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16 Tips to Quickly and Efficiently Onboarding Manufacturing Employee Remotely

The Essential Guide for Resilient Businesses

16 Tips to Quickly and Efficiently Onboarding Manufacturing Employees Remotely

Quickly and remotely onboarding manufacturing employees is an imperative for HR managers, hiring managers, supervisors, and business owners alike. Onboarding done right brings new hires up to speed fast while ensuring a safe and productive work environment.

- Paperwork completed
- Rules learned
- Introductions made
- Teams built
- Job details transferred
- Productivity achieved

While 95% of professionals say their company has an onboarding process, 59% report experiencing a mishap when starting a position, according to a Robert Half survey. Clearly, onboarding quality must also be part of the success formula. If manufacturing employees are not onboarded properly, there can be accidents, inspection issues, inventory control problems, and other serious threats to safety, productivity and business success.

Onboarding Successfully is More Important—and More Achievable—Than Ever

Onboarding may never be the same—and that's good. New onboarding practices that are location independent provide a reliable path to success for everyone.

- Faster time to higher productivity
- Maximum employee engagement
- Greater sense of commitment and teamwork
- Higher rates of employee retention in what could otherwise be a high turnover environment
- Cost savings

Chances are some on your onboarding team will be remote throughout the process. Executives, hiring managers, IT, HR, teammates, inspectors, general managers, accounting, sales and new hires may never be in the same room. And that's okay. In fact, remote onboarding processes will likely rival in-person onboarding because they are more flexible, engaging and measured than those that rely on the open door.

Onboarding Basics are the Same, Just Applied Differently in the Remote Environment

The basics of onboarding don't change. How you manage the process might:

- Plan - organized and deliberate with frequent virtual check-ins
- Introductions - virtually connect new hire with team and broader workforce
- Paperwork - gather tax forms, contact details, direct deposit, benefits, certifications and licensing such as CDL
- Questions - make it easy to ask questions via virtual channels
- Shadowing - use video conferencing, webcam or other means for live but not necessarily in-person on-the-job training—yes this is possible for line workers, shipping/receiving, maintenance and others who work on the manufacturing floor
- Team building - offer formal and informal ways to build rapport and common cause
- Office equipment and software - procure and set up equipment from afar
- Meeting participation - logins, calendars, video conferencing
- Face-to-face - meet regularly but not necessarily in person

Here are 16 tips for quickly and remotely onboarding manufacturing employees.

01

Start the Conversation Early

The first phase of onboarding begins as soon as the offer is accepted. No need to wait until Day 1. Get started by sending a welcome letter. Use the time between when a new hire accepts the job offer and actually starts working. Keep the excitement going and build rapport. The time invested to do this is small and the payoff can be great.

02

Go Paperless with the Paperwork Before Day 1

If your new hire is available, let them start the paperwork. Make sure your paperwork is actually paperless, so new hires can access it online. Most new hires will find this very helpful.

Online onboarding:

- Gives new hires the flexibility of time to get it done
- Lets new hires pull together details as they can
- Gives you immediate access to the paperwork even if you are remote
- Makes the paperwork more snackable and less overwhelming
- Eliminates misfiling and lost documents
- Conducts an optional WOTC interview
- Gathers tax, licensing, payroll details, contact details, direct deposit and more
- Presents confidentiality, non-disclosure and other agreements as needed
- Provides access and allows time to review employee handbook, safety guides, emergency procedures, and other documents relevant to the new hire's specific job
- Collects electronic signature
- Moves the focus onto team building for the first day on the job

03

Get the Logistics Right

Start your new employee off in the environment where they will be working. The setup will be different if they work from home, at a central office, on the manufacturing floor, in the warehouse, or on the road. Be prepared ahead of Day 1 to give them the specific tools they need to thrive in their particular situation. Make sure you also provide a list of items the new hire is expected to bring to the job, such as personal tools and work boots.



Order furniture, supplies and technology early. This could include:

- Desk or workspace
- Locker
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) including hard hat, safety glasses, gloves, and boots
- Tools
- Uniform
- Laptop/PC
- Monitor
- Phone
- Printer
- Wi-Fi
- Email
- Collaboration tools like Slack, Teams, Asana
- Office365
- CRM
- ERP
- Cloud Storage
- Job specific software

Understand the logistics. Have people ready to set up and support technology using remote tools or in office. These resources can help with logins, email setup, software setup and access to various internal systems.

04

Set Up Time Tracking

Make sure you have a system in place to track time. Have it ready Day 1. Every employee should have a formal method of reporting their time. Your business needs it to comply with ACA, FMLA, FLSA, and a host of other federal and local laws. Your managers need it to ensure they meet labor cost budgets, while contract workers need it to confirm that they are paid properly.

Here are some key capabilities your time tracking system should include:

- Time clock - make it easy to clock in and out using a physical clock or phone-based app. A physical clock can be quite convenient for those who work exclusively at the factory or in a central office. A phone-based app may be more popular for service technicians who travel to customer sites, staff who work from home and supervisors who may split their time between locations. You can decide for each new hire.
- Position - similarly, assign or allow employees to select if they switch between roles that have different pay rates or need to be reported separately within projects. For example, an employee qualified for arc and tic welding and also sometimes assigned to general machine shop work may need to track time by those positions.
- Geolocation - automatically record the location of clock activity to ensure that employees are where they should be when working
- Department - assign time to a department automatically or allow employees to select if they split work between departments
- Mileage - collect mileage or other important details during clock in/out
- Breaks/meals - prompt employees to take breaks based on governing rules. This helps you prove compliance with regulations while keeping your operation running without interruption
- Project - prompt employees to select the job or project so that time is captured for all work on the project. This can be critically important for shops that do custom projects or cost-plus contracts.

Time and labor is critically important to cash flow and job costing. [WorkforceHub](#) is a good example of a manufacturing time tracking solution. WorkforceHub has an easy-to-use phone-based app and integrates with hardware clocks.

Start tracking time on the employee's first day at work, giving everyone confidence that onboarding is underway. As soon as the new hire is contributing to a job or project, the hours can be assigned to that activity.

05

Start Scheduling from Day 1

With employees spread between locations, departments, shifts, lines and projects, it is critical to publish schedules as early as possible. Add new hires to the schedule on their starting day and give them as much advance notice as possible.

Employee scheduling is important for ensuring proper shift coverage. It is critical to compliance with licensing and certification regulations. With good scheduling you can prevent unplanned overtime and compliance issues. Make sure you have an easy way to let employees pick up and drop shifts in accordance with compliance rules, so that you minimize situations where you have to scramble to cover a shift.

Employee scheduling software is invaluable in protecting employee safety, health and productivity. Multi-shift, multi-line, multi-location schedules are the new norm, and software like [WorkforceHub](#) can ease the burden of building and managing them. You can publish schedules online and employees can see their assigned shifts right away. Make it easy on yourself and on them.



Combine employee scheduling with timekeeping and you can enforce schedules. [WorkforceHub](#), for example, supports both timekeeping and employee scheduling.

06

Set an Onboarding Timetable

There is a lot of ground to cover with onboarding. There is paperwork galore. There is required reading. And there is a fair amount of work to get the new hire connected to the rest of the team.

Create your onboarding timetable by dividing it into stages. For example:

- Stage 1 (Pre-Day 1): Logistics and paperwork (licenses, certifications, tax documents, etc.)
- Stage 2 (Day 1): Introductions and orientation
- Stage 3 (Week 1): New hire up and running in their environment, connected to team, actively training
- Stage 4 (Month 1): Goals provided by hiring manager, weekly HR check-ins/feedback
- Ongoing measurement

Measure progress toward goals from the perspective of:

- Employee
- Company
- Manager
- End Customer

For example, an employee goal may be to become an expert on the lathes and milling machines, while the end customer goal may be to have on-time delivery of high-quality precision metal components without burrs or stress fatigue. Keeping these perspectives in mind can help you measure actual job success.

07

Anticipate (and Proactively Answer) Questions That New Hires Will Ask

Every employee wants to know specific details about their job and the company they work for. Why not provide that information up front? This shows your interest in the employee and gets these questions out of the way.

Here are some common new hire questions:

- Schedule: what is it, and how can I request changes?
- Hours: is there flexibility?
- Vacation/sick policy: how do I request time off and how much do I get?
- Rules: what are the boundaries?
- Safety processes: are there safety processes I need to know about now?
- Timekeeping: how do I report the time I work?
- ID/Badge: do I have an employee ID or badge?
- Equipment: what technology do I need for my job and how do I get it?
- IT support numbers: who can help me if I have technology questions? How do I submit a support ticket?
- Key contacts: who do I turn to if I need help?

Brainstorm what new hires might not know and might not know to ask. Ask existing employees what questions they had during onboarding, then prepare the answers.

08

Show the New Hire Around the Organization, the Building(s), the Mission

Remote onboarding doesn't mean that orientation is out the window. Day 1 is a great day to learn more about the employee and introduce them to the company they have joined.

Make your orientation less about place and more about people. After all, people are what make the company a success. Remember that the first few hours can have a heavy impact so use them wisely.

Take the time to explain how the new hire fits into the organization and culture. Describe overall goals, team goals and how the new hire can make an impact. Provide relevant company history and culture, with an emphasis on individuals and team success. Let them express themselves within their job role if possible. Studies show that performance and retention are higher when individuals have an opportunity for self-expression.

09

Get Their Face Out

Connect new hires with the organization as quickly as possible. Just like in social media, faces matter. Make sure that the new hire has a photo on all shared applications like Outlook, Teams, Slack, and Asana. This will help form a social connection.

Add their profile photo to the company directory and publish a new hire spotlight. Ask the new hire to write their own summary for the spotlight, giving them specific guidelines. The summary should include a notable tidbit—for example, a paragraph about a favorite pastime. Include this in an email to the company and on your company news site such as your HRMS.



10

Be Clear About Rules, Expectations, Policies and Procedures

Successful onboarding depends on clarity. Be clear on the ground rules. Emphasize people and processes. Define procedures, priorities and expectations. This may seem obvious, but organizations struggle to do this well. Take the time to document so that your messages are consistent and complete. If you haven't already, use the next onboarding as an opportunity to capture and codify key information from subject matter experts.

11

Make Documentation Easy to Access and Explore

Onboarding usually requires some reading to come up to speed. So does keeping up with the company. Make it easy for new hires, and everyone else, to receive and consume information.

- Company news, video updates, team insights
- Company handbook, code of conduct
- List of resources
- FAQs
- Announcements
- Knowledgebase of policies, resources
- Project libraries (Google Drive, SharePoint, OneDrive)

You can use your HRMS for many of these documents. WorkforceHub, for example, makes it easy for you to post announcements, events, handbooks, policies and other valuable information and notify employees that it is available for review. Doing this helps new hires quickly come up to speed and stay current.

12

Make Training Interesting, Progressive and Measured

Over the course of time new hires will likely receive a fair amount of training. When this is in person, it can be lively and interesting. When it is remote, you risk boredom. So change it up.

Present company training and individual job training in a variety of ways. Here are some possibilities:

- Video conferencing (like Zoom) with a speaker and slides
- SlideShare with narration or annotation
- Stand-ups for quick team and/or company status check
- Videos demonstrating factory equipment, showing work processes, following a product down the line, discussing product development and testing, and so on
- Live walkabouts taking new hire through the building, factory floor or demonstration
- Q&A sessions
- Lunch and learn
- Coffee break
- Role reversal, where the student teaches the master

Be sure to measure the results of training in the moment and over time.

13

Make the New Hire Feel Like Part of the Team

Work to connect your new hire to the team. Here are some ideas:

- Introduce teammates
- Give the new hire a way to make an early contribution
- Set up communication links within the team
- Foster interest in the individual
- Describe the tie between your company and why the new hire was hired
- Set up meetups
- Make intro videos
- Host a lunch and learn
- Perform daily check-ins, feedback, Q&A until the new hire is integrated
- Ask teammates why they like the company
- Set up a favorite beverages club (coffee clutch)
- Team building games

Many new employees have a hard time meeting co-workers. Help them along.

14

Hold Regular Stand-ups

This idea is good for everyone, regardless of how new to the team. Short meetings (that's why they're called stand-ups) provide a quick update on individual projects and potential roadblocks. The best stand-ups generate new ideas and spur creativity while improving transparency and teamwork.

In the factory, topics for stand-ups could be the day's workload, production goals, safety incidents, and equipment status.

Some people may stay quiet at first. Stand-ups can help ensure new hires are part of the team conversation without putting them on the spot.

15

Be Deliberate

How you conduct new hire onboarding makes a big difference in how quickly new hires become effective at their jobs. Remote onboarding requires your process to be less ad hoc and more proactive.

Companies are now a network of people and places. Your company's future may well depend on your ability to quickly and remotely onboard new hires. You can do it by building on your past processes while transitioning to a virtual workflow.

16

Leverage Technology to Free Your Organization from the Bonds of Location

The span and scope of affordable communications technology available today is truly breathtaking. Virtually everyone in the workforce has a mobile device and internet access. Email, social media, messaging, chat, video and live streaming are commonplace. Collaboration tools, project management, CRM, ERP, video conferencing and mass storage are all widely available to teams.

Human Resource Management Systems (HRMS) provide a great platform for quickly and remotely onboarding new hires. Using an HRMS like WorkforceHub makes it easy for remote small business HR teams to add new employees and initiate paperless onboarding. New hires step through an online process that gathers tax forms, contact information and all the other details needed.

You can also use the HRMS to publish documents like your employee handbook and require electronic signature. Company news, a suggestion box, check-ins and other HR touchpoints make HRMS a vital component of your enabling technology.



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