



Get Onboard with a First-Class Talent Experience

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The Talent Experience

In the last few months there has been quite a bit of buzz around *talent brand* and the *talent experience*. You may be wondering why this is a big deal? The talent experience embodies all of the employee's life cycle events beginning with the talent acquisition process through onboarding, transfers, leaves of absence, performance management, career development, promotions and, finally, off-boarding. Think of all of the interactions that an employee encounters through these various experiences with your organization. These contribute to forming initial and lasting impressions for the employee and impact his or her decision to join and to remain with your company. As you may imagine, at each stage there are vast opportunities for the employee to experience positive, anxious or even frustrating moments. Efficiently and effectively managing these experiences will translate to more satisfied employees and improved business results. Just a few simple metrics to measure the business results may include reduced turnover, improved performance and overall higher employee engagement.

The Onboarding Experience

What does it look and feel like to be a new employee in your organization? For some of you, it may be a recent experience and for others, it may have been many months or years ago. A high majority of new employees are

extremely excited to have been selected for the position for which they have spent considerable time and effort during the application and interview process. They are in the "honeymoon" period and are looking forward to becoming an official new employee with your company. So what do you do in your onboarding process to reinforce this accelerated engagement level? Here are a few questions to consider as you evaluate your organization's onboarding program.

1. Can your new employees begin their onboarding as soon as they accept your job offer?
2. Is onboarding personalized for each new employee?
3. Are new hires introduced to your talent brand?
4. Is socialization part of the experience?
5. Can new employees be productive on his or her start date?
6. Do new associates rate onboarding as "outstanding?"

If you are able to answer "yes" to the six items above, congratulations! You have robust onboarding processes and programs in place and would likely be classified as a "best-in-class" onboarding organization by the Aberdeen Group. In the "*All Aboard: Effective Onboarding Techniques and Strategies*" published by the Aberdeen Group in January 2008, three key performance criteria were used to distinguish best-in-class companies. These included improved retention rates, reduced time to productivity and increased completion rate for onboarding tasks or activities. The six sample question list above does not constitute everything to be rated for best-in-class or world-class onboarding, but it does provide a foundation for considerations as you assess your own organization's programs and practices.

The Role of Talent Branding in the Onboarding Experience

First of all, what is the *talent brand*? It can be defined as the talent strategy that promotes the benefits and unique aspects of working for the company to current and future employees. It represents the image and, ideally, the reality of what it is like to work for your organization. Just as consumer brands offer and promote promises of the quality and value of products, an employer's talent brand attempts to differentiate why a candidate should be attracted and, ultimately, employed by the company.

Talent branding is one of the most critical components for today's employers for attracting the new, technology-centric generation of workers. A company needs to advertise itself as a tremendous place to work, a place to build life-long relationships, and a place that provides opportunities to achieve personal and professional goals.

Why is this important to onboarding? There are many reasons, including statistics, which demonstrate that an organization's talent brand is crucial for both attracting and

retaining talent. In a May 2008 study conducted by the Human Capital Institute,³ respondents were asked how important was the image or brand of that organization in the decision to join the current or previous organization. Seventy-one percent identified this as either somewhat important or very important. In addition, 75 percent of survey respondents indicated that the employer's image or brand was somewhat important or very important in their decision to stay with the organization. These responses demonstrate that the company's talent brand does significantly impact an employee's decision to join and remain with the organization.

Incorporating the Talent Brand into your Onboarding Program

Aligning and leveraging your talent brand is critical as you onboard your new employees. Ideally, the new associates have learned about your organization's mission, goals and values throughout the talent acquisition process. You want to reinforce this messaging as they complete onboarding tasks through their 90-day, six-month, or even up to one year onboarding program. Providing access to a personalized New Employee Portal is a key ingredient in the pre-arrival onboarding stage. The new employee who has just accepted your job offer can become more familiar with your company,

find out more about the location and even the department he or she is joining. Best-in-class organizations often provide a video or audio message from the CEO, pictures of team members, and company culture content that all further connects the new employee to the organization and reinforces the company's talent brand. "Your onboarding efforts must represent and convey your company's specific brand," says Carmen Marston, executive VP of HR for Zimmerman Advertising. "Creating an onboarding process that introduces new employees to our corporate culture and personality – from recruitment to their first days on the job – gives them a better sense of how they will integrate into our brand and team."



Recommended Strategies for Onboarding Success

With the average cost of professional turnover estimated at one to one and a half times salary, retaining the sought-after talent is essential for any organization. As identified in the Aberdeen 2008 Onboarding Report, 86 percent of respondents agree that new hires make their decision about

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whether or not to stay at your organization within the first six months on the job. Premier onboarding processes are mandatory for an organization's talent success. If you are just beginning to focus on this component of the talent experience, below are some recommended steps:

1. Identify the business issues to be addressed – samples include attraction, engagement and/or retention of talent, process efficiency or quality of the employee experience.
2. Formalize your onboarding strategy – what does onboarding mean, how long does it last, who is involved, and what is the scope or the priority?
3. Create or align your talent brand – as discussed above, incorporate your brand into your onboarding efforts.
4. Leverage technology – utilize a New Employee Portal so new employees can begin their onboarding process as they accept an employment offer with your company.
5. Measure results – Know when you have success, whether it is quantitative, qualitative or both.

The old adage of “First impressions aren’t easy to erase” is extremely applicable in regards to the onboarding experience. Keep this in mind as you develop, implement, and continuously improve your onboarding programs and processes to attract, retain and motivate your new associates.

Endnotes

1 “All Aboard: Effective Onboarding Techniques and Strategies,” Aberdeen Group, www.aberdeen.com, January 2008.

2 “The Branding Imperative in Talent Management,” a report by the Human Capital Institute and SilkRoad Technology, Inc., May 2008.

About the Author



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