

UPSKILLING

MENTORING: THE KEY INGREDIENT FOR SUCCESSFUL ONBOARDING

BY WENDY BRENES

After reviewing a mountain of resumes and interviewing multiple candidates, you found **THE ONE!** Congratulations! Your next steps are critical — what will you do to ensure the new employee is set up for success? Does your company have a new hire mentoring program? An onboarding mentoring relationship can accelerate how connected the new employee feels to the company and team culture while expanding their internal network.

Let's look at this from the new employee's perspective. Joining an organization can be exciting yet full of uncertainties. While eager to succeed, they are in a period of transition. Think back to your own experiences. For me, these have been some of my most vulnerable moments and I remember wondering if I made the right decision, taking everything in day by day.

While they accepted your offer, today's new employees are assessing every interaction, every connection and every communication to determine if it is the right role and place for them. They are taking in the company and team culture, evaluating if both align with their personal values. They may be questioning if the work they are doing aligns with their understanding of the role presented to them during the interview process. Some are afraid to ask questions or feel isolated, particularly in remote work environments.

According to research, **70%** of employees decide whether a job is the right fit within the first month — and **29%** know within the first week. What's more, **20%** of new employees leave organizations within

their first 45 days. Can you afford to let this happen?

As they leave the role, they also leave with a bad experience of your company, and these unfortunate experiences are shared freely on websites such as Fairygodboss, Glassdoor and Rate My Employer. That means it's back to the drawing board — reviewing resumes while battling fresh negative reputations, and existing workers feel the weight of extra workloads. Productivity, innovation and engagement could be impacted.

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It doesn't have to be this way. You can significantly influence a new employee's experience through a mentorship program. Below are recommendations to empower new employees and experienced ones to create meaningful mentoring relationships, and ultimately, encourage positive employee experiences for all:

CHOOSE A MENTOR FOR THE NEW EMPLOYEE

When considering who may be the right person to mentor your new employee, I often think of someone who has had similar experiences. Perhaps they worked in a similar industry or share common experiences and interests. Mentors do not necessarily need to perform the same job function and can be job function-adjacent so there is a general understanding of the role and impact they each have.

INTRODUCE THE PARTNERS AND SET EXPECTATIONS

Provide an opportunity for each of the partners to get to know one another. This is a great time to share the structure of the program and expectations. Consider meeting for 30 minutes once a week for a two- to three-month period. This will support the new employee beyond the important 45-day mark. Encourage the partners to set a meeting schedule that works best for them and when meeting virtually, encourage the use of video technology.

PROVIDE SAMPLE DISCUSSION TOPICS

An onboarding mentorship is more than just pairing people together and hoping for the best. By offering a few focus areas and prepared discussion topics, you can strengthen the impact of the partnership and create a standard for mentoring excellence across your organization. Of course, mentors should also invite the new employee to bring questions of their own and allow time to follow the new employee's energy and curiosities.

Below are a few samples of discussion topics:

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Discovering common interests and experiences is a critical step in building trust within a mentoring relationship. These foundational conversations connect people, and when new employees feel connected, they begin feeling more confident in their decision to join the company.

- Tell me about yourself: Why did you come to join the company?
- Who have you met? Who would you like to meet?
- What aspects of your career at the company interest you the most?

JOINING THE COMPANY

There may be a company onboarding roadmap, however, every transition will be unique. Exploring this topic encourages transparent discussions that go beyond reciting the company's value proposition.

- What has been the easiest part of your transition? What has been the most challenging? What are you hoping to learn next?
- Who are our customers? How does your role support the company customer? What can I clarify for you?
- What corporate responsibility efforts or accolades interest you?

LEVERAGING YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

You hired the new employee for a reason. Whether it was skill, knowledge or strategy, you wanted someone who could use their experience to improve efficacy and elevate your company. Mentors can help new employees identify how they can use their experiences to succeed.

- What experience(s) from your prior roles have been most helpful to you?
- Are there past activities you would like to try here?
- How can you leverage your professional network?

MEETING WITH YOUR MANAGER

Having candid discussions about early meetings with a leader can be extremely

beneficial for the new employee. They want to put their best foot forward and make good impressions. Sharing tacit knowledge can expedite this relationship.

- Have you had a meeting with your manager? Was the meeting what you expected? Did you learn anything new? How will you use this knowledge moving forward?
- Was the meeting different than you expected? What do you wish you would have discussed? How well do you feel your intentions were perceived?
- What goals did you set during the meeting? What progress have you made toward those goals?

UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Today's work environments can be varied: in-person, remote or somewhere in between. When new employees understand how best to adapt to your organization's work environment, they can begin to thrive.

- What has your previous experience been working in-office, remotely or in a hybrid model? If remote, how common was it for everyone to be on-camera in virtual meetings even when they weren't speaking? What can make you more comfortable with this?
- What opportunities does your team have because of the hybrid model? How do you plan to capitalize on these?
- What challenges exist? How might you address or overcome these? Who can support you?

EMBRACING THE COMPANY CULTURE

Helping new employees understand your organization's cultural norms can help them integrate more smoothly, build better relationships with colleagues and contribute to a positive and productive work environment.

- Is the company culture what you expected it to be?
- What company culture norms have you observed?
- How have you embraced these norms? What challenges might you be experiencing?

LIVING THE COMPANY VALUES

A significant aspect of company culture is tied to how closely employee behaviors align with the company values. Discussing values in everyday interactions can reinforce the true company culture.

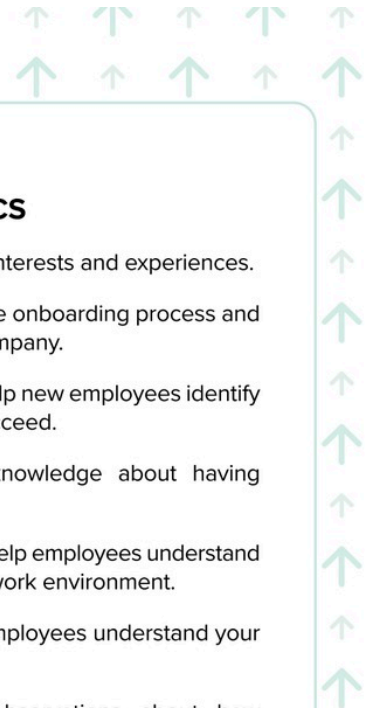
- How have you seen people demonstrating our company values in action?
- How have you tried to embody our company values?
- Which company value resonates with you the most?

MONITOR AND SUPPORT THE PARTNERSHIP

Once a mentoring partnership is established, you can offer support as needed. After a few weeks, confirm they are meeting regularly. At the midpoint of the program, inquire if they are seeing value from their collaboration and encourage them to assess what adjustments need to be made to make it even more impactful.

As the partnership comes to a close, invite partners to reflect on their experience and how they would like their relationship to continue moving forward.





Often, partners will keep in touch on a more informal basis. If available, show your appreciation by leveraging company recognition programs.

Not only does an onboarding mentoring program help new employees feel supported but existing employees benefit by strengthening their professional networks and enhancing their leadership and communication skills. Being chosen to serve as a company mentor is a form of recognition and creates fulfillment in helping others progress in their development. Mentor engagement, retention and connectedness often increase significantly. Try this recipe to set yourself up for onboarding success! 🍷

Wendy Brenes has more than two decades of experience in L&D. She passionately creates transformative mentoring cultures at Robert Half, the world's first and largest specialized talent solutions and business consulting firm. Email Wendy.

MENTORING DISCUSSION TOPICS

- **Getting to know you:** Discover common interests and experiences.
- **Transitioning to the company:** Discuss the onboarding process and how they see their role supporting the company.
- **Leveraging your previous experience:** Help new employees identify how they can use their experiences to succeed.
- **Meeting with your manager:** Share knowledge about having productive meetings with a leader.
- **Understanding your work environment:** Help employees understand how best to adapt to your organization's work environment.
- **Embracing the company culture:** Help employees understand your organization's cultural norms.
- **Living the company values:** Share observations about how employees embody the company's values.



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