

Onboarding isn't just for new employees. Every time someone changes roles, teams or managers, it's time to reboard.

While the company culture doesn't change for an employee who moves internally, team culture, expectations and relationships do.

To help your rising stars quickly acclimate to their new role, take reboarding as seriously as new-hire onboarding — there's no quicker way to lose a star or disrupt a team than promoting someone beyond their preparation and not supporting them throughout their transition.

Onboarding is the first time your new employees experience your EVP in action. It's no longer a claim being made to a candidate — **it's your promises being lived out day to day through your culture.**

The Five Questions
Every Onboarding
Program
Must Answer

29%

After experiencing onboarding at their organization, 29% of new hires say that they feel fully prepared and supported to excel in their new role.

For many employees, onboarding includes an avalanche of information, from computer setup to ethics training.

Although much of this communication is necessary from a compliance and policy point of view, the questions that are most important to the employee all too often get lost in the shuffle. After the details are out of the way, many new employees are left to ponder:

What is this place all about? How do I fit in? How can I make a difference here?

Yet, those are the types of questions that onboarding should be answering. Instead of starting with requirements, HR leaders should begin with the fundamental psychological needs that every new employee has.

Gallup has discovered five employee questions that, when addressed, add up to a truly exceptional onboarding program that sets employees up for success.

The Five Questions of Onboarding

- 1) What do we believe in around here?"
- 2) "What are my strengths?"
- 3) "What is my role?"
- 4) "Who are my partners?"
- 5) "What does my future here look like?"

1) "What do we believe in around here?"

Culture matters. It's how you live out your beliefs, values, mission and purpose. It defines who gets rewarded, how decisions get made and how problems get resolved. It's the way people behave every day in meetings, over email and in person.

To be successful, new employees need to know — and experience — your culture firsthand. It's more than a list of core values on a slide deck. Employees should be able to describe your values and beliefs based on what they experience in your workplace within their first year.

4.7x

When employees strongly agree that they have a good understanding of "how we do things at this organization," they are 4.7 times more likely to strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional.

2) "What are my strengths?"

People enjoy doing what they are good at. They also like to be known for what makes them special. Investing time and resources into discovering an employee's strengths is a great way to build relationships and show that you, as an organization, care about them as an individual.

3.5x

Employees who strongly agree they can apply their strengths every day at work are 3.5 times more likely to strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional.

3) "What is my role?"

"What is expected of me?" is a simple question, but it often goes unanswered in the workplace. There's no way someone can be successful at something if they don't know what that "something" is.

Managers are key here. They must help employees understand their job expectations and how they relate to teamwork and the business needs of the organization.

1.8x

When employees strongly agree they are confident in their ability to excel in their role, they are 1.8 times more likely to strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional.

4) "Who are my partners?"

People perform at their best when they respect the people they are working with and trust that they also are going to perform at their best. Building trust takes time, but there's a lot that managers and organizations can do to develop trust and effective collaboration between new employees and their teams.

1.9x

When employees strongly agree they have partners they can always rely on at work, they are 1.9 times more likely to strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional.

5) "What does my future here look like?"

New employees arrive at the office filled with high expectations. It's a fresh start. They see a new horizon. But those positive feelings evaporate if they gradually realize they aren't going anywhere. For this reason, a path for future growth must be front and center throughout their onboarding journey.

All five aspects of onboarding matter, but our analysis finds that answering this question has the second-strongest association with an exceptional onboarding experience.

3.5x

Employees who strongly agree they have a clear plan for their professional development are 3.5 times more likely to strongly agree that their onboarding process was exceptional.

Imagine an onboarding process where all five of these questions get answered comprehensively. The result is an employee who feels bonded to their team, knows what their talents are and what they care about, and understands what they are supposed to do. They also know the direction their career is taking. That's an employee who is prepared to fully embrace their new role and is likely to succeed at it.

Investing time and resources into discovering an employee's strengths is a great way to build relationships and show that you, as an organization, care about them as an individual.

The Importance of the Manager in Onboarding

3.4x

When managers take an active role in onboarding, employees are 3.4 times as likely to strongly agree their onboarding process was exceptional.

The manager-employee relationship is the most important relationship at every stage of the employee journey. Gallup has found that the manager accounts for 70% of the variance in team engagement. Unfortunately, most employees receive far too little feedback from their manager — nearly half of employees receive feedback from their manager a few times a year or less — and most managers are not trained to have meaningful coaching conversations with employees.

Not surprisingly, the lack of manager-employee communication and coaching has an impact on onboarding as well. Too often, managers are either not included in the onboarding process, or they are given a simple checklist of items to cover. These approaches can make onboarding into a “formality” rather than an experience that makes an employee feel good about their decision to work for you.

When managers are disconnected from onboarding, it also can create a gap between corporate policies and the everyday work experience. Your managers may tell a very different story than employees initially heard about your company culture and expectations. This can cause confusion for new employees who easily notice misalignments and hypocrisy. They may think: If leaders are unaware of the distance between their organization's core values and their own behavior, how healthy is this organization anyway?

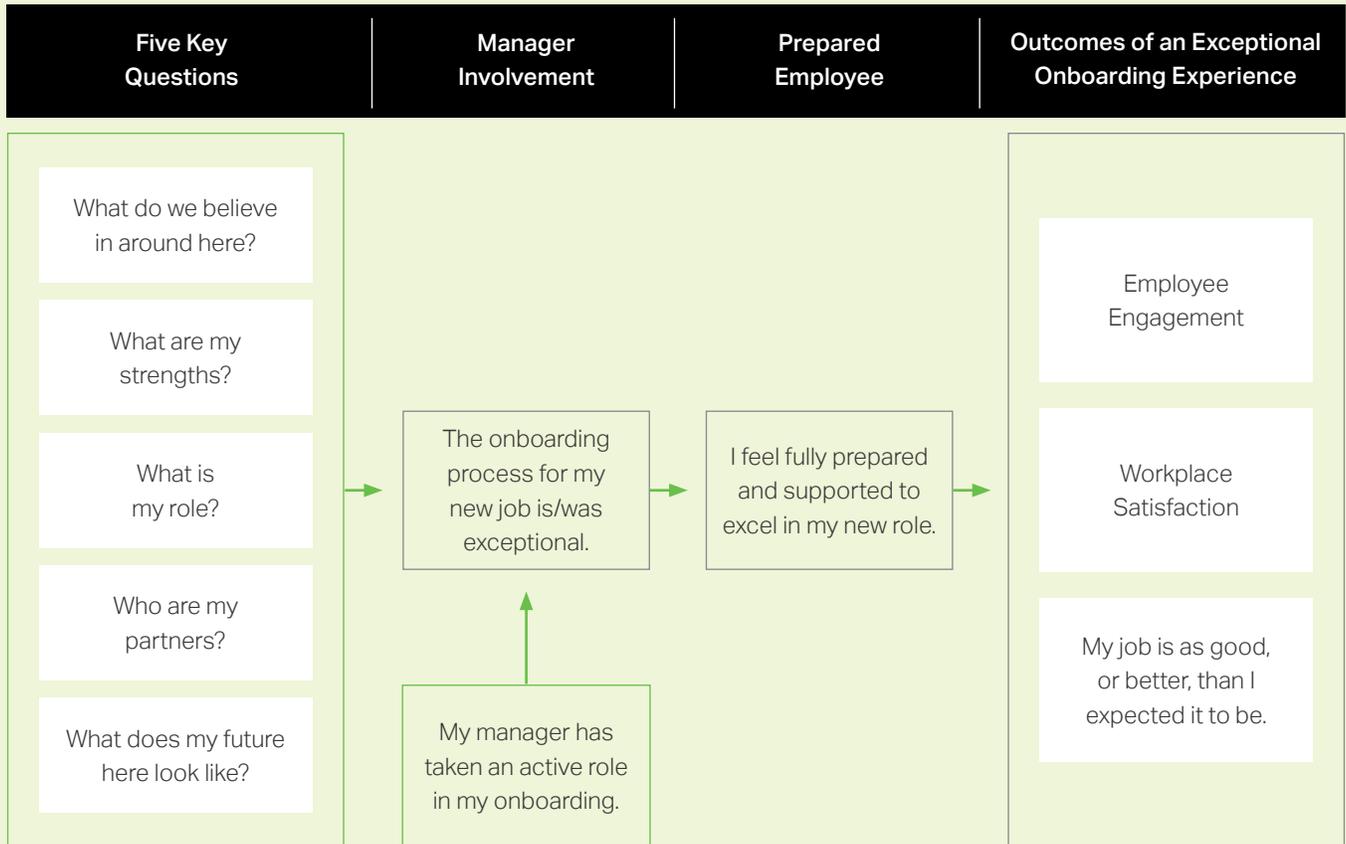
Most importantly, managers must individualize the onboarding program to each employee's role and strengths. Human resources typically constructs onboarding to be generally applicable to everyone across the organization or to specific job families. So, beyond HR's planned orientation, additional activities, and meet and greets, it's up to the manager to show employees how the onboarding experience is put into practice over time on their team and in their role. For example, when a company has a flexible work environment, expectations may be different for a graphic designer than an administrative assistant. Managers need to set expectations and individualize when appropriate.

How Managers Affect Onboarding

Gallup research shows that an employee's perceived effectiveness of an onboarding program is contingent on employees feeling like their manager plays an active role in the process. The statistical onboarding model on the next page illustrates how manager involvement in onboarding is the linchpin for how the five key questions of onboarding affect employee readiness, performance and engagement.

When employees have answers to the five key questions and their manager has an active role in their onboarding process, they feel prepared to excel and are equipped to achieve the outcomes that both they and their organization are looking for.

THE ONBOARDING MODEL



Gallup research shows that an employee's perceived effectiveness of an onboarding program is **contingent on employees feeling like their manager plays an active role in the process.**

Beyond the five questions, managers must help employees understand and navigate the learning process. Managers should:

- 1 be present, involved, available and engaged with the onboarding process
- 2 translate what's learned in onboarding to the employee's specific role and set clear expectations
- 3 connect new employees with teammates
- 4 teach new employees how their work connects with their teammates' roles and the needs of the organization
- 5 ensure that employees get the resources, key experiences, support and mentoring they need to be successful

Employees Want a Coach, Not a Boss

According to our recent *State of the American Workplace* report, today's employees want a manager who takes an active role in their development and works with them to navigate the work-life blend. They want someone who cares about them and understands their unique strengths and gifts.

Workers today want more than a boss; they want a coach. They want to be held accountable, and they want a manager who gives them meaningful feedback and can help them paint a positive picture of the future. Employees prefer a boss who can help them succeed personally and connect their success to the organization's mission.

Fundamentally, this relationship begins with conversations. Managers should be trained to have meaningful, authentic conversations with new employees — and they should continue those conversations for the rest of an employee's career.

70%

Gallup has found that the manager accounts for 70% of the variance in team engagement.



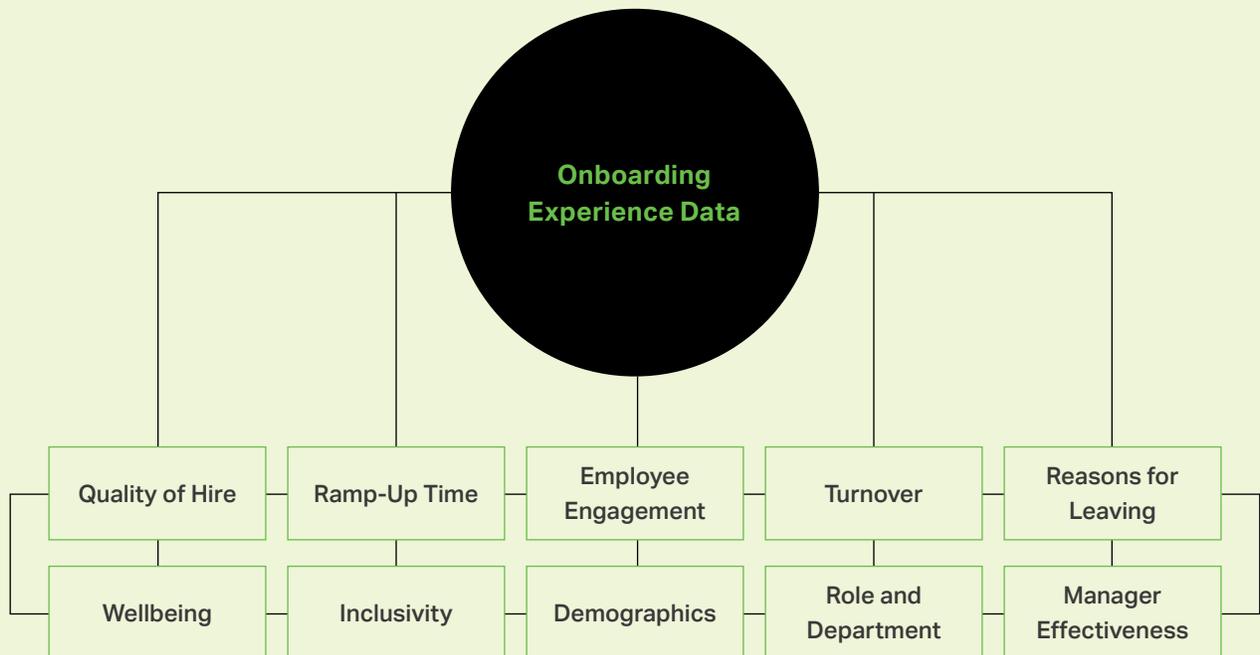
Remove the
Guesswork With
Onboarding
Analytics

12

New employees typically take around 12 months to reach their full performance potential within a role.

Organizations with great onboarding programs don't make lucky guesses. They put the right listening posts, accountability mechanisms and analytics in place to identify risks and build a strong program for the long term. They study what works by examining onboarding survey results and tying them to other organizational and employee data, and then they monitor changes.

CONNECT ONBOARDING INSIGHTS TO YOUR TALENT DATA



The following lessons from onboarding analytics are key to enhancing your program.

Onboarding Takes Longer Than You Think

How long do you think it takes to ramp up a front-line sales associate? A team manager? A program director? Most people would likely say a few weeks to a few months, depending on the complexity of the role.

However, Gallup's experience in hiring analytics and consulting reveals that new employees typically take around 12 months to reach their full performance potential within a role. That's a far longer runway than most onboarding programs use, which means organizations probably need to rethink what their onboarding program looks like.

Employees need time to experience a variety of situations, observe others, master systems and processes, practice, and learn to work with their teammates and customers.

Rather than building a program based on wishful thinking, Gallup uses advanced analytics and quality-of-hire metrics to determine how long employees need to work in a new role until their objectively measured performance reaches "cruising altitude" — and then to determine how that ramp-up time can be reduced.

For example, bank tellers often take 12-15 months to ramp up, and personal bankers take 15-18 months. New branch managers often require 24 months or more. Naturally, more complex roles take longer to learn.

Management and senior leadership are among the most challenging roles to prepare for and settle into. Not only are the jobs complex, but managers and leaders are inheriting business units that have historically operated a certain way, and change takes time.

In light of this, employers need to have realistic expectations for how long it takes to achieve peak (or even average) performance.

Decreased ramp-up time should be one of the primary goals of an onboarding program. Waiting years for high performance is a cost that most organizations cannot accept. A greater investment in onboarding is justified when employees reach high performance levels faster.

Through hiring analytics, organizations can hone their onboarding program to address risk points for turnover, determine performance benchmarks, and decide which tools and development opportunities will help managers best support the onboarding process.

Quality-of-Hire Metrics Aren't Just for Hiring

How should new hires be assessed? Let's start with how they shouldn't be evaluated: against employees with more tenure, on metrics outside of their control and by a single observer.

Instead, a great way to measure new-employee performance is relative to others with similar tenure using a robust Quality-of-Hire (QoH) metric. The term QoH refers to the value that new hires bring to the company. When measured rigorously, QoH includes a combination of performance metrics, manager ratings and turnover metrics.

QoH is critical to measuring onboarding effectiveness because it helps you measure how well employees are doing as a cohort and relative to one another. Even more importantly, leaders can use QoH to guide conversations about "where we're at today and what help is needed."

Pulse Surveys

Let's not forget that the onboarding experience is best understood by asking employees how they feel about it. Given that up to 70% of our decisions are made based on emotion (versus rationality),⁵ the hearts and minds of new hires define their reality.

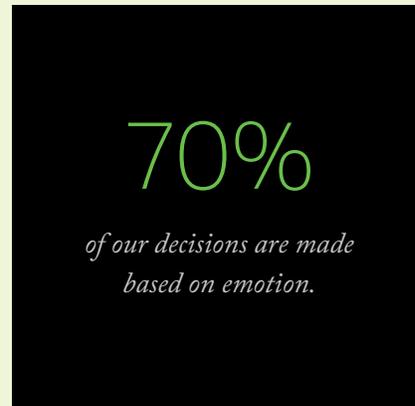
Pulse surveys are one of the best tools for tracking what's working and what's not working with onboarding. They help determine the effect of onboarding on a group of employees, and they inform managers about how employees are being supported and what they need. After all, if a new hire receives a low QoH score, it may be because the manager and onboarding program are not doing their jobs.

Analytics That Connect the Dots

It is best to monitor and measure onboarding using multiple sources of information, including employee responses to the five onboarding questions, QoH metrics, ramp-up time and the voice of the manager. These sources allow you to study pain points in the process, as well as capture what's going right (i.e., best practices).

When organizations robustly measure onboarding effectiveness, they can use advanced analytics to determine success and risk factors that affect onboarding. For example, you can examine how employee and manager fit to role and engagement affect ramp-up time and turnover. You also can determine which types of roles or teams require unique onboarding approaches.

Ultimately, advanced analytics can help you track the progress of your onboarding program and make better decisions about how to improve it. And, they can help quantify the business impact of potential investments in the program.



When organizations robustly measure onboarding effectiveness, **they can use advanced analytics to determine success and risk factors that affect onboarding.**

⁵ Fleming, J. H., & Harter, J. K. (2013). *The next discipline: Applying behavioral economics to drive growth and profitability*. Gallup.

Bringing It All
Together: Building
an Exceptional
Onboarding
Program

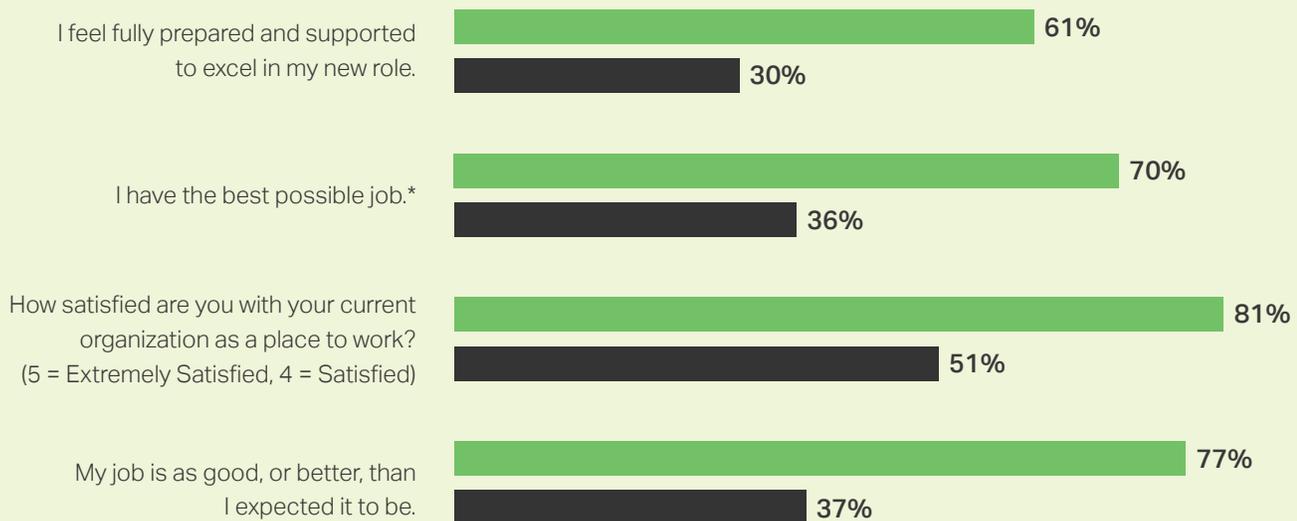
2.6x

Employees with an exceptional onboarding experience are 2.6 times as likely to be extremely satisfied with their place of work.

Why is it so important for your organization to have an *exceptional* onboarding program?

Gallup analysis shows that the difference between a program that employees *strongly agree* was exceptional (a 5 on a 5-point scale) versus just agree (a 4 on the scale) is the difference between an effective program and a waste of time.

EXCEPTIONAL ONBOARDING IS THE ONLY EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING



*Survey respondents were asked: Imagine a ladder, with steps going from 0 to 10. 0 is the worst possible job for you and 10 is the best possible job for you. On what step do you personally feel your current job is at on the ladder from 0 to 10?

■ Strongly Agree Onboarding Was Exceptional (5)
■ Agree Onboarding Was Exceptional (4)

In contrast with employees who rated their onboarding process a 4 or below, employees who strongly agree the onboarding process for their new job was exceptional are:

2.8x

as likely to feel fully prepared and supported to excel in their role

2.8x

as likely to say they have the best possible job

2.6x

as likely to be extremely satisfied with their current organization as a place to work

3.3x

as likely to say their job is as good, or better, than expected

Likelihood reflects a comparison of employees who choose a 5 (*strongly agree*) versus a 4 or below (4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*) when asked if the onboarding process for their new job is or was exceptional.

These results demonstrate that if you want your onboarding program to influence new employees for the long term, you have to “wow” them.

So, what does it take to have an exceptional onboarding experience?

Six Steps for Developing Your Exceptional Onboarding Experience

Based on Gallup's analysis of employee onboarding experiences, six actions will improve organizations' programs for new hires — moving them from average to exceptional.

Six Actions to Enhance Your Onboarding Program

- 1) Extend the employee onboarding journey to span the entire first year.
- 2) Make sure your onboarding experience aligns with your employee value proposition.
- 3) Answer the five questions of onboarding.
- 4) Add experiences that make new employees feel your distinctive culture.
- 5) Train leaders, managers and teams to take responsibility for onboarding.
- 6) Combine your onboarding analytics with performance data to gain deeper insights.

1

Extend the employee onboarding journey to span the entire first year.

Although formal orientation may end in a week, it takes months for new employees to reach their full potential. Employee excitement and engagement may be high at first, but after a few months, the essential elements of a job — the manager relationship, expectations, team dynamics — come to the forefront. This is when many employees decide to stay or leave.

Organizations need to think about onboarding as a year-long process that offers employees many opportunities to build relationships with team members, learn and grow, and connect with their manager through regular check-ins.

Ongoing feedback should lead to focused manager-employee conversations about what's working and what's not. To be clear, check-ins are not evaluations. The goal of these conversations is to deepen the relationship between employee and manager — an essential key to success in any role.

Various systems and tools also must be put into place to help facilitate meaningful check-ins and create accountability around them. Conversation guides and blended learning tools help enrich these conversations. Evaluation tools, such as QoH assessments and pulse surveys, provide the analytics and accountability needed to systematically improve the program, identify risks, reduce ramp-up time and prepare your future stars to excel.

2

Make sure your onboarding experience aligns with your employee value proposition.

Today's employees are consumers of the workplace. When they accept a job offer, they want to get what they expect when they start working. Their expectations include all aspects of their job, from pay and role to culture and a career path. Sometimes these are explicit in promotional materials, and other times they are not.

HR leaders should clearly define the expectations that employees have when they are hired, and they should make sure that onboarding addresses each of these items in some way.

Organizations should also consider constructing listening posts to learn how the EVP is being lived day to day. Exit surveys are a frequently overlooked tool for gaining valuable insights from employees who leave within their first year — but don't forget to ask the people who stay too. What did they expect and hope for that didn't happen? Where was the gap between expectations and reality?

3

Answer the five questions of onboarding.

When employees can emphatically agree with Gallup's five questions of onboarding, your culture and talent development strategy are primed for success. All five questions are critical.

Employees fundamentally need three of these questions answered to know how to meet their most basic job expectations: What do we believe in around here? What is my role? Who are my partners?

The other two questions — with answers that enhance performance — often go unanswered: What are my strengths? What does my future here look like?

Employers should give new employees the opportunity to discover their talents and share them with their team. This helps managers and team members increase the productivity and early success of a new hire. Managers also should talk to employees about goals and opportunities to grow. Development is so important for today's worker; the topic shouldn't be left until their first formal review.

4 Add experiences that make new employees feel your distinctive culture.

To be successful, new employees need to understand your culture and believe that they fit into it. Hiring for culture fit is important, but it means little if your organization doesn't invite new employees to participate in that culture.

Organizations need to create experiences that bring their culture to life in social and emotional ways.

If being a "customer-centric" culture is important to you, how can you include the voice of customers in your onboarding process? Perhaps team members could talk about their favorite customers or tell stories about their best customer service wins. Or, perhaps every new employee — regardless of rank — must spend time answering or listening to customer phone calls.

5 Train leaders, managers and teams to take responsibility for onboarding.

Onboarding is all about connection. We forget most of the information we receive at orientation, but the relationships we build in the first few months on the job may last for the rest of our tenure.

Feelings of belonging, trust and respect can't be generated from a checklist. They require conversations and experiences with leaders, managers and team members.

A brief, genuine encounter with a leader can leave a deep impression on a new employee. A meaningful conversation with a manager about deep topics — professional dreams, passions, talents — can reassure someone that they are in the right place. And moments of support and encouragement from teammates several months into a role can make all the difference in deciding to continue through inevitable growing pains.

Everyone — not just HR leaders — needs to take responsibility for new-employee success.

6 Combine your onboarding analytics with performance data to gain deeper insights.

An effective onboarding program should have a proven positive effect on employee engagement, performance and retention. Surveys provide valuable insights into the onboarding experience, and linking rigorous survey data to employee behavior (such as a premature exit) and business outcomes is even more valuable.

On a tactical level, leaders can use onboarding data to identify top reasons that employees are not connecting well with the organization. Based on what they learn, leaders can provide managers with additional resources and recommendations for correcting issues and engaging their new hires.

From a strategic perspective, leaders can combine onboarding data with data from other stages of the employee life cycle — such as hiring, performance and exit data — to see which parts of the employee experience need improvement.

Leaders may discover that onboarding can illuminate bad hiring practices, failed delivery on an organization's EVP or a disconnect from the organizational culture — which all can lead to performance issues later.

Connect With Gallup

The reinvention of onboarding is long overdue. Most onboarding programs are ineffective or detrimental to the success of new hires. To build a workforce of the future and retain top talent, great workplaces must:

- assess the current state of their onboarding program
- benchmark best practices
- set distinctive goals and outcomes for organizational success
- get buy-in from all levels of the organization, from leaders to the front line
- track processes and adjust tactics as necessary

Gallup can help you assess your current program and provide practical steps for taking your onboarding outcomes from ordinary to exceptional. We also partner with internal learning leaders to create engaging, strengths-based training and coaching.

Gallup cares about ensuring authentic and verifiable change for your organization, backed by the world's best workplace analytics and advice. Learn more at [Gallup.com/workplace](https://www.gallup.com/workplace).

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