



Mentoring for Onboarding: Increase New Hire Retention and Maximize Hiring Investment

Both HR and non-HR leaders “know” an easy formula for “people success”: Invest the money to attract the best people and then make them stay for as long as possible and generate a return on investment. Complicating this, however, is the fact that retaining employees, especially new hires, is not quite so simple.

Human capital losses

Far from becoming reliable and profitable human capital, many individuals actually lose money for their employers as soon as they come on board. According to The Wynhurst Group, 22% of staff turnover occurs in the first 45 days of employment, and the cost of losing an employee in the first year is estimated to be at least three times salary. Considering that 46% of new hires leave within their first 18 months of employment, leaders must take action to address the causes of voluntary employee turnover.

New hire expectations

All new hires want to know what the organization’s culture is really like. But this question often goes unanswered, and organizations who fail to answer it pay the price. According to Carl Maertz and Michael Campion’s International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, organizational culture, job realities relative to expectations, and individual characteristics that clash with perceptions of the organization are major causes of employees leaving an organization. Such factors are exacerbated by the gap in understanding between the individual and the organization, of particular concern with new hires who have expectations for their new role yet lack knowledge of how things “really work”.

Mentoring for role understanding

Structured mentoring programs that support individuals in the onboarding process help organizations give new employees a better understanding of the workplace and culture faster. New hires need to know how their own positions and careers fit into the overall organizational structure, and how their envisioned role links with their own career goals and preferences. Mentors offer mentees the opportunity to gain an understanding of the organization and help reduce the likelihood of turnover early in the employment lifecycle.

Handling employment baggage

Perhaps the biggest hurdle facing new hires is adjusting to and fitting into a new organizational culture. According to Nancy Rothbard of University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, experienced new hires often carry “employment baggage”—a set of attitudes, norms, and experiences that apply to their previous workplace. This baggage can actually make their work experience have a negative effect on performance at a new workplace. A mentor with considerable experience at the organization enables new hires to quickly learn the culture so they can quickly become productive in their new jobs.

Aligning expectations with reality

A mentor during the onboarding process also helps new hires align their expectations with the realities of the job. New hires benefit from partnerships with mentors who have themselves experienced being new to the organization — have been “in their shoes” at their current role — or who inhabit the roles that they will take on in the future.

Well-selected and well-matched mentors can paint an honest picture of the new hires’ roles, answer their questions and concerns about those roles, and offer advice on how they can make the most of those roles.

Whether an organization successfully addresses employees’ career and personal preferences from the beginning can make or break their desire to stay. Through an onboarding mentoring program with well-matched mentoring partnerships geared specifically toward career development, organizations instantly brand themselves as employers who truly care about their employees. Mentoring partnerships should be strategic relationships that take both organizational and individual goals into account. This may mean pairing a new hire with a mentor who has the ideal skills or experience for the mentee’s development, but who may work in an entirely different team, office, or department.

Ultimately, organizations that provide a structured, formal onboarding process with mentoring support avoid losing their greatest assets. By incorporating a structured mentoring program within the onboarding process, organizations can address the early causes of turnover by signalling to new hires that they are committed to mutual understanding.

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