

# STRATEGIC ONBOARDING: HELP NEW EMPLOYEES AND THE BUSINESS

June 2016

Spending an appropriate amount of time and effort on onboarding new hires can pay off dividends. Traditional, more tactical approaches with paperwork at the core are a decent start, but savvy companies have a more well-rounded strategy for onboarding that puts the employee experience front and center. This can do even greater wonders for the business and the employees that help shape it.

→ **Zach Lahey**, Research Analyst,  
Human Capital Management



## **Aberdeen Definition:**

Strategic onboarding is a formalized approach to bringing new hires into the company. Such a process requires support from all parties involved, from the new hires themselves, to HR, hiring managers, and coworkers. Comparatively, tactical onboarding consists of the more traditional activities associated with the process, such as new hire orientation or forms management.

Effective onboarding today needs to be more than filling out forms. This process can have a major impact, however, it would be misguided to think that you can magically grow a business or improve profits overnight. Instead, onboarding is a process to get new hires excited about their new roles, outline a clear path to productivity and performance, and get them acclimated to everyone and everything. Enter strategic onboarding (sidebar).

## Strategic Onboarding Emphasizes the Employee Experience

In an era when businesses constantly wrestle with candidate recruitment and employee retention, savvy companies prioritize excellent experiences wherever possible in hopes of aiding with both endeavors. All facets of talent acquisition and talent management require such attention, but a formalized onboarding strategy is the bridge from acquisition to management. However, the more traditional facets of onboarding must not be overlooked. Case in point, 78% of businesses use onboarding programs to provide new hires with

necessary forms, and 74% use onboarding to provide new hires with relevant company information via orientation. These activities qualify as tactical onboarding.

But strategic onboarding means more than administrative, tactical tasks. It is compelling, informative, and adventurous. When done well, it gets employees amped up and ready to be contributors. It demonstrates to new hires that their new employer cares about them. Top performing companies are often the ones to provide their new employees with such quality introductions. For instance, Best-in-Class companies (sidebar) are 50% more likely than All Others (71% vs. 48%) to use onboarding processes to introduce new hires to relevant people in the company, whether those individuals are on their team or across the company. Doing so enables new hires to mingle and communicate with their new colleagues that much easier. They're also 48% more likely than All Others (43% vs. 29%) to use onboarding in order to assign new hires to a mentor/coach beyond their manager.

When executed appropriately, strategic onboarding puts employees' best interests on the same level as that of the business. New hires will be significantly more comfortable and capable in their new roles when they have resources and connections from the onset of their experiences.

### Intrinsic Tenets of Strategic Onboarding

Successful strategic onboarding is multifaceted, but that doesn't mean it needs to be complex. For starters, a key aspect of strategic onboarding is timing. In many organizations, the onboarding process starts either right after an employer receives the signed offer letter or after the background check results come back. However, many employers often wait to commence any aspect of the process until the employee's first day. There's a great opportunity to immerse new hires in the company culture

In Aberdeen's November 2015 talent acquisition survey, the following key performance indicators (KPIs) were used to distinguish the Best-in-Class (top 20% of aggregate performers) from the Industry Average (middle 50%), and Laggard (bottom 30%) organizations, with mean performance among the Best-in-Class as follows:

- 79% of employees received rating of “exceeds expectations” on last performance review.
- 79% year-over-year improvement in length of strategic talent search (time to hire).
- 15% year-over-year improvement in revenue per full-time equivalent (FTE).

---

**Best-in-Class companies are 2.5 times more likely than All Others to provide key stakeholders with visibility into the development progress of new employees through the onboarding process.**

---

before their “start date.” This is why onboarding is more than just a checklist — it involves equipping new hires with the right tools, the right context, and the right connections to get started on the right foot. Best-in-Class companies do just that — they begin onboarding before day one, which is also known as pre-boarding. Such organizations are 53% more likely than All Others (69% vs. 45%) to begin onboarding new hires before day one. This is also known as pre-boarding, and is rapidly becoming a best practice.

By using pre-boarding, new hires can get a firmer grasp of the expectations, culture, and company itself before they start their jobs. In turn, they can also start building relationships that will be integral to their experience and enjoyment of working somewhere. Top companies also take decisive action around ensuring onboarding is truly successful. Best-in-Class companies are 2.5 times more likely than All Others (61% vs. 24%) to provide key stakeholders with visibility into the progress of new employees throughout the onboarding process. By staying abreast of employees' progress, relevant stakeholders — recruiters, hiring managers, trainers, colleagues, etc. — can better understand what they need to do to help get their new workforce up to speed.

Another key tenet of strategic onboarding is mobile, and, more specifically, the ability for new hires to consume content relevant to their roles, their teams, and the company on the go. Case in point, Best-in-Class companies are three times more likely than All Others (24% vs. 8%) to empower their employees with mobile technology. Refined mobility makes it easier for employees to access information; it provides greater simplicity for an often complex process; and it can add an element of fun. Mobile continues to be top of mind across all facets of talent acquisition. Per Aberdeen's [\*Talent Acquisition Trends, 2016: Candidates Take Command\*](#) (June 2016), Best-in-Class companies

are 37% more likely than All Others (48% vs. 35%) to use mobile to support their talent acquisition efforts.

Fruitful strategic onboarding should also include the effective tracking of employee performance and productivity throughout the process. Are they retaining information? Do they need specific items explained differently? Best-in-Class companies are invested in how onboarding affects employees' performance. Notably, such organizations are 18% more likely than All Others (58% vs. 49%) to use strategic onboarding to better understand employees and determine what steps are needed to get them to be as productive and as comfortable as possible. Ultimately, employees want to contribute effectively in an effort to prove their worth and why they were good hires in the first place.

Such organizations look out for their employees' well-being in other ways, too, such as understanding their current and needed skills and linking them to other talent processes. Notably, Best-in-Class companies are 3.7 times more likely than All Others (52% vs. 14%) to use pre-hire assessment results collected during the recruitment process to determine appropriate career/development tracks. Such results can be used to support their employees' ongoing development as well, specifically through learning and knowledge management efforts. In that vein, companies with strategic onboarding in place are 38% more likely than All Others (69% vs. 50%) to provide new hires with learning technology to aid with development from the onset of their tenures.

That way, employees who want to make improvements can do so on their accord, with resources that are available to them. In addition, be thoughtful regarding the quantity of information and learning resources, as this affects their likelihood of completion.

---

**Best-in-Class companies are 3.7 times more likely than All Others to use pre-hire assessment results to determine appropriate career / development tracks.**

---

---

**58% of all companies indicate that the biggest influence on onboarding efforts is the need to engage new hires in the company culture.**

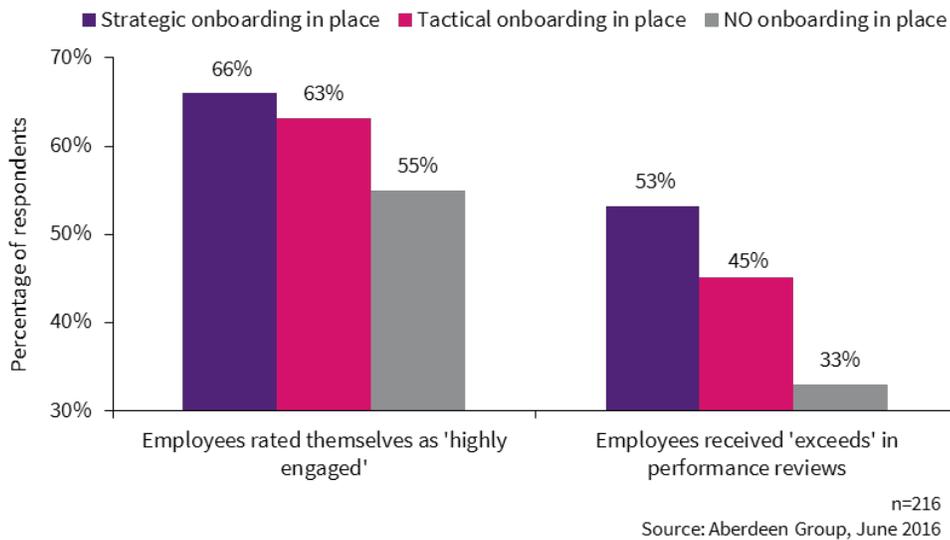
---

Such strategies can help employees to be more engaged early on in the onboarding process. After all, companies are universally concerned with employee engagement from the onset of hires' tenures. Since [90% of employees make the decision to stay within the first year](#), it's more important than ever to determine if new hires are engaged early on. Accordingly, Best-in-Class companies are 39% more likely than All Others (75% vs. 54%) to measure employee engagement as part of the onboarding process. To that point, 58% of all companies indicate that the biggest influence on onboarding efforts is the need to engage new hires in the company culture. Most people want to feel connected, and that goes double for new recruits.

#### Measuring the Return on Investment of Strategic Onboarding

As demonstrated above, strategic onboarding can do wonders for new hires' knowledge, satisfaction, performance, retention, and engagement. While these are often unmeasured metrics, they're increasingly necessary in this candidate/employee-centric era. That doesn't mean employee-centric key performance indicators (KPIs) go out the window. In fact, per Figure 1 below, utilizing strategic instead of tactical onboarding or no process at all leads to a greater percent of employees who rate themselves highly engaged and exceed expectations as well.

**Figure 1: Strategic Onboarding Can Do Wonders for Employee Performance**

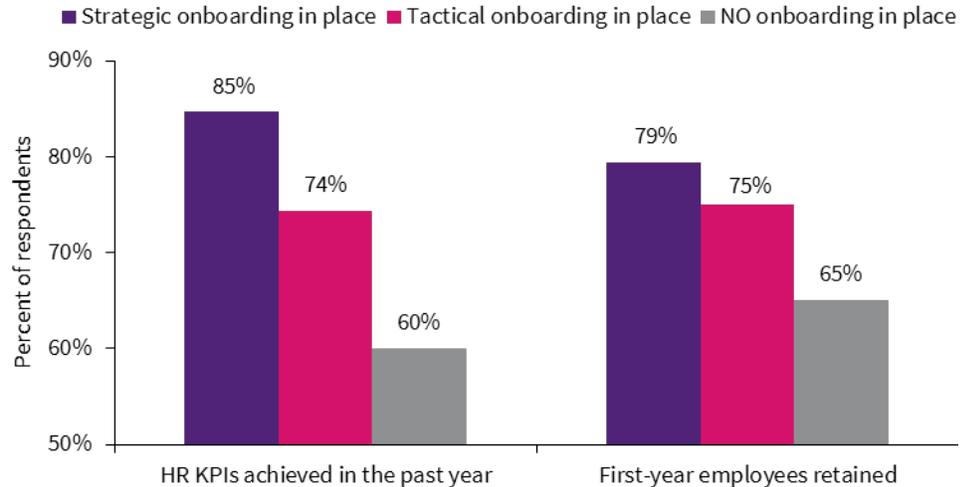


New hires traditionally find their entry into a new employer to be challenging, so HR and the organization as a whole should be cognizant about how to connect employees with the overall strategies, messaging, and culture of the company.

Such levels of engagement and performance can mean employees are that much more satisfied and excited about what they do. After all, 57% of companies believe that the biggest reason employees commit to their jobs and employers is that they are drawn to what they do and believe their efforts make a difference. It's important to continually strategize around what gets employees committed and passionate about what they do.

Strategic onboarding can also do wonders for more traditional, business-facing goals. For instance, per Figure 2 below, businesses that use strategic versus tactical or no onboarding are more likely to exceed common HR KPIs, such as hiring manager satisfaction.

**Figure 2: Strategic Onboarding Can Also Aid the Business**



n=216

Source: Aberdeen Group, June 2016

---

**Companies that use strategic onboarding are 22% more likely than companies without any onboarding process to retain first-year employees.**

---

Businesses looking to prove the value of strategic onboarding to finance, HR, or IT need to look no further. Successfully meeting a variety of HR-centric KPIs in the past year is a great ROI alone. But the retention of first-year employees is almost better — all that time and effort to recruit, hire, and onboard new hires was well spent.

### Conclusion

In an effort to engage, excite, and retain hard-won employees, savvy companies think constructively about the execution of their onboarding process. Said strategy should be formulaic and thoughtful. By providing new hires with mentors, establishing a dialogue between new employees and their colleagues, starting the process earlier via pre-boarding, using mobile functionality, and beyond, any business can establish a Best-in-Class onboarding process.

New hires traditionally find their entry into a new employer to be challenging, so HR and the organization as a whole should be cognizant about how to connect employees with the overall

strategies, messaging, and culture of the company. The sooner such information can be disseminated, the more likely employees are to understand what they can and can't do. The key to strategic onboarding success is to put employees front and center, just as is done with traditional business metrics and goals.

### **About Aberdeen Group**

Since 1988, Aberdeen Group has published research that helps businesses worldwide improve their performance. Our analysts derive fact-based, vendor-agnostic insights from a proprietary analytical framework, which identifies Best-in-Class organizations from primary research conducted with industry practitioners. The resulting research content is used by hundreds of thousands of business professionals to drive smarter decision-making and improve business strategy. Aberdeen Group is headquartered in Boston, MA.

This document is the result of primary research performed by Aberdeen Group and represents the best analysis available at the time of publication. Unless otherwise noted, the entire contents of this publication are copyrighted by Aberdeen Group and may not be reproduced, distributed, archived, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written consent by Aberdeen Group.