

On Boarding : Beyond Induction Basics

How to ensure your senior and high potential hires are successful in their first 100 days and beyond.

Why is it that despite significant investment in recruiting senior hires and high potential individuals each year, attrition rates within two years are still disappointingly high? And why, after the careful selection of high calibre individuals, who have been assets and ambassadors at their previous organisations, do some of the best recruits fail? A well known Private Equity house recently told us that 50% of people they hire at Director level leave within 12 months.

A strategic review carried out in recent months by Dr Curly Moloney of Moloney Search amongst the FTSE 100, endorses the long held view that the journey an individual takes during their first 100 days is critically important to their long term success in an organisation.

'Two things' says Dr Moloney 'need to happen within 100 days to ensure a high calibre hire translates into a great long term employee'. 'First the individual needs to deliver tangible evidence of what he/she has to offer their new employer, and second the individual needs to feel they have totally bonded with their new company'.

Moloney Search found that the key barriers to making this happen were a lack of preparation by the individual, a lack of time invested in the individual by the employer and a miss match of expectations on what is expected. It is estimated that the average cost of making a senior hire is £80,000 and despite this, most organisations spend very little time 'On Boarding' new individuals into a business.

This article presents ideas for a programme of activity that can practically and simply be facilitated by a line manager, an HR business partner or an executive coach to make it more likely that a new hire is successfully 'On Boarded' into their new role. 'On Boarding' is a critical activity over and above a standard induction programme. So often organisations think a tour of the office or an induction workshop will suffice though this only amounts to an information download and a one-way dialogue that will not lay the foundations for real success in the first 100 days. Instead, 'On Boarding' is designed to make an individual think and plan for their success rather than be totally re-active to their new day to day operational demands.

An 'On Boarding' programme contains ideas and tangible support during the first 100 days. 'Most people' says Dr Moloney, 'go through a natural dip in commitment during their early weeks in a role. This is because the reality of working in an organisation is invariably different from the expectations they had before they joined. The more one to one support that can be provided in this period the more successful the outcome and we should not assume that this is inappropriate for senior hires'.

The best 'On Boarding' programmes will focus on the following four main activities and prepare the new recruit for success: (1) encouraging new hires to self- review their capabilities and profile; (2) helping new hires to rapidly take stock of the business; (3) facilitating the development of new relationships and (4) planning for 'quick wins'.

Let's touch on each of these four areas:

Encouraging new hires to self-review review their capabilities and profile:

In their old organisation, your new hire knew how to be successful; they knew how to navigate through the organisational minefield and deliver successful outcomes. However, a new role in a new organisation will always present new and unexpected challenges and an individual will invariably need to dig deep to draw on their current skills and develop new ones. A good starting point is to help your new recruit assess their strengths and development needs against the requirements of the new job and the organisation's culture.

Often the most successful organisations will use a detailed feedback session, based on data gathered during the interview process, to initiate this discussion. By exploring with the individual how they performed and came across during the interview process can help the individual understand why they were selected into the job, what strategies were effective and what capabilities are particularly valued. A wealth of data usually exists and it can often build confidence for the individual to know how they benchmark against their peer group and how they might deal with any shortcomings. A development plan can be immediately facilitated which really builds the individual's commitment to their new organisation and starts to build their strategy for the first 100 days.

CASE STUDY: A large UK professional services firm

This highly respected company meets with all new hires on their first day of appointment and debriefs their performance during the interview process. Strengths are highlighted and development areas noted in relation to the individual's ability to do the job. Long term ambitions and potential are also discussed.

The outcome from this discussion is turned into the individual's first development plan which is reviewed at regular intervals.

The company maintain that showing this level of interest from day one is a very cost effective way of developing employee commitment quickly.

This exercise is carried out for each employee regardless of seniority.

Another approach is to introduce the new hire the primary capability model that exists in the company and encourage them to self assess themselves against it. Ask them to reflect on their behaviour last time they started a new role (or alternatively when they have seen others integrate well into a new organisation) and ask them to review any learning from that.

It can often help to encourage the individual to build self awareness by getting them to think themselves into a new mindset and imagining the new role going well. Most people will need to make the transition mentally. Get them to ask themselves:

- In what ways will I have to think differently in the new role...will I be successful by continuing what I did previously?
- To what extent will my relationship with my people be different if I have a smaller or larger team?

- What is the biggest thing I will have to change about my behaviour?
- What have I learned in my old job that will be valuable to the new role?
- What will people be saying about me after 100 days if all goes well?

Helping new hires to rapidly take stock of the business:

Having thought about themselves the next logical step is for the individual to identify the key challenges and opportunities which affect the business.

An obvious starting point is to understand the corporate strategy and reflect on how their business unit, their team and they themselves can play a part in achieving this.

So much can be achieved by exploring the history of the business unit. Why does it exist? What is its purpose? What have been the major milestones in its life? What are people saying about it now? How successful is it? How does it fit into the wider business? How do things get done around here? How strong are its vision and values?

The trick is that the new hire asks these questions without pre-supposing that he/she already knows the answers. Assumptions can be dangerous red-herrings and stop new recruits from properly listening to the answers that are given from different stakeholders. No two organisations are the same.

Similar questions can then be asked about other related business units and competitors so an early, though robust, evaluation can be made on the relative strength and potential of the business.

Spending time getting to know the new team and what makes them tick is clearly essential within the first 10 days. A wise Manager of mine, very early in my career shared an old Chinese proverb which went something along the lines of 'seek to understand, before making yourself understood'. So often, new hires get this wrong when going into a new situation.

Observing, meeting the team individually and listening (whilst suspending judgement) will build respect and help the new hire to map team capability. Get them to understand how the team sees the business, how they think customers rate their service, what could be improved and their own individual aspirations. Focus on what works well, not just the gaps.

On an individual basis, personal objectives, often via a balanced scorecard need to be agreed within the first 100 days. The new hire will need to have a good understanding of how their objectives feed into the business unit objectives and corporate strategy.

Facilitating the development of new relationships:

It is critical to help the new hire identify who relationships need to be developed with. A stakeholder map should be created outlining who does what within the team (its inputs, processes and outputs) and identifying the suppliers, customers and other internal and external stakeholders connected with this. Personal stakeholders should be highlighted on this map and pro-active contacts prioritised.

The individual should be encouraged to really think through each meeting in advance: What would a successful outcome look like? What do they want from me? And what do I want from them? Always remembering that they will never have a second chance to make a first impression.

The individual should think particularly carefully about their own line manager. They should seek to find out what it is that their line manager really wants and doesn't want from their new employee. How will he or she want to work with them (e.g. how much contact or information will they want and at what level of detail). What is really important to them in terms of delivery sign off and remit which may or may not be in their objectives.

But the balance needs to be right. The new recruit should also be clear what it is they are looking for from their line manager and discuss it openly. Often things to be considered are the extent to which a line manager is required to be a sounding board, support required at major decision points and levels of feedback required.

Planning for 'quick wins'

Quick wins are really important as most people will want to make their mark. Some well placed achievements in the first 100 days will convince the organisation that they have made a great decision, will promote respect and could raise morale amongst a team.

Guidance could be given however to ensure the quick wins are based on proper analysis. All too often something is changed in the first 100 days just for the sake of doing something. Best practice with quick wins seems to be around identifying a maximum of two things to be achieved within the 100 days. These things should have an immediate impact on the business, be important to the individual's line manager and lay the foundations for future activity. Once identified the new recruit needs to work relentlessly to achieve them.

CASE STUDY: A global financial & network services company

This company experienced a higher rate of departures within early years amongst its external hires as opposed to internal candidates and on analysing the causes they discovered that some simple on boarding processes mitigated the problem. Primarily, they did three things:

1. They pro-actively managed the new hires expectations by setting realistic expectations to manage natural enthusiasm in the early weeks with the company, and gave support and managed up expectations later, if the individual became demotivated by a self perceived lack of progress.
2. They discussed development with the new hire from day one and employed a coach to help them think through any behaviours that could derail progress. In doing this they built strong loyalty towards the company.
3. They facilitated the development of a quality network for the benefit of the individual and to promote cross departmental working.

Ideas such as these have been used in some UK organisations to assist with the 'On Boarding' process. None of the ideas are 'rocket science' but they do encourage individuals to think and plan for their new role rather than getting totally sucked in to the first challenges that come

along. In planning what they might do, the individual is more likely to make an immediate and lasting impact on their organisation and by showing an interest in facilitating and supporting this, an organisation is more likely to retain a committed individual for the long term.

The most effective way to implement the ideas above for senior hires and high potential recruits is to provide one-to-one support. If the volumes of new recruits are particularly high, workshops can be run to highlight the importance of the activity and up-skill the individuals on how to achieve the ideas suggested.



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