Practical Onboarding: How to Quickly Develop BTS High Performing, Engaged Employees

When you hear the terms onboarding or employee orientation, do PowerPoint parades and never-ending forms flash through your mind? That’s a 20th-century experience that we don’t have to carry over into today’s innovative workplace.

In fact, onboarding can and should be one of the most exciting, dynamic and defining moments in an employee’s career. By providing new employees with the necessary skills to deliver on business outcomes, and a deep immersion in a company’s business, strategy and culture, onboarding provides acceleration. Said another way, successful onboarding means employees achieve higher levels of productivity faster.

How important is successful onboarding? Well, if you measure success in ramping up new hires quickly and cost effectively, and retaining them over time, the impact is staggering. Successful onboarding leads to accelerated productivity, improved retention and deeper bench strength, higher employee satisfaction, and engaged employees who execute on the organization’s strategic objectives and deliver results.

Onboarding Done Right is Worth Billions

A recent study by IDC found that U.S. and U.K. employees who do not fully understand their jobs, cost businesses an estimated $47 billion annually. The estimated cost of losing a valued new employee is between $15,000 – $40,000 and can be much higher for senior executives.¹

The report states that these losses occur as a result of “employees who misunderstood or misinterpreted or were misinformed of company policies, business processes, job function, or a combination of the three.”
The impact — positive or negative — of onboarding programs is felt immediately:

- 86% of new hires said they make the decision to stay or leave within six months (Aberdeen Group)
- 89% of new hires say don’t have optimum level of knowledge necessary to do their job (Aberdeen Group)
- 57% of frontline voluntary turnover comprised those with less than one year of experience (Workforce)
- New employees are 69% more likely to stay more than three years if they experienced well-structured onboarding

It is surprising that few companies give much thought to creating the right onboarding experience — and even fewer do it well.

**Onboarding is About Engagement and Delivering Essential Knowledge and Skills**

The most effective onboarding is about creating a strong emotional connection between the employee and employer. To establish a positive, long-term relationship, new employees learn about the company’s history and leadership, core values and future direction. During this process, they should be immersed in the company’s business and industry, so they have a clear understanding of how the enterprise creates value and differentiates itself from competitors. Most importantly, new employees should strongly recognize their role in the business.

Learning, however, is not conveyed through logoed t-shirts and coffee mugs and a lecture by a subject matter expert. Instead, employees engage with each other in small groups using customized business simulations, engage maps and connected online learning. Skilled facilitators, steeped in the company’s business, guide the discussion down a predictable path, creating a visceral experience that creates clear connections and impactful learning.

**The Foundation for Onboarding:**

BTS has created successful onboarding learning and execution journeys for dozens of leading corporations, including AT&T, CCE, Humana, Microsoft, Teva Pharmaceuticals and UPS. The foundation of a successful onboarding program includes:

1. Engaging employees early on in their employment, ideally on or even before their first day
2. Providing a structured approach to accelerate assimilation into new roles and company culture
3. Providing a framework for managers to create and manage position-specific onboarding plans to accelerate job effectiveness
4. Fostering basic business acumen around how the company operates, makes money and helping each employee connect specific job responsibilities to higher organizational goals and business outcomes

Pre-event activities set the stage for learning; post-event activities reinforce learning through rapid application on the job.
Onboarding Programs at a Glance

Put yourself in the shoes of a new employee for a moment. Would learning your company’s unique vocabulary of acronyms create a connection? Structuring and accelerating your acquisition of “tribal knowledge” will help an employee get past feeling like an outsider sooner, minimizing a significant source of disengagement. How about learning your company’s history and business model? It is surprising how many long-term employees have only a vague understanding of how their company operates beyond their department and how the enterprise makes money. But how will you be able to deliver business outcomes without understanding how your industry and company work?

While each BTS program is unique, the flow generally involves a series of engaging, blended learning experiences with leader involvement throughout the process. The following is an example of a 12-week process:

1. **Preparation: Leader Engagement; Portal and Online Community**
   It is mission critical that the manager of the new hire is involved in the onboarding process, providing context, coaching and follow-up support. Through our Advantage Way process, we provide tools to facilitate leader learner engagement. A learning portal houses the tools and provides an important online community for the new hire.
   
   • Our history: The company’s industry, history and unique values
   • Our current reality: The company’s core processes that create value for customers
   • Our exciting future: The company’s vision and strategy, and individual action planning on how to align with the company’s priorities throughout the onboarding experience

2. **Core Orientation Workshop:**
   One- or two-day classroom experience leveraging Engage Maps accelerates the new hire’s assimilation into the company, business and culture:
   
   • Our history: The company’s industry, history and unique values
   • Our current reality: The company’s core processes that create value for customers
   • Our exciting future: The company’s vision and strategy, and individual action planning on how to align with the company’s priorities throughout the onboarding experience
3. **Online Know-the-Business Program: Important Learning of the Company’s Finances, Strategic Priorities, Customer Value Drivers and More:**

In the month following the core program, participants gain access to two or three online Know-the-Business Programs that can be completed by individuals or teams of learners. The programs build financial acumen and strategic thinking in context of the company’s business and strategic priorities. Each module is customized to the client’s business and takes approximately two hours to complete. These modules are highly interactive and provide community for new hires to share experiences and best practices.

4. **Company Business Simulation:**

Approximately eight weeks after completion of the core program and after the Know-the-Business Modules, participants reconvene for a half, one- or one-and-a-half-day Board Simulation program to build business acumen and strategic thinking. This program leverages the BTS Custom Business Simulation and Company Presentations.

5. **Ongoing Leader/Manager Meetings:**

Post-program, participants meet with their leader to share action plans and receive ongoing coaching to ensure successful execution back on the job. Tools available on the portal and online community support this process.

The following elements are incorporated into a typical program:
- Messaging from company leaders, through written materials or video
- Industry and company timelines
- The structure of the company with an understanding of how strategic acquisitions have contributed to the whole organization
- Industry and company vocabulary
- Personal and company value exploration
- Customer profiles or case studies
- Product and/or service examples
- Core process mapping
- Key financial metrics
- Company mission, strategy and goals
- Action planning

**Case in Point: Teva Pharmaceuticals Uses Onboarding to Convey the Legend and the Promise**

Teva Pharmaceuticals is the world’s leading generic pharmaceutical company. But how can an organization built through acquisitions better connect new and acquired employees to the company and its goals? Working closely with Teva, BTS created Teva Foundations, a one-day, three-map learning experience for all employees. All new employees participate in Teva Foundations within their first six months with the expectation that they will achieve the following goals:

1. Gain an appreciation for the history of Teva and the importance of a unified vision/strategy for continued success
2. Understand that there are both internal and external customers, and improvement in how they service these customers has an impact on company performance
3. Gain an appreciation that their daily roles and responsibilities contribute to achieving greater Teva market goals
4. Understand at a high level how the business operates and how Teva is helping to transform the U.S. healthcare system
5. Gain an understanding about the Teva value/supply chain, and how its inter-relationships either accelerate or impede achievement of results, and what role individuals play in adding value to the system

Onboarding Can Drive Value at Any Organization

Whether it’s through new hiring, acquisition or reorganization, effective onboarding is critical to provide employees with an overview of the organization, the people and the culture, and to expose them to the resources and tools they need to succeed. Hiring new employees is an investment and establishing a formal onboarding process is essential. Whether the company has 100 people or 100,000, the lessons are the same. By coupling necessary skills with an emotional commitment to sustaining the company and its culture, onboarding builds short- and long-term company value.

About BTS

BTS focuses on the people side of strategy, working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results. At our core, we believe people learn best by doing. For 30 years, we’ve been designing fun, powerful experiences™ that have profound and lasting impact on people and their careers. We inspire new ways of thinking, build critical capabilities and unleash business success. It’s strategy made personal.

For more information, please visit www.bts.com.

1 $37bn: Counting the Cost of Employee Misunderstanding, Cognisco White Paper, June 2008
2 Corning Glass study referenced in "Creative New Employee Orientation Programs" Doris Sims, 2001