



## **New Employee Onboarding: The Supervisor's Handbook for Doing it Well**

## What is onboarding?

Onboarding is a process of assimilating (integrating) a new employee into an organization. There are many ways in which one integrates into a new group but one of the most important considerations, from a management perspective, is social integration. Social integration begins when new members are welcomed into the group and form connections and relationships with group members. Integration and assimilation are hastened when a new employee understands the organizational culture—something that is often hard to discern and interpret.

At VCU, the formal onboarding process begins prior to employment (pre-employment) and lasts through the first year of the new employee's lifecycle.

## Why is it necessary to bring new employees onboard?

There's a great deal of research that supports onboarding as a method of engaging new employees with an organization, ramping up their productivity, and aligning their strengths, talents and efforts with the organization's strategic direction and business plan. Successful onboarding can lead to happier and higher achieving employees, longer retention of those employees, and a more successful and vibrant organization. Failure to purposefully bring new employees onboard may result in employees who don't engage with the organization, and this can mean lower productivity, higher absenteeism and even more safety incidents.<sup>1</sup>

New employees experience uncertainty when they enter new work environment. The onboarding process is an intentional way to guide new employees through the transition, facilitate social integration and clarity of job roles <sup>2</sup> and, amongst other things,

1. Maximize the natural learning opportunities that present themselves during times of change;
2. Ease unnecessary stress that may distract from learning and delay productivity.

It helps to have a model on which to build an onboarding program. The model<sup>3</sup> below outlines four key needs that are common to new employees. If we understand and build an onboarding program around meeting key employee needs, and apply the program consistently, then we can collectively increase the potential to engage and retain employees.

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<sup>1</sup> Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2013 Report

<sup>2</sup> SHRM Foundation Effective Practices Guidelines, Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success

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## Key Employee Needs



Self-efficacy-new employees need to gain confidence that they can learn and do their jobs well. Self-efficacy is the measure of one's own abilities to succeed in a situation. As you can imagine and may even remember, a new employee is on a steep learning curve. Greater confidence in oneself (and your clear confidence in the individual) engenders faster learning and skill acquisition. The first days, weeks and months are tender times in which self-efficacy can be undermined or progressively strengthened.

Role clarity-clear expectations and role definition contribute greatly to the success of a new employee. When new employees know what is expected of them professionally, what roles they play and responsibilities they own, they are less likely to encounter conflict and ambiguity-and stress-and will more quickly add valuable contributions to the work group.

Social Integration- individuals that are new to groups are outsiders until they are accepted as insiders. Not only do newly hired individuals need to become part of the work group or team, they also need to be introduced to, and develop relationships with, other key organizational insiders who they must rely on to get work done.

Knowledge of Culture- Organizational culture is unique and difficult to decipher. The true culture of a workplace is often different than the one articulated through policies, procedures and mission statements. Only insiders can help individuals new to an organization learn what cultural symbols, people's behaviors, organizational traditions, stories and mythology really mean. Understanding the culture, and determining the fit within the culture, is critical for a new employee to be able to navigate the workplace with savvy.

## The Onboarding Process

### Stages:

#### Pre-Employment

The onboarding process begins, for our purposes, when an employee is offered and accepts a position at VCU. Information is communicated by and contacts established with key individuals, including the new employee's supervisor, their department's personnel administrator (P.A.), and their department's human resource consultant (HRC). Employment information begins to flow between VCU and the new employee. Requests for action are made and new employees are expected to complete documents and come prepared with information on the first day of work. These communications, requests and information sharing convey material things that must be done to legally employ an individual and are the basis of future relationships. At the same time, employees make impressions and judgments about the type of place VCU is, and is to work, as a result of these interactions.

**The supervisor's responsibilities at this stage** include:

1. Understanding the pre-employment process and ensuring it goes as planned. You may not be responsible for doing the tasks, but you are responsible for the new employee's experience and for intervening if something goes wrong.
2. Be present. Pay attention to:
  - a. The new employee's needs and experience during this stage.
  - b. Your P.A.'s needs and experience. Most of the internal and external communications and tasks to prepare VCU's systems (technology & communications, parking, identity, etc) to integrate a new person are the responsibility of the P.A. The tasks are numerous and processes are complex. While all goes as planned much of the time, your P.A. may need support if they are new, when processes or systems are changed or new, and when things go awry.

#### Initial Employment Stage

##### First Day

The rubber meets the road. This is where an employee's initial impressions form or deepen, and a new person's orientation towards the university is either positively or negatively directed. The responsibility resides with the supervisor to guide, with purpose, an employee's first day experience. This is the first day of a new working

relationship between the two of you and how well you connect and relate matters a great deal.

It is helpful to understand the typical needs, emotions and thinking (anxiety, exhilaration, anticipation, expectations) an individual has when they begin a new job. Your foresight, planning and responses can ameliorate anxiety and lay the foundation for a strong relationship and start. This is your first chance to take care of an individual's basic work needs (equipment and materials, workspace, etc), help them orient to a new "space" including the building, the campus and the university at large, and begin the process of group assimilation.

**The supervisor's responsibilities** include:

1. Ensuring basic work needs are met
2. Establishing yourself as the primary point of contact
3. Establishing a back up contact, such as your department's P.A.
4. Welcoming the individual to the work group
5. Orienting the individual to the physical space
6. Ensuring a positive first impression and experience
7. Understanding the paperwork and benefits enrollment processes and requirements AND the processes for integrating new employees into security, telecommunications and IT systems. Again, although you are likely NOT the one doing the tasks, you are responsible for ensuring your new employee has their needs met and for partnering with your P.A. and Human Resources when there are problems or anomalies that might interfere with an individual legally begin working or enrolling in benefits programs.

## **First Week**

After the first few days on the job, most of the activities around employment eligibility and system integration (set up of and access to technology hardware, software and information systems; parking and acquiring an ID badge) are done; and the new employee is ready to settle into their workspace and work life. Employees may still need benefits' education and assistance with enrollment, and most of those issues will be resolved at New Employee Orientation.

The first week is a good time to set expectations and provide guidance and boundaries around work habits. It's the best time to continue developing a positive working relationship between the two of you, and for the new employee to assimilate with the work group.

**The supervisor's responsibilities** include:

1. Setting basic work expectations
2. Revealing your style and preferences. Examples include supervision/management/leadership style and communication preferences
3. Reviewing the probationary period (what it is, expectations, and how employee performance will be evaluated)
4. Understanding the employee's expectations from supervision and inquiring about their styles and preferences
5. Establish meeting frequencies
6. Reviewing the job description (EWP) and considering appropriate 6 and 12 month goals. Goals may not be set for another few weeks and prep work for the goals can certainly begin now. The format in which goals are written, the linkage to job responsibilities, and possibilities for goals and skill development are examples of what can be considered prior to agreeing upon goals.
7. Creating an agenda/list that includes people to meet, meetings to attend, policies and procedures to read (above and beyond what's required of all new employees), resource materials to review, current and historical information about the university, the department, the work group and their work, etc.
8. Developing a positive and mutual relationship

### **New Employee Orientation (NEO) Stage**

NEO is facilitated by the Human Resource department. More information about NEO can be found on the New Employees tab of the VCU HR website.

New employees are asked to complete a pre-NEO and post-NEO survey so that we can evaluate their onboarding experience. Supervisor are asked to complete a post-NEO survey as well.

NEO is designed to welcome and integrate new employees to the broader VCU culture and to enhance the work you are doing to facilitate employee engagement and success.

At this stage, **supervisory responsibilities** include:

1. Knowing what happens at NEO! Attend a current session if it's been awhile since you participated.
2. Ensuring new employees attend NEO.
3. Ensuring both of you provide feedback to Human Resources about NEO via surveys or in conversation.

4. Discussing with the new employee what they learned in NEO and reinforcing the learning.
5. Soliciting any outstanding questions they have about benefits, policies and procedures, leave and holidays, pay, work practices and expectations etc.
6. Connecting learning about university culture with the department/work group culture.

## **First 90 Days**

By this time, new employees are settling into their work life, habits are established and what was once novel is now or becoming routine. It is critical that the best practices, the right habits, are what you model, expect and routinely reinforce.

For this period, and into the first year, attention should still be paid to the employee drivers of self-efficacy, role clarity, social integration and knowledge of the university culture. You may want to make observations about and check in with the employee on the following questions:

1. Is the individual gaining confidence in their job (self-efficacy)?
2. Does the person have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities?
  - a. If there is role ambiguity or conflict, what is it and what can be done right away to clarify or resolve?
3. Is the new employee being integrated into/with
  - a. The immediate work group
  - b. Their peers
  - c. University insiders that they need to know in order to do their job
4. Have you together established a healthy and supportive working relationship?
5. What has the individual learned about the organizational/department culture?
  - a. What do they still need to know in order to be integrated and productive?

When considering all of these questions, you must ultimately consider what else you are responsible for doing or discussing in order to better meet the employee's needs.

## **Supervisor practices to shore up include:**

1. Regular, reinforcing supervision meetings
2. Providing performance feedback
3. Identifying and addressing learning and development needs
4. Reviewing expectations for the probationary period
5. Soliciting feedback on your supervision and management style and practices
6. Ensuring employees have the resources they need to do their jobs

7. Routinely asking about what barrier to job productivity the new employee encounters
8. Ensuring employees have continued exposure to organizational culture, opportunities to contribute and to develop their strengths

### **First Six Months**

A six month evaluation is conducted at the end of this phase.

### **First 12 Months**

The first annual performance evaluation is conducted at the end of this phase.