

How to create a positive onboarding experience: 10 strategies for SMEs

Whether you are working for an SME or a larger national or multinational corporation - good onboarding is crucial for employee retention. And the shocking statistic is that 35% of companies spend £0 on onboarding new hires!

Temps de lecture : minute

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The first 90 days of employment constitutes the 'make or break' period. And the stats certainly back this up with 1 in 3 employees leaving during that time. The old adage - 'First Impressions, Last' - has never been truer in the case of employee onboarding.

Firstly, let's clarify the concept of onboarding. Unlike induction, which often revolves around short-term, checklist-driven tasks, onboarding is a comprehensive process. It ensures not only the completion of administrative items, but also focuses on cultural assimilation, social integration and role-based enablement. Through onboarding, new employees become immersed in the company culture, receive role-specific tools and training, establish social connections and familiarise themselves with the systems and processes essential for success.

Here are Cognexo's ten, tried and tested strategies to enhance productivity levels during the crucial onboarding phase:

- Have a pre-boarding strategy

Don't wait for day one to embed new hires into the company culture. 51% will continue looking for roles even after accepting the job! With a one to three-month gap before starting – this time can be used for pre-boarding activities to maintain interest in the job. This includes welcome packs, intros to mentors and other key staff, filling in paperwork and even a short microlearning course about the company, easing fears and building excitement for day one.

- Develop personalised L&D programmes

You cannot deploy a one size fits all approach to the development of new hires – you must meet their specific needs and skill sets. Providing targeted L&D, resources and guidance equips employees with the knowledge and tools necessary to hit the ground running, minimising ramp-up time and maximising productivity.

- Set clear role expectations

Setting clear expectations is the basis for any successful new starter. Make sure your new hires understand the tasks and systems, upcoming projects, team objectives and individual goals. Work out a schedule for them to attend team meetings, allowing them to get a clear picture of their duties in the wider context of the team. Also celebrate when employees hit key goals or milestones. Even small wins can boost employee morale over the long-term. Create a channel through any of your techstack to highlight these.

- Create a buddy /mentor system

Pair new hires with experienced mentors or buddies to facilitate a smooth transition into the organisation. Leveraging the expertise of seasoned employees provides invaluable support, guidance and insider knowledge, accelerating the onboarding process and boosting confidence. The buddy / mentor will be on hand to answer any questions during the early days, although this relationship can continue throughout the whole onboarding process and indeed throughout a career.

- Implement a technology-first approach

Embrace technology to streamline onboarding processes and eliminate administrative bottlenecks. Implementing digital platforms for paperwork, L&D and communication enhances efficiency, allowing new employees to focus their energy on productive tasks from day one.

- Encourage cross-departmental collaboration

Foster cross-departmental collaboration and integration during onboarding. Encouraging interaction with colleagues from different teams promotes a holistic understanding of organisational dynamics and facilitates seamless collaboration on future projects.

- Create a performance feedback loop

Establish a feedback loop to provide ongoing performance feedback and support. Regular check-ins with managers and mentors offer opportunities

for clarification, guidance and course correction, ensuring new employees feel supported and empowered to excel.

- **Introduce cultural integration**

Immerse new hires in the company culture and values early on. Organising team-building activities and social events cultivates a sense of belonging and camaraderie, laying the foundation for strong team cohesion and collaboration.

- **Celebrate milestones**

Recognise and celebrate milestones throughout the onboarding journey. Whether it's completing learning modules, mastering new skills, or achieving other key milestones, acknowledging accomplishments reinforces progress and motivates continued excellence.

- **Evaluate the effectiveness of your onboarding programme!**

55% of businesses do not do this and it's crucial for continuous improvement. Collecting relevant quantitative data such as staff attrition rates, e-NPS and progress towards KPIs is key, as is collecting more qualitative data through focus groups and one-to-one sessions. Use pulse surveys and polls to check how well integrated employees feel.

By prioritising these strategies, SMEs can elevate productivity levels and enhance the onboarding experience for new employees, setting the stage for long-term success.

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