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GUIDE

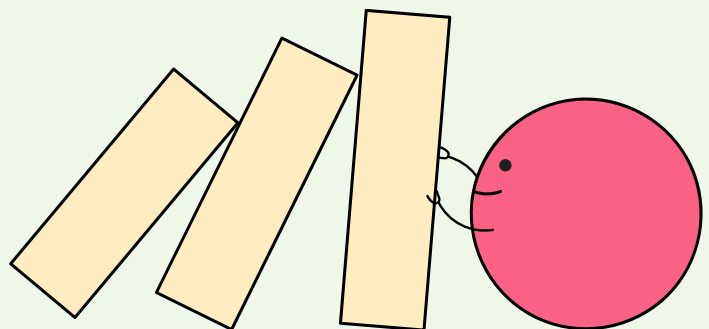# A Definitive Guide to Onboarding Programs

The importance of a good start has been stressed for ages by the wise: "Well begun is half done" said Aristotle - and yet, come the time for new employee onboarding and most organizations get caught in the rigmarole of running the same routine new employee onboarding programs, with endless power point presentations from multiple business units.

So, lets go back to the basics and see how we can do this better!

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Why do we need to have onboarding programs?

Look at it through two lenses – that of the individual and that of the organization:

Through the lens of the individual who is joining:

It creates a great first impression

Done well – it addresses new job concerns

Familiarises one with the procedures, policies, infrastructure and job-specific information

Gives a sense of the culture of the place

Builds pride, a feeling of belongingness and psychological safety

Through the lens of the organization who is inducting a new joinee:

- 30% of all new employees leave within 90 days of joining as per a survey from Jobvite. That is one hell of a scary statistic for recruiters considering the time and effort that goes into getting the right people on board in the first place. **Any reduction in that figure goes straight to the bottom line.**

- Every time new people join in a team or organization, as Bruce Tuckman's model teaches us, a team goes through the different stages of formation before becoming a performing team. **Should we leave that to chance?**

- We live in a VUCA world – the expectation that most organizations have is for new employees to "hit the ground running" and become productive extremely quickly. Onboarding programs when done well play a big role in **speeding up this process.**
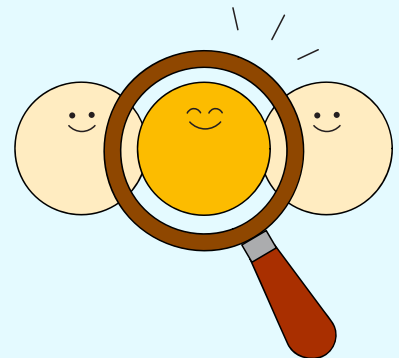
7 Best Practices

So what are the best practices for onboarding programs?

Different strokes for different folks.

There cannot be one template for all onboarding journeys. Depending on the roles, seniority, needs and complexity of the role – it is a good idea to define a few "personas" and design different onboarding journeys for each.

Leveraging technology.

Onboarding programs can amplify their impact when they use technology and adopt an online or blended approach. Microlearning for example is a very effective tool in enabling onboarding programs.

Facilitating informal interactions between new employees and their managers.

It is by now a well-known and documented fact that people don't leave companies – they leave their managers. Hence managers need to be nudged to check in with new employees so that they start building the foundation for a psychologically safe relationship.

Build Pride

AITSL in a landmark study talked about this. When a player joins the All Blacks they are given a small book bound in black leather. The first page shows a jersey from 1905, known as 'The Originals', followed by jersey after jersey of historic All Black teams up to the present day. Following this, the reader is reminded of the principles that underpin the ethos of the team, and to past heroes who have exemplified these values. The remaining pages are completely blank, waiting for the recipient to write their own story, their own legacy.

Build a sense of community

Onboarding programs often make the mistake of not including existing employees. This creates an artificial "them" versus "us" syndrome that can grow if left unchecked. Informal get togethers carefully crafted as lunch catch-ups or evening snacks breaks or team building programs – help break this sense of isolation for new comers.

Help them get early wins

Early wins are a good yet subtle way for incoming employees to build confidence and credibility. Managers need to work on making this happen.

Have a clear roadmap

Giving new employees a clear path for their first day, first week, first month and first quarter goes a long way in setting them up for success in their new role.

4 Watch-Outs

We know the best practices – so what are the watch-outs while designing onboarding programs?

1. Onboarding programs are not just about the first day of joining.

It is a full fledged process of getting someone onboard. So think about it holistically:

- What can be done before the person joins? (Paperwork, Things to be read, Things to be arranged to make the person productive - like laptops, email id, working space)

- What needs to be done on the day the person joins? (Statutory needs, day plan, team catch-up, key people to meet, tour of facilities)

- What needs to be done in the first 30 days after the person joins? (Frequent check-ins to see how the person is doing, clarity on role and what good work looks like, informal team bonding opportunities)

2. Information overload.

In our eagerness to scale up our new joinees, onboarding programs are sometimes planned as a series of back to back presentations by different departments. Believe us, beyond a point all of it just passes away in a daze. Less is more.

3. Not enough interaction with the reporting manager.

We live in busy times and senior folks truly find it difficult to make time away from their day-to-day grind. But unfortunately, there is no short-cut around this. This is the one relationship that has an inordinately high impact on the success of assimilating a new employee. As Nike would say – just do it!

4. Delays in the onboarding process.

For a variety of wholly credible reasons, onboarding programs sometimes get delayed in implementation and stretch out over uncomfortably long periods. This has a direct impact on employee morale and engagement with the organization. It is important to set clear targets for the different time spans atleast for the first 90 days.
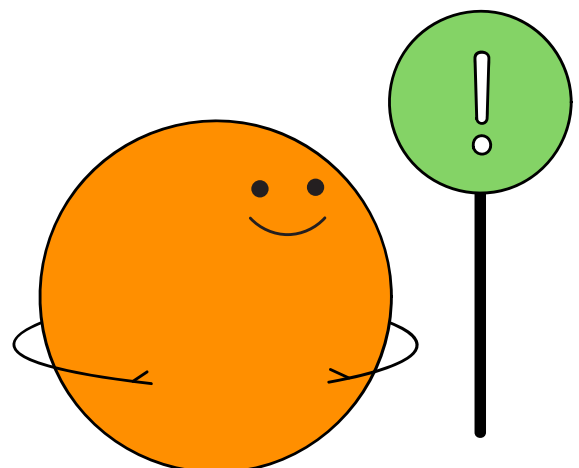
10 industry examples to inspire your onboarding program

Here are a few practices from other marquee organizations to inspire you:

NETFLIX
Catch-up with Executive Management members in the first quarter.

sky | MEDIA
Web-based pre-commencement programs that use game-based learning to ensure that all new staff arrive prepared and motivated for their new role.

in
A '90 day New Hire Onboarding Plan' – which is a detailed week-by-week guide that supports them to be productive and successful in their new role.

NEW ZEALAND ALL BLACKS
Training sessions that are described as "brutal" set the expectation that high challenge is the norm from the outset.

Twitter
Focuses on making the 'Yes to Desk' period as productive as possible. This period is from when a new hire says 'Yes' to an offer, all the way through to arriving at their 'Desk'.

Facebook
A six-week boot camp where new hires learn their role and the company culture at the same time.

Quora
A personal mentor for each new hire.

Buffer
A 3 buddy system - A Leader Buddy, a Role Buddy and a Culture Buddy.

IBM
Onboarding program of two years that integrates with different aspects of professional learning (technical, cultural, personal and historical) and supports new starters to grow into flourishing 'IBMers.

Google
Team-level employee onboarding instead of a centralized approach.

> 69 percent of employees are more likely to stay with a company for three years if they experienced great onboarding.

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A few themes that can make your Onboarding Day program memorable

1. We before Me

Core values are an integral part of the organizational culture. But how boring is it if you just keep talking about them. It often transports new joinees back to school or worse still Moral Science class in school. (P.S: Nothing wrong with Moral Science – except the way it is taught) What if each new employee could actually be put in situations where they get an opportunity to live out the values – through creating storylines and acting out roles in movies they shoot?
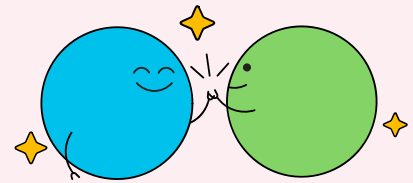
2. From ME to WE

Our entire education system is currently very focussed towards recognising individual brilliance. In the work environment though, success often depends on being a team player. This mindset change from "ME to WE" is something that many fresh campus hires struggle to adapt to. Through bespoke team based activities carefully designed per the cultural nuances of the organization, this messaging can be brought out or participants.

3. Agile Mindset

We live in a VUCA world. What is knowledge and cutting edge today, becomes stale in no time. So, one good way to set the context for your new hires is to share the reality that everything they learnt in school or college will soon become obsolete. Why hire them then? Because of their ability to unlearn, learn and flex their thinking. So how do they go about flexing their learning?
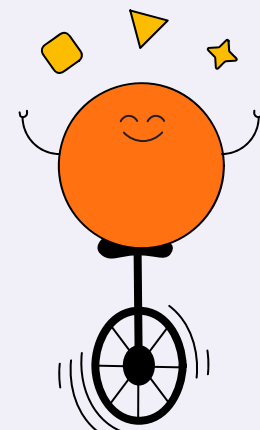
4. Gamified Learning

One of the essential elements of an onboarding program is to ensure that participants get familiar with organizational policies, interact with key stakeholders and even get familiar with office premises. This is usually done through PowerPoint presentations or cascades which are not very engaging.

What if you used microlearning platforms or tablets with special software, and got participants working in groups to crack clues in a treasure hunt format, to help them gain an understanding about company policies, the campus and even people? Add some fun challenges that bring out core values of the organization, and you have a focussed and meaningful intervention that is fun for the participants too!
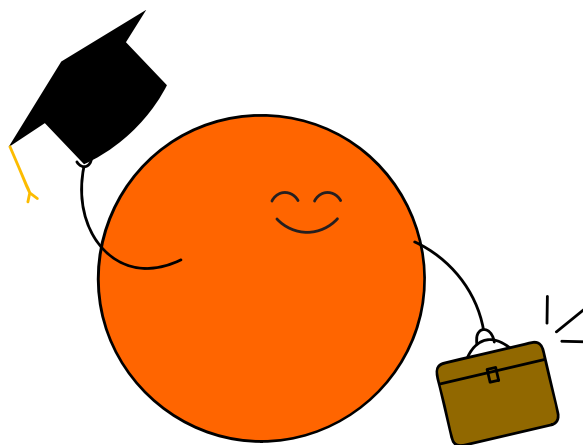
How to plan the perfect Virtual Onboarding Journey

> " *Is it even possible to make a virtual onboarding as engaging as it is when we do it face to face?* "

This is a question that is haunting many folks in L&D and HR now-a-days.

The answer is a definitive **"Yes"** – however, what it calls for is to first of all challenge many existing paradigms from the pre-Covid era. Here are a few holy cows that need to be challenged:

The Holy Cow	Traditional Approach	The New Paradigm
When does the "Onboarding period" really start?	Traditionally, the "Onboarding period" is from the day 1 of an employee joining an organization. But in a virtual world, do we really need to wait for day 1?	Twitter for example focuses on making the 'Yes to Desk' period as productive as possible. This period is from when a new hire says 'Yes' to an offer, all the way through to arriving at their 'Desk'.
What parts of the Onboarding program can be gamified?	Traditionally, only the "social engagement" piece of an "Onboarding program" was gamified by companies. But in a virtual world, can more elements of the onboarding process be gamified?	Sky Media for example leverages game-based learning to ensure that by the time all new staff arrive, they are already familiar with many nuances of the organization, are well prepared and motivated for their new role.

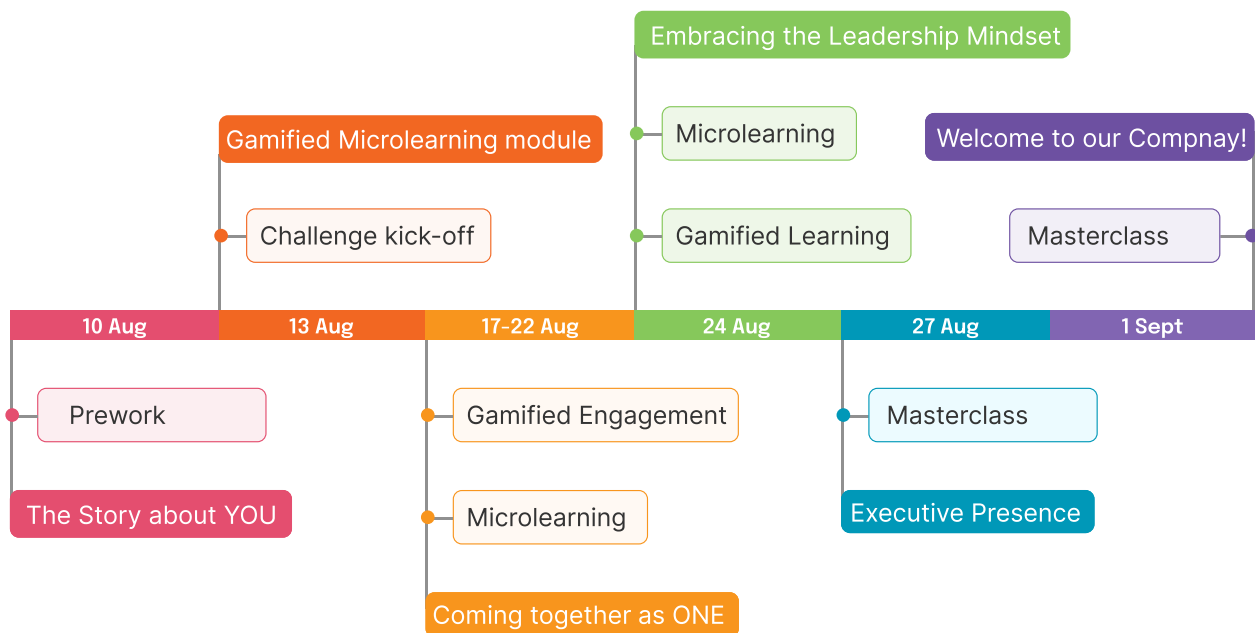| The Holy Cow	Traditional Approach	The New Paradigm
Social engagement has to be done face to face	Traditionally, once new employees join an organization and finish all joining formalities, some time between the first week and the fourth week, companies organized team get togethers which were gamified informal sessions run to build team bonding and connections between team members. But in a virtual world, can such social interaction be enabled?	Perfetti Van Melle for example moved the total social interaction and engagement of new hires to an online medium where through a gamified experience, participants get to know each other.
What parts of the Onboarding program can be gamified?	Traditionally the "learning" part of different onboarding programs were always conducted in face to face classroom sessions. But who says such learning cannot be delivered effectively through the virtual medium?	Virtual learning is not just webinars. It can be so much more. It can be delivered as engaging virtual workshops, convenient microlearning modules or engaging online business simulations. A global pharma major we work with for example has recently moved even its Leadership journeys to the virtual learning medium. The constraints are not with technology – it is with our thinking.

focus·u BE MORE!

Now that we have challenged all the holy cows, let us look at how a sample virtual onboarding journey for a cohort that has to join the company on the 1st of September would look like.

10 Aug	13 Aug	17-22 Aug	24 Aug	27 Aug	1 Sept

Gamified Microlearning module
- Challenge kick-off

Embracing the Leadership Mindset
- Microlearning
- Gamified Learning

Welcome to our Compnay!
- Masterclass

Prework
The Story about YOU

Gamified Engagement
Microlearning
Coming together as ONE

Masterclass
Executive Presence

10th August (Day minus 21): Welcome to our world!

The engagement with the new joiners starts well before the official joining date!

- First communication to all new joiners welcoming them to the company
- "The Stairway to Heaven" challenge is announced…. Different steps to be taken before they formally enter the portals of the company…. Are you ready?
- Here is the first challenge! – "What is your Story?"
- We share different templates. The future employees can choose any they want and tell us about themselves through a creative poster.
- The time starts now – and basis the quality of your answers, you may be put into different groups. Deadline for submission: 12th August.
- Lets get the excitement going……
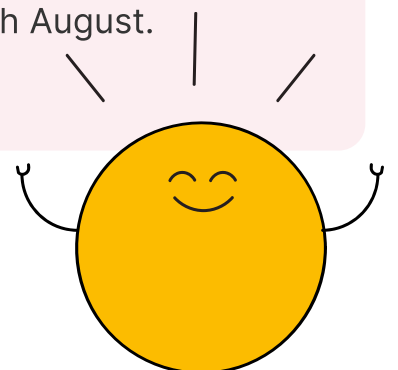
# 13th August (Day minus 18): The challenge begins!

- The group of 30 is divided into 5 smaller groups of 6 people randomly
- From now to 1st Sep is a virtual challenge between the five teams.
- "The Stairway to Heaven" challenge is kicked off on everybody's phones through an app.(App Snapshots attached)
- The challenge is set-up as a series of gamified challenges on different topics like:

  - Org values
  - Org structure
  - Trivia fun questions
  - Important org processes
  - Basic business etiquettes
  - Knowing future team members
  - Transition from Campus to Corporate
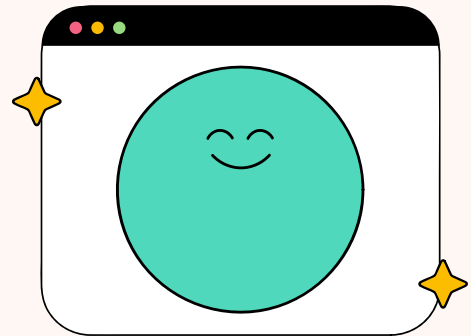
- **The key idea is to encourage learning through self-discovery and gamification**
- Multiple types of questions: Standard, Photo challenge, quiz challenge, Poll, Prediction, Fixed answer, Custom form challenge – are incorporated to keep the participants totally engaged
- Challenges are to be done individually – but scores add up for the team
- The "Stairway to heaven" challenge continues to run till 30th Aug. so participants can get to it at their convenience
- The leader board is visible to all – to foster a healthy mix of collaboration and competition
- To keep engagement going, some interesting milestones like "Coffee with the Director" is introduced – where the group logs in for an informal catch-up with the Director – online.
- A few elements from the real world, like say – "Starbucks vouchers" or "Amazon vouchers" are weaved in from time to time to keep the excitement going!

18th – 22nd August (Day minus nine): The Social Engagement

- One big challenge for new joiners coming in fresh from college is to learn to be team players rather than individualists (like in college days)
- Each team (of six) is hence put through a challenge that calls for them to collaborate
- The points earned as per the team performance – is added up to the leader board on the app and reflects in the "Stairway to heaven" challenge
- Teams are encouraged to form informal whatsapp groups to communicate / reach out to each other during the activity.
- **The key idea is to encourage new joiners to connect with each other even before joining the organization and start building informal networks**
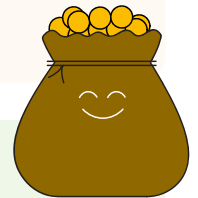
24th August (Day minus seven): The Learning Engagement

- Leadership is for everyone. It is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others.
- Many leading organizations are hence incorporating leadership modules in their onboarding programs as a way to set expectations for new joiners that each of them has the potential to be a leader that they need to fulfil.
- The iLead simulation is a self-paced simulation that puts participants in the role of a team manager, who is required to achieve business objectives by energizing and inspiring the team while responding to their needs. To succeed, participants are expected to use a variety of leadership styles in response to tough situations that emerge within the simulation.
- The self-paced session is supplemented by detailed individual reports that gives participants insights into their Dominant Style, Contextual Leadership Capability, Range of Leadership Styles, Consistency in Leadership Style and Team Performance under Leadership
- **The key idea is to drive a learning engagement with the new joiners that subtly sends the message that "Leadership is an expectation" even before they join the organization**

27th August (Day minus four): The Finale

- How do we build momentum and excitement with the new joiners just before they actually even arrive at Day 1?
- What if we get a real Rockstar to address them?
- Australian rockstar Adam Thompson is a natural Master of Stage who inspires his audiences to know their life's stages – and to own them. His sessions are infused with his infectious energy and pure zest for life, leaving audiences exhilarated and motivated to bring his words to life. With over 30 years in the entertainment industry under his belt, Adam is currently enjoying the most successful period of his career.
- Adam is also a highly regarded keynote speaker, MC and facilitator. He weaves his personal story into his presentations to engage, enlighten and inspire audiences on the topic of Executive Presence.
- It is a 60 minute session followed by a 30 minutes Q&A
- **The key idea of the session is to inspire participants towards more Executive Presence – and also to bring the whole onboarding journey (before formally starting with the company) to a rousing end, so that when participants finally join the company on day 1 – they are absolutely charged, excited and engaged**

1st September (Day zero): Welcome to our company!

- Formal virtual welcome by Leadership Team
- Leader board announcement and celebrations!
- Next Steps!
- **The key idea here is to ensure that on Day1 of their formal entry into the company – they are ready to hit the road in many ways – and super excited about joining the firm!**

So, what are you going to do differently about your Onboarding Program?

Let's talk
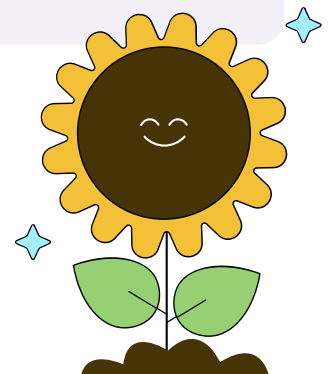
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- Conducting around 600 programs a year touching 40000 participants
- Facilitators with international experience & handling multi-cultural groups

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Some of our recent customer testimonials are updated at:

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A few clients with whom we have worked: