A ROAD MAP FOR ONBOARDING MANAGERS

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Onboarding programs are a key factor in employee retention, according to 98 percent of the respondents in a recent Korn Ferry FutureStep survey. This raises the question: If employee retention is such a critical business outcome, wouldn’t organizations want to make sure that the people responsible for employee retention—that is, their managers—have all the tools they need to be successful?

Yet, as obvious as this sounds, few organizations have programs to make sure managers start their careers fully prepared to achieve company goals. What companies do have, both for employees and managers, is orientation programs so that new hires understand the ins and outs of human resources and the like. Many organizations also have manager development programs, which often provide soft skills training to current employees—before employees become managers. New managers may receive some on-the-job instruction after they’ve been promoted or transferred, instruction that will be helpful when it comes to activities such as filling out expense reports.

But few organizations have a defined manager onboarding program for newly hired and promoted managers—a program that gives new managers the tools they need for success starting day one. This seems counterintuitive for a couple of reasons. First, managers are employees. And they are the employees who manage the rest of the workforce. Making sure managers receive proper onboarding helps them start their new role confident and engaged. It enables them to be better prepared in their role as an employee coach and mentor. Both mean a win for the organization's bottom line.

This issue of TD at Work will focus specifically on the concept of manager onboarding programs. It will cover:

- why managers need their own onboarding program
- a step-by-step process for developing a manager onboarding program
- guidance for developing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals for the onboarding program
- tips for gaining buy-in from leaders for a manager onboarding program.

Just as with other employee onboarding programs, manager-specific onboarding programs provide the foundation for a new manager’s career success.

**NEW-HIRE INTEGRATION**

The purpose of having a specific process for bringing an individual into a new role is to give him the tools to make him productive quickly, welcome him, and make sure he is part of the workforce. Making sure managers receive proper onboarding helps them start their new role confident and engaged. It enables them to be better prepared in their role as an employee coach and mentor. Both mean a win for the organization's bottom line.
organizational culture and goals. This doesn’t change for managers. In fact, for the reasons I’ve already outlined and will delve deeper into throughout this issue, it’s even more important for managers.

Components of New Manager Integration

While many people think of the work related to a new hire when that person is walking in the door or shortly before when ordering supplies or setting up a work station, the truth is that new-hire integration begins much earlier in the process—when an organization begins to consider hiring.

To look at the big picture, think of the new-hire integration process as an umbrella with four separate phases, as depicted in the figure on page 1. Let’s look at each phase.

Recruiting. New hire integration starts before candidates apply for the job. Expectations of a potential new hire are expressed in the way the company creates its careers website—the way the page describes the company, culture, and role. It’s part of the organization’s employment brand. Hiring managers and recruiters have interview discussions about the role and responsibilities for each position and what they are looking for in the candidate. They also may discuss what qualities the best candidate would have in terms of culture fit. Whether the candidate is external or internal, recruitment starts the new-hire integration process.

Preboarding. This may vary slightly if the candidate is internal versus external, but preboarding is the time after the candidate has accepted the job offer and before her first day. Many organizations are using this time to complete paperwork and send welcome messages (via video, email, and snail mail) to the new manager so she starts to feel a part of the team.

Orientation. Typically conducted by the company’s human resources department, orientation focuses on the big picture. For external hires, this may include learning about the company’s history, mission, vision, and values. It also includes tours, product and service information, and so forth. It’s possible that internal hires may need this information as well, depending on the job they are coming from and moving into.

Onboarding. Sometimes the entire process—all four elements—is simply called onboarding. But in this issue of TD at Work, I am differentiating this—onboarding is the final (and longest) part of the new-hire integration process. Onboarding is about acclimating the new manager into her daily activities. In addition to learning job specifics, onboarding often involves the new manager gaining an understanding of the organizational culture and building relationships with key stakeholders, including his boss, peers, and staff. Both internal and external hires will have much to learn during this phase.

Road Map for New Managers

Although this issue of TD at Work will focus on the final phase of new hire integration, or onboarding, that’s not to say the other components aren’t important; they are. The conversations and promises a company makes during recruiting, preboarding, and orientation set expectations for the new manager. However, it’s during the onboarding that the new manager expects to see the company’s words turn into action.

One of the ways companies can begin the onboarding process on a positive note is by giving the new manager a road map that explains how onboarding will take place. The road map lets him focus on the immediate work, knowing that the company will make sure he learns what’s necessary when it’s necessary.

A job aid at the end of this issue provides a sample road map you can use with new managers. Of course, each step will be unique to your organization. But here are some aspects that all new managers need to do that should be part of their road map:

Read, watch, and sign. During this phase, the new manager may learn how to approve her direct reports’ timesheets or read up on organizational policies relating to absences, telework, or dress code—things that the manager will need to implement and maintain with her new team.

Meet. This part of the road map may entail introductions to other managers at the same level as the new hire. Or it may include lunch with an informal “buddy.” (See more later about a new manager buddy program.)
Learn. Communication skills—such as how to pause and let a direct report talk about what he wants to do in terms of development in the coming year or how to negotiate with a senior leader on the team’s priorities for the quarter—could be aspects of what the new manager learns during this phase of the road map. Because this may be the first time the new manager has had to juggle both projects of her own and overseeing team projects, this is another skill she needs to learn. Discuss. Through conversations with her manager, as part of this phase the new manager may learn expectations for day 30, day 60, and day 90. Working with her manager, she may begin to map out performance goals. In terms of development, the new manager and her supervisor may begin talking about providing feedback to her employees, especially if there are organization-specific guidelines or procedures for doing so.

ONBOARDING OFTEN INVOLVES THE NEW MANAGER GAINING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING HER BOSS, PEERS, AND STAFF.

How Onboarding and Development Differ

It may be tempting to look at the logic that good management makes for better employee engagement, which reduces turnover costs, and say the answer is to design and develop a management development program. While organizations should definitely have a management development program, this is not the same as a manager onboarding program.

Programs that develop managers—and leadership, for that matter—offer education and opportunities to employees before they become managers. Traditionally, these programs include soft skills training topics, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making. Individuals who participate in this type of program can use the skills they learn right away, regardless of their job title.

Manager onboarding programs, by contrast, are focused on the topics that individuals don’t need to know until they become managers. For example, if a person isn’t going to have responsibility for interviewing until he becomes a manager, it doesn’t make much sense to include interviewing skills in a management development program. An employee would attend the program and not use the skill for weeks, maybe even months. By that time, it’s possible he has forgotten what he learned.

Instead, an interviewing skills training course is a part of manager onboarding. A new manager learns interviewing after she’s been promoted, when she is getting ready to be a part of the hiring process.

In “Onboarding for Managers,” Roberta Westwood and Leanne Johnson share that onboarding programs can be a bridge to development programs (and vice versa). So, employees who attend the company’s management and leadership development programs use the skills they’ve learned on the job and, as a result, get promoted. Hence, the need for manager onboarding.

It’s also possible that new-hire managers attend the company’s manager onboarding program and, once they get settled in, start to attend the management and leadership development programs so that they have the same philosophies as the rest of the organization. In this case, the new manager learns to align with company culture.

GETTING STARTED

If you’re a talent development professional, the conversation about manager onboarding programs and gaining buy-in from the C-suite begins with making the connection among management, engagement, and turnover. The sidebar Employee Engagement and the Bottom Line on page 7 further describes the connection between the manager and the employee.

Here are two tips to help you get your manager onboarding program off the ground.

Look for a sponsor. Find a senior manager who will support this initiative. It could be someone who is a big fan of the department, or it could be someone who has been skeptical in the past. The point is to convince this person that a manager