



How to Effectively Onboard in a World of Physical Distancing

We are all going through times of unprecedented anxiety, fear and constant change impacting our personal and professional lives in profound ways. Despite this, the human spirit is such that we endeavour to live as normally as possible, and that we “get back to business” as quickly as possible. Part of “normal” is having new employees or contractors join our team. **Steve Rosen** shares key ideas to consider including in your onboarding process.

An effective onboarding program has always been critical to both the short-term and long-term success of any new team member; from an entry level role right through senior leaders, the C-Suite and Board. For the hiring organization, this process is a key component of building out the employee brand.

Traditional or standard onboarding practices from both the practical and emotional side are still relevant and applicable. However, there are some elements which need to be adapted; and some additional steps added. Once the offer is made, it is important to continue with a consistent approach—which includes frequent touch points—for at least the first six months after start date. Let’s consider some ideas for each phase.

Making the Offer

- **share feelings.** Remember this is a human interaction. Ask how they are feeling; share your own concerns and perspectives. This will lead to some good discussions and help address any issues that arise
- **organizational alignment.** Share details of the company’s current operating conditions and the importance of the role in the organization
- **clarity and transparency.** Be forthright on how your business is being impacted as well as the risks and opportunities

- **benefits and accommodations.** Review the Health Benefits section of the offer and strongly consider waiving any waiting period to gain coverage. Be sure to advise of any special accommodations your firm is making for employee welfare and safety
- **mitigate loss of support.** If the candidate is going to be resigning from a current role, there will be a rational fear of leaving their existing supports; it is important to provide perspective on how you will alleviate those losses

Between Offer Acceptance and Start Date

- **keep in touch.** Err on the side of over-communicating through the resignation; notice period; any break the candidate takes; and right up to start date
- **expect counteroffers.** Companies won't want to lose good and experienced employees during these times, and the risk of counteroffers, which have always been there, will only be increased at this time, and may continue right to the start date
- **senior salutations.** Have any senior people the candidate met during the interview process also reach out – even a short email or text can go a long way to making them feel welcomed
- begin assembling a “**start-up kit**” that will be couriered to the new employee's home prior to start. It should include:
 - technology: arrange for a computer, cell phone, and any other hardware requirements (especially if working remotely), with clear instructions for set up and a point of contact. If you have a large IT department, maybe you can assign a designated contact so they do not feel lost in the process
 - documentation: ensure HR Documents (e.g. payroll forms, tax details, etc.) that need to be completed and signed can be done electronically
 - access to policy and other procedural documents, etc.
 - access to shared drives and any other company-wide resources
 - any company “swag” that they can use to decorate their home work space as a start to making them feel like part of the team
 - connect the new employee to the right people to ensure they get announced, introduced and welcomed properly

From Start Date On

- set reasonable expectations from the start. Things will be slower than normal, and onboarding will take longer. Ensure the new employee is not putting too much pressure to ‘prove themselves’ beyond what is currently possible
- identify some tasks or projects they can start on right away with minimal training. It is important to set them up to add value, and not feel like a burden, as soon as possible. This would also be a great time for them to complete any online training that would be beneficial in their new role
- replicate the ‘live’ experience as much as possible. Book intro/on-board video meetings with as many colleagues as possible
- check in regularly. Schedule a regular weekly meeting, or maybe daily for the first few weeks, and again, err on the side of over communicating
- find ways to help the new employee “socialize” and engage with the team. Consider a virtual happy hour at the end of their first day or week—using Zoom or a similar technology—to raise a glass with their new colleagues

The one thing we can be sure of is that the upcoming months will not be “normal.” But you can take a number of steps to make your new team member as comfortable as possible in this “new normal.” A successful onboarding process will go a long way to building deep loyalty with the new hire, providing a sense of belonging and instantly raising engagement and productivity.

Hiring A-Players requires the right mindset.

Employers or candidates—who’s in the driver’s seat when it comes to hiring top talent? [Get the scoop.](#)

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