5 TIPS
FOR VIRTUAL EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING

If making a successful hire in a candidate's market is like dating, failing to provide an adequate onboarding program is like a couple skipping the wedding and honeymoon and barreling straight into marriage—with heavy debt, crazy in-laws, and somebody who snores.

Successful employee onboarding saves time, makes for better employees, increases company loyalty and coworker collaboration, and aids in retention. How important is great employee onboarding? One study found employees were 69% more likely to stay three years if they experienced great employee onboarding.

Onboarding has always been important, but it becomes even more important in a virtual setting. The effort to attract talent is wasted if the candidate never makes it to the first day on the job. To make sure your 'yes' offers turn into true employees, implement these five tips.

> " Employee retention starts the day you make the offer, if not before. If you don't want to be jilted between offer acceptance and start-date, make sure you have a great onboarding program."

TIP #1:
Implement Pre-Boarding

This is one of the biggest issues and major pain points in the hiring process today. Post-COVID, more recruiters are reporting issues with candidates accepting offers but then walking away from the position before their start date. A verbal or even written employment agreement may not be enough to retain a candidate in a 100% virtual environment. It's critical that your employee onboarding process begins the moment you present an offer to a candidate and continues through the first year of employment. Without any face-to-face interaction that leads to an emotional connection, it is much easier for candidates to leave you ghosted. They've moved onto a different opportunity and you're left searching through candidate profiles again.

Sometimes organizations confuse onboarding and orientation. Orientation is a specific program established to orient a new hire to the office. It's a part of the onboarding process—but just one part. The pre-boarding process actually begins even before you extend an offer to a candidate. Think about your application and interview process and consider how to incorporate elements that foster a sense of identity, belonging, and company connection. That may mean panel interviews with future coworkers—who then continue to connect with the candidate as soon as they accept an employment offer. Maybe it's introducing a candidate to a company public service project or community cause, and then giving them an

opportunity to stay connected to the charitable cause during the pre-employment phase. The more meaningful interactions a candidate has before their start date, the more invested they will be in making the transition a success.

Day One ready technology is often a struggle for cleared and intel positions. This is one area where COVID has helped. If your teams are utilizing video or chat platforms for informal team chats or check-ins, consider inviting current candidates to participate, even before their official start date. Scheduling a virtual happy hour or team-building activity? Allow onboarding candidates to participate.

EXPERT TIP:

Make sure new candidates know which pre-boarding activities are optional, and which are required. The idea is to present a variety of ways to engage, but not to force a high degree of 'mandatory fun' before a candidate has even started.

TIP #2:
Think Organizational, Technical, Social

Ron Carucci, co-founder of Navalent, wrote about the importance of employee onboarding for the Harvard Business Review, and described the three-prong approach to employee onboarding: the organizational, the technical, and the social.

Organizational

In a virtual environment, it's even more important for new employees to be given an understanding of the organizational culture. Make sure org charts, employee resource groups, and mission statements are provided with pre-boarding materials. Give your new employees a vision for how the company operates so they know where they fit.

Technical

We're not talking about technology (we get to that later), but we're talking about understanding the technical aspects of the new position. This is particularly important for cleared professionals, who typically report mission being one of the primary motivators for seeking out a new position. If you lose a potential employee during the onboarding process, they were likely lured by either a higher salary or a more compelling mission. Don't let them forget about the technical aspects that attracted them to the job.

Take a tip from the OPSEC playbook and 'read-in' your new hires when it comes to the technical mission. Don't share classified details before they're on a cleared facility, but do let them know what programming languages, technical skills, or other unclassified details you can share. The more vested a candidate is in the technical aspects of the job before they begin, the less likely they will be to ghost.

Social

Employees might come for the money and the mission, but they'll stay for the boss and the team. Start building community for new hires laterally and horizontally long before Day One. Schedule a video meet-and-greet with a new program manager or supervisor if it wasn't a part of the initial hiring process (and spring for the coffee). Invite new hires to social gatherings organized by team members and encourage team members to connect with new hires online and email them to e-introduce themselves. If your company offers employee resource groups, introduce a new hire to those opportunities early on. Establishing community can come more slowly in a virtual environment. Don't overwhelm a new hire with so many social opportunities that they start to stress about how they'll perform the technical components. But do provide a variety of opportunities to engage socially with both formal and informal methods.
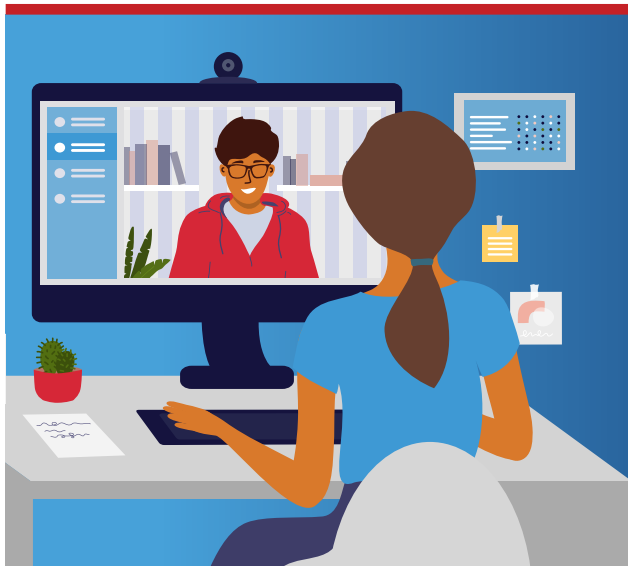
Your Virtual Buddy

Employment buddy programs are pretty ubiquitous, but a virtual environment makes them even more important. A good buddy will help fill in the gaps that occur in your virtual onboarding process. Make the buddy the person the individual can ask all of the questions they're afraid to ask their boss or HR. Try to pick someone who knows the new hire's area of business, but who isn't in their natural chain of command—that makes those kinds of questions easier to ask.

TIP #3:
Mix Your Media

Zoom fatigue is real. When virtually onboarding a new employee, there can be an impulse to create a robust agenda or fill the first days with nonstop meetings. Organizing opportunities for new hires to virtually meet new coworkers is great but avoid scheduling back-to-back meetings and jam-packed agendas. A full 9-5 onboarding schedule may work for in-person training, but it doesn't work in a virtual setting, where meeting and laptop fatigue are real. Worse, if you pack the first days with continuous meetings, you may set the stage for a new hire to think that's the only way you do business.

The perception can be that a video conference is second best to an in-person meeting. But if that onboarding meeting could have been an email—

maybe just leave it as an email rather than trying to schedule a video call. Pre-recorded video training can get a bad rap. However, a well-produced, on-demand video may be a great way for employees to get required information on their own time. The key is options and diversity. Try to make the initial days and candidate orientation opportunities a mix of live video, on-demand training, and yes—free time. Encourage team members to just reach out naturally over email or via phone—just like the office fly-bys that happen in-person.

TIP #4:
Onboard for a Year, Not a Day

Employee retention is as critical as attraction, and an onboarding program that leaves candidates behind after orientation is paving the way for a new hire to become a short hire—particularly in a virtual environment. Underwhelming onboarding also sets a candidate up for failure when they come face to face with the client. A successfully onboarded candidate should be ready to represent the organization and the program right out of the gate. According to research by Aberdeen, a provider of behavior-based sales solutions, only 37% of companies extend their onboarding processes beyond a month, with 15% of companies giving only one day to onboarding. Wondering how to extend your onboarding program for a full year? Here are some ideas:

Month 1

- 15-minute virtual coffee chat with all team members
- Send welcome team video
- Welcome snack or swag box
- Other formal trainings (HR systems, payroll, etc)
- Add employee to Teams, Slack and other technology channels
- 30-day formal check in with manager

Month 2

- 15-minute coffee chat with managers of other teams
- Meet with one member of executive team
- Consider gamification for on-demand onboarding materials: How many questions can new hires get right based on on-demand videos or handbook materials? Provide prizes for correct responses!
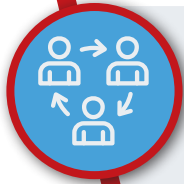
Month 3

- Meet with one member of executive team
- Formal 3-month check in—begin alluding to employee growth, perhaps offering the opportunity to connect with someone who previously worked in the same role but has moved vertically or laterally within the company.
- Coworker scavenger hunt or team building activity—get creative, but make sure to recognize the new hire.

Month 6

- Meet with one member of executive team
- Provide a 'how are we doing' survey of the onboarding program.

- Team lunch (on the company dime!) with current team.

Month 7

- Survey follow-up. Have HR connect with the candidate to ask: What have you liked? What would you change?

- Virtual team building activity—the Spy Museum has a 'Bonding, Team Bonding' activity that's great for cleared teams.

Month 8

- Virtual team-building event

- Consider opportunities for lateral shadowing or cross-training with different teams.

Month 12

- Provide a 1-year wrap-up survey, asking what was done well and what could be done better.
- Happy 1-year virtual happy hour!

- Create opportunities for employee to be a buddy to newer employees.

Spread Out the Onboarding Process Wherever Possible

The average new hire has 54 activities to complete during their onboarding experience. The sheer number of activities could slow down an employee's ramp-up period, which could make it tough for them to learn necessary skills and tasks related to their jobs. Remember, if an onboarding program hampers the employee's ability to perform their job, it will likely cause stress, anxiety, and self-doubt. That's a surefire recipe for early turnover.

TIP #5:
Get Your Technical Ducks in a Row
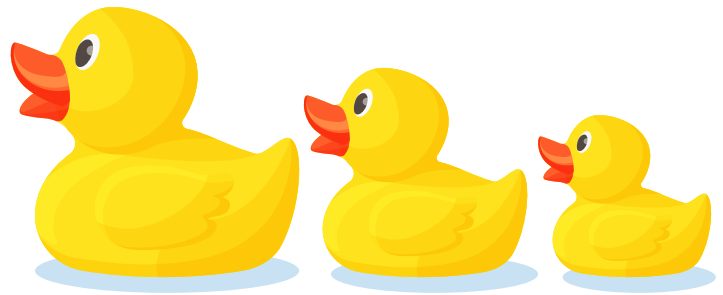
Technology doesn't need to be perfect, but it does need to be functional. This is where COVID-19 offers opportunity for improvement for many cleared employees. Getting access to classified networks is often a notoriously painful and slow process. Technological availability on Day One is rarely a workforce reality. But with the coronavirus taking many cleared contractors and government employees out of the SCIF and into the home office, there are new opportunities for employees to be connected immediately.

Make sure unclassified laptops arrive before a new hire's start date. Consider other tech an employee might need such as phone, extra monitors, and computer accessories. And make sure your service team is available to assist. Don't make your new employees go it alone when it comes to getting new tech up and running.

Virtual onboarding is a challenge, but it doesn't need to be a disaster. Going remote is an opportunity to innovate and—particularly in the cleared space—to enhance onboarding and strengthen employee connections to a new employer.

> **A lack of technology support can undermine all of your onboarding efforts. Don't let this happen.**

Access to a Safe and Secure Work Environment

Ensuring that employees have access to a safe and secure workplace when they're unable to work from the office can have a positive impact on long-term retention. Be sure to have technology measures in place to keep employees productive, whether working from the office or at home. This will ensure a positive impact on company culture, employee mobility, and retention.

CLEARANCEJOBS HAS ALL THE TOOLS TO HELP YOU ATTRACT CLEARED TALENT.

DISCOVER AND PIPELINE

ClearanceJobs allows you to search its database using 14 separate filter criteria, including clearance level, geography, and salary. Intellisearch™ is powered by the same engine used by the intelligence community and takes advantage of intuitive searching to find candidates based on concepts—not keywords. Users can flag and make notes on candidate profiles, which are only viewable to the user and/or colleagues. Within the dashboard, users can view personalized metrics based on site activity, profile views, and connections, in addition to receiving additional candidate recommendations.

DIVERSITY CANDIDATES

Users can locate diversity candidates through group searches or keywords. The database has five dedicated veteran and wounded warrior groups allowing recruiters to broadcast hiring needs to the 25K+ group members or connect directly one-on-one with candidates. The keywords search within the database hosts phrases like "wounded warrior", "10 points", "30 percent", or "disabled." When users combine these key words for diversity with descriptions for ideal applicants, the search is narrowed to identify the best candidates.

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