



## Human Resource Solutions

# Onboarding: Delivering on the Promise

### Executive Summary

- ▶ The nursing workforce continues to age and exit the workplace. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics studies indicate as many as 40% will retire or are considering retirement.
- ▶ Fewer qualified graduates are in place to replace aging baby boomers, leading to a knowledge and skills gap as well as a numbers gap.
- ▶ Globalization of the nursing workforce has increased competition for all employers to find, hire, and retain good employees.



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**M**OST EMPLOYERS, especially in health care, have a process in place to “orient” new employees. Typical orientation programs can range in complexity as well as time from a simple 1 day “here’s the manual,” to elaborate models that span weeks and months. While this approach has its merits, a newer more effective method is now being used in many settings. Employers who embrace the concept of *onboarding* are striving to be best in class organizations.

One might ask, “Why invest in another process?” Given the adage “first impressions are often lasting impressions” and the fact that your new hire is still fair game to a competitor until she/he is actually on site, engaging the new hire as early as possible has strong merits. This is even more critical in health care where our employees are our biggest assets. They are not only the core of our delivery models, but account for our largest expenditure as well.

An operational definition of onboarding is a “holistic approach combining people, process and technology to optimize the impact a new hire has on the organization with an emphasis on both effectiveness and efficiency” (Frear, 2007).

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Engaging new hires before they start to work illustrates the value an organization places on its employees.

### Components and Process

Key elements of an excellent onboarding program are:

- Process
- Support
- Follow up

Process begins during the recruitment phase and recruiters must understand the vital role they play. How they feel about the company often translates into behaviors they demonstrate when meeting candidates. Recruiters who see the value they add to an organization will always strive for “good hires” not “any hires.” Partnering with the hiring manager to find the best fit is critical.

Hiring managers also need to believe the manner in which a new employee is welcomed, or in some cases the lack of a welcome, can have a profound effect. Employers who track turnover rates will find a correlation between departments/areas that welcome and assimilate new hires and those who do not and have a “sink or swim” mentality.

Once a selection has been made and the offer accepted, the onboarding process begins. During this phase, HR and the hiring manager must work closely and have clearly defined responsibilities. A variety of methods can be employed, ranging from phone calls and traditional packets of literature to Web-based portals.

HR should share basic information such as:

- Date and location for the health screen.
- Orientation date, time, and location.
- Driving directions and parking instructions.
- Attire for the orientation period.
- Meals and breaks.
- Benefit information and enrollment forms.
- Payroll and tax information with appropriate forms.

For new hires from out of the area, a complete package that addresses housing, schools, license requirements, and key contact information should be included. Links to the local chamber of commerce or visitors’ bureau provide valuable information and tips to newcomers.

Web-based portals are an effective means to provide this service. Information can be loaded and new hires can conveniently access and download the information whenever they wish. The portal can be set up in-house or through a vendor who provides onboarding products.

The hiring manager should call the new hire to welcome her/him and provide:

- The manager's contact information and how to contact the unit or department.
- The name and contact information of the preceptor or mentor who will be working with the new hire.
- Structure, goals, and strategic plans for the unit/department.

Depending on the length of time between offer and start date, the manager and the preceptor should maintain contact with the new hire. This can be accomplished via email or phone. Reaching out throughout this time frame begins to solidify the bond the new hire feels between him/herself and the manager.

During this time it is also the manager's responsibility to "secure" the workplace. This encompasses all the things the new person will need to begin work: computer access, passwords, locker, keys, and office space and supplies if applicable. These elements will vary according to the position.

Informing co-workers of the new hire is another manager responsibility. Everyone on the unit should be aware of when the new person is coming and a welcoming tone must be set.

An onboarding checklist for both HR and managers is a helpful tool to keep everyone on track and to ensure all the necessary details are incorporated.

If you happen to work where onboarding software has been purchased and is in use, a checklist or tickler email is automatically generated for many of these processes. Some of these products go as far as automatically setting up appointments for the new hire to meet other staff members, both in and out of the hiring department.

The key is to give pertinent and concise information and to always include contact information.

## Support

Support from the manager is critical and the concept that people don't leave a job, they leave a supervisor, is very true. Conversely people stay not only because of the job, but also because of the leader and their co-workers.

The length of time for the onboarding process can vary between 1 to 2 months prior to start to 1 year after hire depending on the complexity of the position.

The preceptor or mentor also provides support to the newcomer. Keep in mind when you select this person he or she needs to be positive, competent, and accepting of new staff. Don't pair a new hire with someone who is negative and rigid.

Utilize tools whether they are on-line or written to formulate a roadmap with time lines for the new hire. Regular reviews help keep everyone focused and on track. Integrated into regular feedback sessions should be activities that are fun and social in nature. When envisioning the holistic nature of onboarding, incorporate the social aspect of making a new hire feel completely welcomed and accepted by the work group. During this period the manager should ensure that the new hire meets all the appropriate stakeholders.

Ultimately when people are made to feel welcomed, they are more productive, less stressed, and more team focused. This all translates into lower turnover rates.

## Follow Up

The last phase of a good onboarding program is follow up. Meetings at key milestones are critical to let the employee know how he/she is progressing. Follow up should always include a feedback mechanism for the new hire to let you know if his/her expectations are being met. The follow up process should utilize both formal checklists as well as targeted questions to elicit honest comments. "Post-hire" or "re-recruit interviews" should be handled by HR and spaced out over 12 months. Good time frames for these interviews are 45 days, 90 days, 6 months, and 1 year. Having HR handle the interviews minimizes fear of reprisal and increases honest responses.

Another way to handle follow up interviews is to let all new hires from a specific time frame meet in an informal, social setting. This encourages networking as well as allowing for constructive feedback in a nonthreatening environment.

Best-in-class onboarding programs result in highly integrated, productive, and satisfied employees and dramatically affect turnover rates as well as customer satisfaction. \$

## REFERENCE

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## ADDITIONAL READINGS

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