

Onboarding Employees Remotely During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused employers to make significant changes to their business practices, including onboarding. Managers and new employees across the UK are navigating the uncharted waters of remote onboarding.

The onboarding process—which is designed to cultivate a long-term relationship between the employer and the employee while fostering a feeling of belonging and an affirmation of making the right choice—is one that is extremely important for both employers and employees. As such, employers should still prioritise onboarding new employees, even though their training will be conducted virtually instead of in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why Is Onboarding Important?

A recent study from HR experts found that the first 90 days of employment is a pivotal time for employees to build rapport with a company, its management and their co-workers. When you share your company's goals and values with your employees while simultaneously showing them how to do their jobs, everyone benefits.

Best Practices for Remote Onboarding

If you have new employees who need to be onboarded remotely during the pandemic, keep the following best practices in mind:

1. **Meet with them in-person on their first day, if possible.** If government guidelines allow for it, try to meet with new employees at the office to welcome them to the company, get them set up with any necessary equipment and deliver any printed training materials. Be sure to test the equipment to make sure it works before you both leave the office. Keep social distancing guidelines in mind when meeting with new employees, which include keeping a 2-3 metre distance at all times. While it may seem odd, avoid shaking hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
2. **Set clear expectations with new employees.** One of the most common mistakes employers make with onboarding plans is not setting clear expectations. Because your onboarding process is now being done remotely and you're not there in-person to monitor a new employee's progress, setting expectations becomes even more important. Expectations that should be discussed include the company's values, the team's objectives and the new employee's responsibilities.
3. **Don't overwhelm new employees with too much training.** Training new employees remotely isn't ideal for managers or the new employee. As such, prioritise the training and only train new employees on the skills that are absolutely essential for them to be able to do their job. Overwhelming new employees with too much information at once when they're working from home can lead to confusion, stress and frustration.
4. **Check in with new employees daily.** Having employees work from home can help keep them healthy, but it can become isolating, especially for new staff. Schedule a daily call or video chat to help new employees feel like part of the team and give them the opportunity to ask questions.

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5. **Match a new employee with a remote mentor.**

Assigning mentors to new employees can be highly advantageous to both parties. It gives new staff someone to contact for questions and helps mentors develop confidence and pride in their jobs. Encourage mentors to have daily check-ins with new staff to establish a professional relationship and help the new employees feel included.

For More Information

An effective onboarding programme, regardless of whether it's an in-person programme or a remote programme, provides employers with a solid starting point during which they can communicate their values to their employees and explain why they do what they do. It also helps new employees easily assimilate into company culture. An employee who has gone through a positive onboarding experience helps build a positive reputation for his or her company among talented job seekers.

While onboarding your new staff remotely may not be your first choice, the COVID-19 pandemic has required employers across the UK to get creative. Contact us today for additional COVID-19 resources and employment guidance.