

EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING©

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Employee onboarding, also known as new-employee orientation or assimilation, is the process by which a practice acclimatizes its new employees. It is one of the keys for building employee loyalty and engagement, fostering a stronger team, and helping new employees become successful early in their careers with your practice. Onboarding includes the processes that allow new employees to learn about the practice, its structure and its vision, mission and values, as well as to complete new-employee paperwork relative to benefits and legal documents such as non-competes, at-will statements and employee handbooks. For some practices, the onboarding process consists of one or two days of activities; for others, this process that may involve a series of activities spanning one or many months. Veterinary practices have learned that onboarding is not merely a process for getting new employees to sign off on their new-hire paperwork. Rather, the process manifests value for the practice in various ways.

Engagement, loyalty, commitment

Studies have proven that employee engagement is partially determined by the new employee's treatment and orientation during the first 30–90 days of employment. A solid onboarding strategy will help build on that loyalty and help with retention and engagement issues throughout an employee's tenure.

Mission, vision and values

If employees are to contribute to the practice, then they must have a solid understanding of the practice's mission, vision and values and how these align with the employees' positions and departments.

Expectations and performance standards

“What is expected of me?” is one of the most important questions contributing to employee satisfaction. Reviewing work standards and expectations, along with how performance will be managed, measured and

reviewed, is critical for the new team member to better understand how s/he will fit into the practice.

Acceptable work behaviors and etiquette

What is the work culture and what standards of etiquette govern employees' everyday behavior? Is it OK to smoke on facility grounds? Can receptionists eat at their desks? Is there a dress code? Is it ok to joke around with clients? Discussing these, and many other written and unwritten rules, is a great way to avoid any misunderstandings and help new employees become productive team members.

Review and sign documents

New employees also must sign documents which may include W-4's (tax withholding), I-9 Employee Eligibility, benefits enrollment, legal (e.g., Handbook Acknowledgement of Receipt), and others.

Checklist of items to cover

The scope of information covered in the onboarding process will vary from practice to practice, but these are some of the basics.

- **Hospital Overview**
 - Company profile
 - Mission, vision, values of the practice
 - Practice culture
 - Uniform policy
 - Organization chart or listing of team members
 - Tour of facility
 - Hospital security information

- **Legal and Policy**
 - I-9 form
 - Personal information sheet, including emergency contacts
 - W-2 (tax withholding form)
 - Direct deposit form (if applicable)
 - Benefits enrollment forms (depending on eligibility)
 - Employee Handbook and/or significant policies (e.g., anti-harassment, non-discrimination, e-mail, dress code, telephone, etc.)
 - Employment-at-will
 - Non-compete agreement

- **Work Group**

- Meeting with supervisor
- Meeting with co-workers
- Job description
- Work expectations and standards (performance review form)
- Tools and supplies (business cards, e-mail account, keys, etc.)
- “How we do things” (informal issues for ensuring success)
- Cross-departmental communications issues
- Etiquette issues (eating at your desk, answering phones, personal items at work, etc.)

Duration

Many practices believe that onboarding is a one-day event in which the new employee signs all appropriate paperwork, reviews all pertinent information, receives the facility tour and is set to begin. Increasingly, however, practices realize the value of a thorough process as a strategy to ensure success, improve productivity and engagement, and, ultimately, enhance retention. To that end, practices are looking for ways to strengthen onboarding by making it a process and not an event.

Before the start date

Practices that tend to recruit long in advance of the employees’ start day may find that they want to begin the onboarding process after the offer is accepted but before the actual start date. In these situations, practices may want to develop strategies to link new employees to the practice. Examples include:

- Inviting the employee (and family) to the facility for a tour (may also include a house-hunting trip and community tour, if relocation is involved).
- Mailing information to the employee regarding the practice, including brochures, flyers, benefits information, etc.
- Sending a “care package” to the recruit (especially in the case of college students who may value a package of goodies during final exams). Care packages may include cookies, coffee, a coffee mug with the practice name and logo, etc.
- Matching the new employee with a mentor who connects with the new employee prior to the first day to answer basic questions (What is

the dress code? What can I expect on my first day? What time should I arrive? etc.).

First day

The first day will include delivering all the basic information, including a tour of the facility, introductions to key staff and review of all new employee paperwork. Because new employees will retain only a certain percentage of new information, it's important not to inundate them with too much and to reinforce information throughout the onboarding process.

First week

During the first week of employment, provide more detailed information for the new employee and reinforce key points delivered previously. The practice manager, the supervisor, or a senior employee should check in to determine how the new employee is adjusting and whether the practice is delivering on promises made. This should also serve as an early opportunity for the employee to air any concerns.

First month

During the first month of employment, continue to reinforce key issues and introduce the new employee to additional staff, including key members of the leadership team. Check in to determine whether the employee's questions and concerns are being addressed.

Three months

The onboarding process should continue by checking with the new employee to ensure that all necessary information has been shared and that the practice is addressing the employee's questions and concerns.

Roles and Responsibilities

While every practice is unique in how the onboarding responsibilities are shared, here are some general guidelines for splitting up onboarding duties:

- **Practice Manager or HR department:** Employee paperwork (forms, benefits, etc.); work hours; history and background of the practice; review of the organization chart; tour of the facility; discussions about the culture, goals and objectives;
- **Supervisor or Practice Owner:** Duties and responsibilities; work behaviors, standards and expectations; introductions to fellow team



- members and other members of the practice; review of other roles and relationships within the department;
- **Co-workers:** How the group works as a team; how to get things done; how to treat/respond to clients; how to treat patients;
 - **Practice Owner:** Mission, vision and values; strategic goals and objectives of the practice; high-level review of roles and responsibilities; description of practice culture.
 - **Mentor/buddy.** Introductions to fellow team members and others within the practice; review of informal rules and policies; answers to day-to-day questions.

Tailoring Onboarding to Different Audiences

All employees, no matter their level or status, will need some sort of onboarding process since this is the way in which a practice conveys rules and guidelines for all employees. However, the process may be modified to meet the differing needs of various groups of employees. For example, all supervisory and professional employees will need a review of not only the employee handbook and company policies and programs, but also information on how to administer or lead these various programs and policies.

Contract employees and consultants may have differing policies controlling their reporting of work hours, access to the premises and other unique issues the practice should address in an onboarding process. Similarly, interns, temporary workers or seasonal employees may have different benefits, rules of conduct, policies and programs that should be explained to them.

Persons with disabilities may also need information about accommodation options and how to arrange them with their supervisor, Practice Manager or Practice Owner.

Mentoring and buddy systems

Many practices offer a formal or informal mentoring or buddy system to support the new employee during the onboarding period. Mentors/buddies may be volunteers or selected by management. Generally, the role of the mentor or buddy is to offer the new employee a connection to someone who is not in a position of direct authority over the new hire (a supervisor) or in an official capacity (the Practice Manager) as a guide. The mentor may be responsible for such mundane tasks as directions to the restrooms or lunchroom or instructions on parking guidelines, or he or she may be



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involved in helping the employee understand the nuances of working in a practice (such as, what are the “hot buttons” for those in executive leadership).

Mentors/buddies may be teamed with the new employee for a day, a week, or a month or longer, depending on the length of the formal onboarding program.

Measuring Value

Especially in smaller practices, it is important to check back with recent new hires and ask open-ended questions to determine their level of satisfaction, not only with the onboarding process but with the practice as a whole.

Questions might include:

- How would you rate the onboarding process?
- What did we forget to include that would have been helpful to you as you began your new job?
- How would you rate each group’s performance in the onboarding process
 - your supervisor
 - your co-workers
 - practice manager
 - practice owner
 - your mentor/buddy
- Did we provide misinformation during the hiring process or in the onboarding process
- What do you need now to be effective in your job
- Is there anything else you would recommend for onboarding future new employees