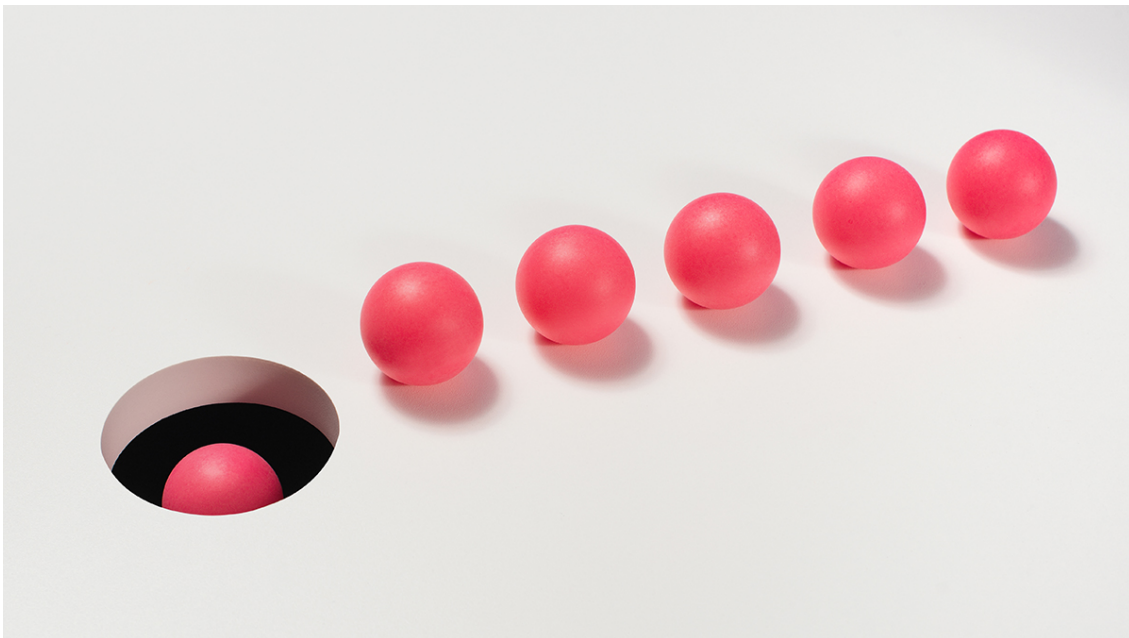Harvard
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7 Ways to Set Up a New Hire for Success

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Summary.   No one has a bigger impact on, or a bigger stake in, new employees' success than the managers who hired them. Research has shown that being systematic in onboarding brings new employees up to speed 50% faster, which means they're more quickly and…   **more**

No one has a bigger impact on new employees' success than the managers who hired them. Why? Because more than anyone else the hiring manager understands what his or her people need to

accomplish and what it will take — skills, resources, connections — for them to become fully effective.

Managers also have the biggest stake in onboarding their new hires effectively. Research has shown that being systematic in onboarding brings new employees up to speed 50% faster, which means they're more quickly and efficiently able to contribute to achieving desired goals. Effective onboarding also dramatically reduces failure rates and increases employee engagement and retention.

The earlier bosses start supporting their new hires, the better. The time between when someone accepts an offer and comes to work is a precious resource that can be used to jump-start the process. But even if new employees already are on the job, there are many ways to get them up to speed faster.

Of course, the starting point is to take care of the "onboarding basics" — such as documentation, compliance training, space, support, and technology. Fortunately, most companies do a reasonably good job with those elements.

It's the deeper work of integrating new hires where the real work of bosses begins. Here are seven key ways to accomplish it:

Understand their challenges.

Onboarding is among the toughest types of job transitions. Why? Because new hires, even if they are experienced professionals, are unfamiliar with the business, don't understand how things really work, lack established relationships, and have to adapt to a new culture. Research has shown that challenges in the latter two categories are the biggest reasons for quick turnover. New employees have to learn a lot and may be feeling quite vulnerable, even when they seem outwardly confident. That's even more likely to be the case when people have relocated for their jobs, so also face change in their personal lives, or if they're moving up a seniority level, so must adjust to a new managerial role.

Some might respond by playing it safe and sticking too much to what they already know; others may overcompensate, behaving like they have "the answer," rather than asking questions and figuring out how to add value.

So it's important for bosses to reassure recent hires that learning is more important than doing in the early days.

Accelerate their learning.

The faster a new hire learns about the organization and their role, the more they will be able to accomplish in the critical first months. To accelerate the learning process, managers must first focus on what focus on *what* they need to learn in three areas. *Technical learning* is insight into the fundamentals of the business, such as products, customers, technologies, and systems. *Cultural learning* is about the attitudes, behavioral norms, and values that contribute to the unique character of the organization. *Political learning* focuses on understanding how decisions are made, how power and influence work, and figuring out whose support they will need most.

Bosses should also think about *how* they can help new employees. This means not only personally providing, as early as possible, the best available information but also thinking about who else is best placed to impart those important lessons.

Make them part of the team.

While it's possible that new hires will work independently, it's more likely they will be part of a team (or teams). The sooner they build effective working relationships with their peers, the better, and there's a lot a hiring manager can do to make this happen.

The starting point is to make sure the team understands why the person has been hired and what role(s) they will play. It's also important that bosses formally introduce new employees — to everyone — as soon as possible after their arrival and make it clear that teams are expected to help their new colleagues acclimate and

move up the learning curve. A small initial investment of time and effort in connecting the new hire with the team will pay long-term productivity and performance dividends.

Connect them with key stakeholders.

Outside of the new hire's immediate team, there are likely to be many other stakeholders who will be critical to not only their learning but also their success on the job. And it may not be obvious who those people are, why they're important, or how best to connect with them.

One simple way bosses can facilitate these connections is to make a list of names, including brief notes on each, and then make introductions, explaining why it's important that they connect. Then schedule a date, perhaps in 30 to 45 days, to check in with the stakeholders to make sure that the new hire's network is taking shape.

Give them direction.

Employees can't — or shouldn't — get to work before bosses set clear expectations. The right guidance helps them answer three key questions:

- *What do I need to do?* This means defining their goals and the timeframes for accomplishing them, as well as the measures that will be used to evaluate their progress.
- *How should I go about doing it?* This means being specific about what strategies they should use to accomplish the goals, including what activities they should and should not prioritize.
- *Why should I feel motivated to accomplish it?* This means communicating a vision for what the organization is striving to accomplish and helping new hires see the part they play in realizing it.

Even if expectations were discussed during the recruiting process, you need more in-depth conversation as soon as new hires start to make sure they're not coming in with any misconceptions about what they need to do to be successful.

Help them get early wins.

Early wins are a powerful way for incoming employees to build confidence and credibility. People new to a job and organization often want to prove they can do it all and fall into the trap of trying to take on too much, too soon, thereby spreading themselves too thin.

The manager's job is to instead keep new hires focused on the essential work they should prioritize and by pointing them to ways they'll make rapid progress on these goals. Part of this is teaching them how to "score" wins in ways that are consistent with the organization's culture. You want employees to get their early wins in the right way.

Coach them for success.

Finally, bosses who are serious about onboarding don't just provide intensive early support then leave new hires to "sink or swim." It takes time for new employees to become fully integrated and able to operate 100% autonomously and productively, so it's important for hiring managers to continue to connect with and coach their people. This can be as simple as scheduling regular "how are things going?" check-ins, perhaps every couple of weeks, until there is nothing left to talk about.

Also, when managers see new hires struggling, they should intervene. It's a common mistake to treat new hires too gently, thinking it's best to give them time to adjust and that early issues with, say, peer relationships and cultural fit, will resolve themselves. But this can easily create vicious cycles in which employees unknowingly dig themselves into holes from which they can't climb out. The longer a negative dynamic persists, the more difficult it is to reverse.

As bosses apply these guidelines, they should keep in mind that "effective onboarding" is not just about helping external hires. Employees making internal moves can face challenges that are as tough or tougher. This is especially the case when they are coming from different units, have been shaped by different cultures, or are moving from different geographies. Managers should use the same approach to accelerate everyone joining their teams.

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