By Donna Mallard

NEW EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING:
MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL!

The talent war rages on and the high level of competition for talent challenges us to evaluate our onboarding processes. With the cost of turnover as high as 150% of an employee's base salary, enhancing our hiring and onboarding processes is essential. Studies show the more quickly employees are integrated into their new workplace, the faster they will achieve returns for their employer. Onboarding is much more than just giving employees policies and procedures. Strategic onboarding is an inventive and intentional approach to integrating new employees into the culture and processes of an organization. This article will address why onboarding is critical to your business success, what successful onboarding programs look like and how you can begin to incorporate onboarding as a strategic business initiative.

MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL!

Think of onboarding as an assimilation process that is strategic, clearly defined and intentional, conveying the value and importance of employees to your organization. Onboarding doesn't just happen, but when it's successful, a mutually satisfying relationship is begun. Some advantages of a successful program include:

Employees:
- Feel good about their job decision
- Engage in their work quickly and enjoy a higher level of job satisfaction
- Reach productivity sooner by compressing the learning curve
- Add value to the company faster

productive part of a team as soon as possible.

Successful programs are not just a one-hour or one-day process. Onboarding should occur over time, as people begin to assimilate and have questions. These strategies maintain a long-term focus, not just on getting a new employee prepared to perform the basic job function, but also on following the learning curve and offering ongoing support as the employee advances in the position.

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executives, communication), then join others in like positions to learn more job-specific functions (recruiting, interviewing, reference checking, business development, leadership).

Metrics play a key role in the success of your new hire's onboarding process. These metrics should be determined up front and tied specifically to what is measured (activities or results), why it is measured (the impact these activities or results have on company performance) and how the metrics will be calculated (numbers, percentages). Most importantly, these metrics should be clearly communicated to the new employee. By measuring progress at various inter-

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Staffing Firms:
- Reduce the cost of learning on the job
- Save money by reducing turnover
- Improve employee retention and satisfaction

One of the main reasons new hires leave a company is because they didn't receive the proper guidance. Today's onboarding initiatives are getting more creative and comprehensive, and they are moving away from those painful sessions with stacks of forms and piles of manuals. The new style of onboarding programs provides guidance by focusing on affirming the new employee's decision to come on board, conveying a sense of the company's culture and making the new recruit feel a

hires is that they are valued by the organization and that this process is important. By periodically having an executive touch base with new hires to share company information and answer questions, the new employee understands the value placed on them and this process.

Although onboarding may have a "group" component when hiring more than one employee at a time, it is best to have all employees participate in general sessions and then have individuals participate in function-specific sessions with their individual leader. For example, all employees may participate in a class offering personnel policies and benefits, company identification (history, mission statement, what makes the company unique, key

vals, you are able to evaluate retention of material, as well as to evaluate the success of your onboarding initiative.

Design an Onboarding Strategy
When designing an onboarding strategy, evaluate the kind of impression you want to make on your new hires, what they need in order to reach productivity as quickly as possible and what will help them feel like they're part of the team. Also consider how your new employee learns and what is important to him/her. Understanding generational differences when creating onboarding and development plans for employees is crucial for effective program design.

All generations learn from programs that are exciting, interactive, interesting, painless and fun! This

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can be accomplished by using a blended learning approach. Blended learning is defined as utilizing various methods of training for efficiency, variety and increased retention of material. A high-touch, personal program that gets new people in front of existing people and provides face time with key people in the organization is crucial. In addition, most generations enjoy a combination of learning techniques. Some of these techniques include:

- Self-studies or self-guided, customized material that requires periodic intervention from a mentor or buddy
- Web-based training that includes ongoing progress reports to mentors, printable workbooks, learning management system, guided implementation strategy
- Live Webinars with other employees

special parking details, a training schedule and the new employee's business cards, to demonstrate the company's commitment to the new hire. Have an office or desk set up with a computer (and access to necessary software programs) in place, a phone number and an email account ready to go.

Celebrate Your New Employee's Arrival

Make new hires feel welcome. Create a welcome committee. Organize opportunities to meet and greet new and existing staff. This can be as simple as taking a new employee to lunch, hanging a "Welcome" banner on his or her desk or giving them a company T-shirt. As part of the orientation, have new employees conduct inter-

Provide a Schedule

Remove some of the more frustrating aspects of a typical orientation. Have the mentor or manager review the onboarding schedule with the new employee and describe the process. Clarify who will be involved each step of the way.

Participate in the Process

In addition to following the onboarding schedule, touch base periodically with new employees on a regular basis. Don't wait for new hires to seek you out with questions or problems. Schedule "touch points" or opportunities to discuss progress, and allow time for questions. Always ask, "What else do you need from me to make this process successful?" This information also provides an opportunity for you

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- Electronic assessments and tools to track and record the new employee's progress
- Company intranet site that may include company information, materials presented during orientation to reinforce the messages and the content, or a gallery of names and photos of all employees

Determine What Can Be Accomplished Prior to the First Day at Work

Make sure your new hires have the tools they need before they arrive for their first day. Send a "Welcome Kit" with company information, such as forms that can be signed in advance,

views with co-workers in their business units to get to know their colleagues and understand the business. Peer-to-peer interaction may seem less threatening or intimidating to new hires and also contributes to relationship development.

Choose an Onboarding Mentor

There's no doubt new hires are going to need a little hand-holding in the beginning. Identify and train employees who will support the new employee's assimilation process. Assign these individuals to be the new person's mentor/buddy and to accompany and guide them through the onboarding phase.

to assess the effectiveness of your onboarding process and where changes or additions may be needed.

Assess Retention

Each step in the onboarding process should be assessed for understanding and retention. By focusing on key areas, such as mission statements, purpose statements or agreed-upon elevator speeches, management can determine if the new team member is comfortable with the company identity. Reviews should be built in to identify areas where additional information is needed. These assessments should be documented, tracked and used to identify additional development opportunities.

Get Employee Feedback on Orientation — The Good and the Bad

The best way to improve your strategic onboarding process is to gather feedback from new employees quickly after the initial orientation. Ask specific questions, such as:

"Which part of the onboarding process was most helpful for you?"

"Which area on your schedule did you feel had little or no value?"

"Describe your first day working with us."

"If you were a mentor for our next new hire, what would you do differently to make that person feel welcome and integrated into our company quickly?"

Beyond the first few weeks of employment, schedule periodic assessments to help refine the onboarding process for future hires. This may include 30-, 60- and 90-day assessments. The added benefit is scheduled touch points with the new hire that may uncover other training, development or support needs.

In this article we share why onboarding is critical to your business success, what successful onboarding programs look like and how you can begin to incorporate onboarding as a strategic business initiative. By following this process, you will reduce the cost of orientation and employee attrition, reduce ramp-up time, and improve employee productivity and retention. When your employees feel good about their job decision, enjoy a higher level of job satisfaction and reach productivity sooner, everybody wins the talent war! **SI**

Donna Mallard, principal of Mallard & Associates and CEO of Staffing E-Trainer, has 25 years experience in the staffing industry and 15 successful years in training exclusively for the staffing industry.