easy generator

Remote employee onboarding: The ultimate guide

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Overview

First impressions matter – both to companies and employees. Onboarding experiences can make or break a new hire's impression about a company and even influence their decision to stay or leave. With an effective onboarding program, organizations can immerse their new hires in the company values, culture, work processes, and provide a go-to person that will support them in their first few months. On the other hand, a poor onboarding experience means higher turnover and a waste of time, effort, and energy in future recruitment.

Onboarding is a set of activities meant to quickly integrate new hires into their new company and role. With an onboarding program, new employees can learn about an organization's values and culture as well as meet their new coworkers. Research has found that in the absence of an onboarding process, one-third of new employees begin searching for a new job within 6 months of starting a new job and 25% of them leave before the end of their first year.

Therefore, organizations looking to hire and retain the best talent need to consider providing an effective onboarding program – be it in person or remotely.

When done virtually – i.e. when new hires are working from home instead of a shared office – this is called remote onboarding. While some companies have always had a remote workforce, the pandemic accelerated this digital transformation. Today, many organizations have gone fully remote, making virtual and remote onboarding the quintessential starting point for them to connect with new employees.

In this e-book, we'll explain how corporate managers and L&D professionals can plan their remote onboarding programs to guide new hires and re-introduce existing employees returning to work.

We'll begin by explaining the key concepts in onboarding, essential elements in an onboarding program, the specific challenges and advantages of remote onboarding along with best practices. Later, we'll walk you through some of the proven tips and models of remote onboarding to help you develop your remote onboarding program.

Why onboarding is key for remote teams

Remote or hybrid or offline – no matter what the format is, the purpose of onboarding remains the same. Let's explore the fundamental definitions, differences, and essential features of an effective onboarding program.

Onboarding vs Training vs Orientation

Onboarding

An onboarding program includes all the activities that help integrate a new hire into their role and the company. Some examples include giving an office tour or holding an introductory meeting to get them acquainted with their new teammates.

An effective onboarding program enables new hires to learn about their job responsibilities, the team dynamics, and more. Additionally, new hires learn how to adhere to company codes of conducts, navigate office politics, and learn the "language" of the organization in a systematic way.

Training

While onboarding focuses on helping new employees adjust to their environment, employee training focuses on the technicalities of their role. This can include training them on the company software, integrating them into internal systems, or teaching them important procedures. The goal is to equip them with the technical skills they need to complete their tasks with confidence.

In short, onboarding and training are not the same. But together, they create a meaningful process to help a new employee smoothly transition into their new role and workplace.

Orientation

Another term that is commonly mistaken for onboarding is orientation. While onboarding spans over an extended period, orientation is a one-time event. Onboarding can include orientation but isn't limited to it. Further, onboarding includes a set of activities and events tailored for a specific role, while orientation is often quite generic and covers the company's vision, mission, and history.

What is remote onboarding?

Remote onboarding follows a similar process as in-person onboarding, but, in this case, new hires work remotely rather than from a company office. Therefore, remote onboarding entails a virtual integration of new hires into an organization by using video, audio, conferencing, and/or cloud technology to replace face-to-face interactions.

For example, a company like Dell runs a dedicated portal to host its onboarding programs and administers all paperwork through digital documentation, videos, and continuous connectivity through platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

Regardless of the format, onboarding offers an opportunity for employees to get acquainted with their new environment and allows employers to share the essential information that will enable new hires to learn more about their role in the company.

4 Cs of Onboarding

Remote or not, any onboarding program primarily focuses on four distinct levels:

- **Compliance** – Educating new hires about the basic legal and policy-related rules and regulations.
- **Clarification** – Ensuring new hires fully comprehend the job requirements and expectations.
- **Culture** – Providing new hires with a detailed sense of corporate values, norms, and more.
- **Connection** – Facilitating connections between the new hire and an organization through informal and formal, interpersonal, knowledge, and information networks.

Compliance	Clarification	Culture	Connection
Covers key policies	Covers job-specific details	Helps in understanding company norms	Establish relationships and networks
Examples: • Anti-harrasment • Personal conduct standards • Progressive disciplinary actions • Security	**Examples:** • Team & project details • Project training plan • Performance expectation and plan • Administration policies: Payroll, Timesheets, Shipping, Businnes cards, Expense reports, Supplies	**Example activities:** • Attend weekly lunch with executives • Review course on company values • Meet your business unit head to hear about goals and culture alignment	**Example activities:** • Assign a peer mentor • Work with cross-functional teams • 1:1s with people they'll work closely with • Functional training

The 4 phases of the onboarding process

As mentioned earlier, onboarding is not a one-time event. The process can last anywhere from 1 week to 1 year with monthly, quarterly and half-yearly reviews.

Throughout this time period, onboarding programs should follow four phases to engage with new hires, reduce attrition, and help them integrate organizational best practices:

1. Pre-onboarding

This phase starts from the time the new hires accept the offer and runs until their official starting date at the new job. A well designed pre-onboarding phase creates a sense of certainty and order, thus engaging and exciting the new hire.

Here's what you can do in this phase:

- Assist new hires in completing the necessary legal and corporate paperwork to start the new job.
- Provide a detailed checklist of the documents that they need to have ready by the starting date.
- Send an overview with a clear agenda of what to expect on the first day of their remote job.
- Share a brief corporate video and send an introductory email to their "buddy" who they can approach in case of any doubts. This will send a clear signal that the organization cares for its new hires.

2. Welcoming new hires

In this phase, companies welcome the new hires into the organization and carry out an orientation program to integrate them so they can be productive as soon as possible. This phase should take place on the day the new hires join the company.

Here's what you can do in this phase:

- Facilitate a simple and easy schedule for the first day
- Give an overview of the company culture and norms and brief new hires on mandatory requirements such as induction training
- Discuss essential policies like leaves, holidays, medical insurance, pay day, invoices etc.
- Check-in on the new hires' progress at the end of the day

3. Role-specific training

This is the main execution phase of the onboarding program as it introduces new hires to their job expectations and prepares them for their roles. Proper handling of this session can see employees thrive and contribute effectively to the organization's bottom line.

Here's what you can do in this phase:

- Tailor the training according to the new hire's skills and prior level of experience

Offer a blend of formal and informal training formats which can be scheduled as per their convenience
Get them familiar with the Learning Management System (LMS) without overwhelming them with too many details of training requirements
Provide the big picture that ties into the business goals and create a career path

4. **Easing the transition to the new role**

This final phase of the onboarding program should focus on ensuring a smooth transition of the new hire into a fully productive employee.

Here's what you can do in this phase:

- Clarify the job and performance expectations from the managers to ensure new hires know what it takes to be successful and productive
- Provide timely periodical feedback in a performance review which can help improve new hires' performance
- Recognize and reward their efforts in order to keep their morale up and motivate them to continue at work

Why onboarding is key for remote teams

The key difference between office-based and remote workplaces is that remote teams tend to have less opportunities for human interaction amongst new hires, HR facilitators, managers, and peers. This can affect a new hire's understanding of the corporate environment because it can be hard for them to understand job expectations, team structures, cultural norms and more, thus possibly making them feel left out.

Fortunately, with a solid remote onboarding program in place, you can overcome many of these challenges by using effective tools and strategies which:

- Connect new hires with their teams and managers instantly allowing for seamless communication
- Allow the new hires to feel they are part of an organization
- Enable employees and new hires to share the same information and facilitate communication
- Train them in compliance and technical topics necessary to execute their roles effectively

Benefits of onboarding for remote companies

The earlier new hires are prepared for the start of their new job, the earlier they will be able to contribute meaningfully to the organization. Onboarding is an opportunity to communicate the company's expectations and share what it has to offer. In return, its success can lead to higher levels of employee engagement and lower turnover rates — among many other benefits.

Here are the main benefits remote companies can expect when they implement an employee onboarding program:

- **Creates a sense of belonging while maintaining organizational culture**
  Inclusion and a sense of belonging are quintessential needs in a remote working environment.

  A well-designed remote onboarding program can ensure that a new employee understands the company's culture, goals, and how their role fits in, fostering a sense of purpose early on. The sooner a new employee understands how they can blend into the culture and contribute to the organization's success, the sooner they'll feel comfortable, equipped, and motivated to participate.

- **Set job expectations with more trust and productivity**
  The lack of a physical office shouldn't keep a remote worker from contributing to their full potential.

  A virtual onboarding program can equip these remote new hires with the tools and information they need to succeed from day one. This will not only shorten their learning curves but also set the job expectations and empower them to take ownership of their roles early on. This reduces any need to micromanage along the way and creates room for trust between employees, increasing the chances of productivity.

- **Empowers communication across the corporate ladder**
  Continuous communication is an unspoken mandate in a remote company.

  There are many benefits to encouraging communication among the new hires, junior employees, and their higher-ups during the onboarding process. For one, it allows new hires to understand the "who's who" in the organization. But it also helps them envision their possible career paths and feel like a part of the team. At the same time, remote onboarding programs are an opportunity to present more senior employees as approachable people, paving the way for a culture of mentorship and learning.

**Ensures all new employees understand compliance and policies**

By no means, a remote working employee is an exception to complying with the mandatory policies and training.

There can be a lot of new information to keep up with when it comes to learning about company policies and procedures for the first time. An effective remote employee onboarding program not only shares this information with new hires but also explains how company policies affect their specific department and their role. This benefits both new hires and the organization, as both can be on the same page with expectations from day one. Creating digestible and engaging e-learning content can help convey this information effectively.

Ultimately, the importance of onboarding in the workplace goes far beyond the individual employee's reaction. When done right, it can bring many benefits for the organization in return.

Challenges of onboarding remote employees

Although an onboarding program lays a powerful foundation for new employees, it doesn't come without its challenges. Here's a rundown of commonly occurring challenges along with tips to overcome them.
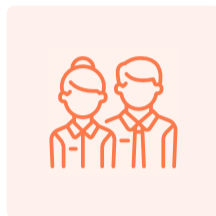
Getting new hires set up with tech

Once remote hires accept an offer, the organization needs to ensure the right equipment is supplied to them in good time. You can help them set up the infrastructure by providing:

- Detailed, step-by-step guidance for installation of equipment, virtual instructions for logging in and walk-through notes for company-wide systems like emails, intranet, and databases.
- A pre-boarding tech support checklist to coordinate and track the prep work that needs to be completed. This way if the new hire has not completed an item, it gets immediately flagged and sorted out, thus ensuring they are up to speed prior to onboarding.

Building company culture and connection

Remote workers have every chance to feel lonely and isolated due to the inherent limited social interactions in their day-to-day job. Treating the new hire as part of the corporate family goes a long way in breaking the ice.

However, a bit of extra planning and empathy is needed. Consider the following ideas:

- Even a simple card welcoming the new hire is enough to start off. Since informal get-togethers near the coffee machine are off the table, an informal virtual meet-and-greet session can be of value.
- The core group which will work together can informally meet virtually at frequent, pre-decided intervals.
- One-on-ones with a "buddy" or mentor once a week during the first 1-2 months can help resolve any doubts and issues that may arise for your new hires. This could also be the time to provide honest feedback on their progress and adjustment to the company. And this feedback can go both ways with the new hires being given the space to discuss their experience with the company so far.

Virtual communication (and miscommunication)

Remote new hires can get overwhelmed with the complexity of digital communication. This can be easily addressed with clear cut, and well laid out detailed communication guidelines.

Here are some ideas you can implement:
- A host of issues can be resolved by specifying when to use asynchronous or synchronous means of communication. Clear expectations on the different types and means of communication can avoid unnecessary anxiety and stress.
- A communication plan detailing projects, deadlines, milestones, and frequency of status updates is a good way to keep everyone informed.
- A project management software (such as Trello or Asana, among others) can be particularly helpful when multiple communication means and apps are being used.
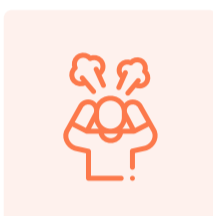
Information overload

Getting swamped with information is easy and remote new hires are no exception.

You can reduce this virtual chaos by structuring and providing guidelines for learning and assimilation of new information. Here are some ideas on how to do just that:

- Review the key information provided to the new hire during their training via scheduled calls regularly.
- Consolidate all information from different departments in one place (such as an LMS) so new hires can more easily find the necessary documentation to complete their onboarding.
- Utilize a single project management tool to share relevant tasks and documentation so that all contributors are on the same resource platform.
- Create an onboarding checklist, breaking up tasks into smaller parts, and be methodical about following up on completed tasks. Storing this progress report in a centralized repository further enables the team to update it themselves and ensure the new hire has all the information for successful completion of a particular task.

Remote onboarding best practices

Now that we understand the basic "what" and "why" of remote onboarding, let's dive a little more into the "How" part of it with the below best practices:

1. **Create an onboarding plan**

The detailed onboarding plan should contain a welcome kit and an activities schedule for the first two weeks. The welcome package could contain:

- Company Handbook
- Detailed agenda for the Onboarding program including training materials
- HR and legal documents to be signed off by the new hire prior to starting the job
- A number of videos developed by the company and related to the new hire's specific job
- Greeting from the manager and the nominated "buddy" or mentor. This introductory note from a "buddy" whom new hires can approach in case of any difficulty helps ease worries and apprehensions.

The central idea should be not to overwhelm a new hire with too much information and demands. A preview of the corporate agenda with job expectations will set the tone for remote onboarding.

2. **Set clear expectation**

An honest and realistic overview of job expectations and company culture can facilitate the onboarding process. By providing accurate information about the company culture and job expectations new hires are able to adjust better and companies can weed out potential misfits.

3. **Introduce the team**

It is a good idea to have a short virtual meet-and-greet to introduce the new hires to their cohorts, teams, and managers. This gives the new employee a chance to put a face to the name. A few ice-breaker activities during these introductions keep everyone in good spirits. Meet-and-greet videos sent across by office colleagues can assist new hires in getting to know them as well.

After these general introductions, the next step should be a scheduled one-on-one call with the each teammate, followed by a virtual meeting with the manager. The virtual calls should remain informal, light-hearted, and reasonably short.

4. Schedule effective virtual training

Virtual training sessions at a set schedule can assist new hires in learning about their job requirements and meeting their team to get up to speed more quickly. Sharing internal videos and links for remote training will help new hires learn at their own speed and time.

5. Provide easy signposting

All new hires will come with doubts and small issues they need assistance with – this is only natural when starting a job in a new place. It's key to point them to the right resources to ensure these doubts can be answered quickly and easily.

Providing an online 'library' of key learning nuggets and resources will empower your new hires to quickly find the information they need to do their jobs more effectively. When providing digital content, ensure not to overwhelm the new employee with everything under the sun, but rather offer targeted content with the key information needed. You can use a variety of formats to create short, focused, and crisp content with videos, quick guides, and infographics – these bite-sized formats have the maximum impact.

How to use e-learning for remote onboarding

E-learning has been a proven approach to facilitate digital learning across organizations. Let us understand how onboarding can be facilitated with e-learning.

Onboarding vs Training vs Orientation

With e-learning, new hires can work at their own pace, acquire the necessary knowledge, and become comfortable with the new company and its culture.

Using e-learning tools, such as online pre-assessments, employee onboarding training modules, and video tutorials, you can start educating potential employees before they even officially join the company. This saves precious time once an employee is hired, giving you a firm grasp of where they stand in terms of their skills and knowledge on day one. Additionally, by using e-learning tools to develop your onboarding program, you can better track the results of your initiative because these tools are supported by analytics that record progress.

4 Tips to create an effective onboarding e-learning program

1. **Break the content down into small bits (microlearning)**

   Bombarding a remote new hire with a thick Corporate Policies Manual is so passe and unlikely to produce any positive results. However, you can easily pique your new hires' interest by making this content more interactive and accessible by adopting a microlearning approach where the information is broken down into bite-sized chunks.

   Splitting information into these smaller chunks makes learning more enjoyable and even makes it easier to learn. You can take this one step further by making these more concise training materials available on a mobile devices, allowing your new hires to more easily access them in the flow of work.

2. **Create a self-paced program by using a blended approach**

   Blended learning makes use of multiple learning formats such as videos, podcasts, infographics, write-ups, graphs, etc. This makes it flexible for employees to pick and choose

any format they please access information. One of the major advantages of blended learning is that users can access learning content from anywhere unlike its face-to-face counterpart. Thus, it is easier to finish assignments, interact with colleagues and cohorts, and receive feedback from everyone.

3. **Personalize the content, evaluate training success, and review the program with course analytics**

Traditional synchronous onboarding program compel new hires to sit through prolonged classroom workshops and learning modules while offering little schedule flexibility. With blended e-learning programs, you can tailor the content to your employee's preference and pace. As a result, new hires learn what they need to learn, whenever they need to learn and wherever they need to learn it – thus offering a more personalized and flexible onboarding experience.

Managers can then assess how their new hires are doing by tracking their progress in real-time. This helps managers know what works and identify what needs to be improved. Data analytics also allow L&D professionals to identify where an employee needs additional support or content needs to be modified. It also assists in determining the gaps in learning by assessing the performance of each new hire.

4. **Choose the right onboarding model**

There are two common execution models for your employee onboarding program. Below we've provided you templates to help you roll out onboarding.

● **30:60:90 Day Model**

The 30:60:90 Day Model sets a clear roadmap for new hires to inform them about expectations, stakeholders, dates, and where they need to go in their first 90 days. Here's a sample breakdown of this model:

	Goals/ Responsibilities	Key contact
30 days Learn The first 30 days is all about basic knowledge to get around the place, know the people and understand the company culture	Classroom plus digital learning sessions that focus on the following aspects: ● Learn company-specific policies, tools, platforms, intranet, processes ● Complete compliance training programs ● Learn products and clients ● Attend weekly one on ones with manager ● Know whos in the firm, business unit, and your team	HR Manager

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**60
days**

Build

The second month of a new hire's employment should be spent collaborating with teams and other cross-functional departments

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On-the-job learning, coaching and a degree of online training are leveraged for the following aspects:

- Collaborate with other teams
- Identify issues and address the issues
- Field trip (e.g. factory or Head Office)
- Attend daily sync up and weekly meetings with the team and manager
- Get feedback from their manager on progress

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Business Head

HR Manager

Team Lead/ Manager

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**90
days**

Do

The new hire is expected to take on bigger responsibilities and be accountable for work

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Mostly on –the-job and 1:! coaching methods with an e-learning component is leveraged for the following aspects:

- Start working independently on projects
- Understand how their goals are aligned with team and organizational goals
- Become more accountable for their work
- Be proactive and become more involved in the company
- Touch base with their manager for feedback about goals/ metrics/ KPIs going forward

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Team Manager

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52 Weeks Model

Few organizations believe that a new hire can be onboarded overnight or even with a month's intensive classroom training. Rather, they believe in spacing out the whole onboarding journey across 12 months (52 weeks) and allowing the employees to learn in a slow and settled fashion.

The first week is usually allocated for the must-haves and must-know information bits in a classroom setting. This is followed by a blend of digital learning activities with minimal disruption at work. Allowing them to onboard themselves at their own pace.

1st week
Policy and processes onboarding

2nd week
Get to know your colleagues

3rd week
Understanding tool and processes in your team

4th week
Breakfast with executives

5th week
Webinars on company history and milestones

6th week
1:1 with your manager to define metrics

7th week
Meet cross-functional team lead

10th week
Policy refresher session

20th week
Tour of labs

30th week
Video of employee stories

40th week
Understanding tools and process in your team

52nd week
Townhall with CTO

Remote onboarding trends to watch

Remote onboarding is here to stay, as more and more companies implement hybrid or even fully remote work policies. In both cases, as employees opt to return to the office the very first step is to plan the re-onboarding of existing employees who have been out of office for more than 2 years. Here, it's essential for L&D to re-familiarize them with the company culture, team, and dynamics.

In addition to re-onboarding employees, companies have also become more and more aware of the increased need for diversity and inclusion training. We are thus seeing more and more inclusion-focused onboarding programs to guide new and existing employees on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies and processes to create a harmonious workplace for everyone.

On the tech side of things, companies are also beginning to experiment with AI and VR elements to create a virtual and immersive onboarding experience. For example, Qualcomm, a telecommunications company uses Bluetooth beacons to take new hires on a virtual guided tour of their company museum. Similarly, some organizations have added AI chatbots to the mix, using them as the new virtual buddies for the new hires. AI Chatbots can be used to answer FAQs or send automated reminders of training schedules.

Trends are always evolving with time and L&D must be flexible enough to adapt the onboarding programs to the changing times.

What's Next?

Building a successful remote onboarding program with Easygenerator

With Easygenerator, you can effortlessly create an onboarding program and can share it on your local intranet, LMS, or LXP. Choose from our library of pre-designed onboarding templates or start from scratch with our user-friendly authoring features. Here's how Easygenerator can help your organization implement the 4 Cs of onboarding:

Onboarding component	Features in Easygenerator
Compliance: This component includes information about policies and rules that govern the employee well-being in an organization. Examples in this category can include FCPA, Preventing Sexual Harassment, Data Security, Safety at Work.	• Example course templates • Tracking & tracing • Automatic certifications • Pre-assessment template
Clarification: This refers to educating employees about their job and team-specific details. Examples in this category can include product training, process taining, intranet basics. These courses are created by the technical team and supervised by L&D team. These are not mandatory, but are the most important knowledge pieces to onboard the employee on the job.	• Zero learning curve authoring tool that subject matter experts with no e-learning experience can use • Mobile responsive courses • Authoring features to support micro-learning and bite-sized content • Collaborative content creation • Feedback loop
Culture: This is a broad category that includes providing employees with a sense of organizational norms - both formal and informal. Examples in this category include company values, diversity and inclusivity	• Interactive elements • Supports multimedia • Example course templates
Connection: This category refers to the interpersonal relationships and information networks required by a new hire. Examples in this category can include: building trust in new teams, establishing cross-functional relationships, social communities.	• Zero learning curve authoring tool that subject matter experts with no e-learning experience can use • Peer review and co-authoring • NPS survey

Compliance

Covers key policies

Examples:

- Anti-harrasment
- Personal conduct standards
- Progressive disciplinary actions
- Security

Clarification

Covers job-specific details

Examples:

- Team & project details
- Project training plan
- Performance expectation and plan
- Administration policies: Payroll, Timesheets, Shipping, Businnes cards, Expense reports, Supplies

Culture

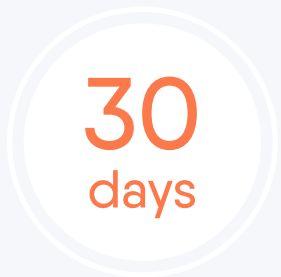Helps in understanding company norms

Example activities:

- Attend weekly lunch with executives
- Review course on company values
- Meet your business unit head to hear about goals and culture alignment

Connection

Establish relationships and networks

Example activities:

- Assign a peer mentor
- Work with cross-functional teams
- 1:1s with people they'll work closely with
- Functional training

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