

Executive On-Boarding



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e work with many different types of clients ... Fortune 500, small privately held firms and everything in-between. Our clients call us to find executive and managerial talent. They have a problem or opportunity and expect us to find someone who can make a difference.

Regardless of the company size it's our experience that you want results and the faster the better. You've invested time and money to find and hire the best of the best. Now you're counting on your new leaders to drive critical business results.

One question we ask our clients ... What are you doing to ensure their success?
One question we ask the newly hired executive ... Do you have a plan for your first few days, weeks and even months on the job?

While our questions may seem fairly straightforward we know the answers are deceptively complex. In fact the statistics are staggering. Without effective organizational transition support, up to 60% of new leaders have significant difficulty adjusting to their new role over the first 18 months. They have difficulty effectively integrating into their organizations to make critical business decisions and execute key strategies. Some are blocked by the organization's cultural barriers, while others struggle with building their teams to reach peak performance goals.

This information report highlights practical solutions to effectively assimilate your newly hired executive. Our focus is on the small to mid-size organizations.

From our experience we know two things:

- Most small to mid-size organizations normally do not have an organized executive on-boarding process – too costly or too time consuming are the usual reasons.
- The impact of a “failed” hire has a greater impact on this size firm than on a larger size firm.

The 5 Practical Lessons to successfully On-Board a newly hired Executive

1. Buy-In is Critical
2. Have a Plan and Execute It
3. Master the 3 “A’s” – Anticipation, Adjustment, Accountability
4. Treat this effort as an Investment
5. Your newly hired Executive must also take ownership

One question we ask our clients ...

What are you doing to ensure their success?

One question we ask the newly hired executive ...

Do you have a plan for your first few days, weeks and even months on the job?



What is your experience when you hired a new executive or senior manager?

Do they “hit the ground running” and make a strong first and lasting impression?

Or do they struggle and seem ineffective causing doubts about their leadership and skill set?

We’ve talked to many people over the years that fit into one or more of the following categories:

Jumping the Gun: New leaders often charge in too fast, and assume everything is “broken” instead of identifying small, quick wins to build positive momentum.

Leader Arrogance: Some newly placed leaders don’t take the time to understand their new organization, and pay respect to its history and successes.

Building Relationships: Many new executives do not invest proactively in building relationships with key stakeholders at every level.

Leadership Style: New leaders may not adapt their leadership style to fit their new team and organizational culture.

Clarity of Expectations: New leaders often misread and misjudge the dynamics, expectations and requirements of their new organization and role.

Cultural Misalignment: Many new leaders don’t invest the time to learn about the organization’s culture, systems and political landscape and are unable to make an impact.

Lesson 1 – Buy-In is Critical

It starts with a purpose. You either know it conceptually or you’ve been burnt by a new hire that just doesn’t seem to work out even though they interviewed extremely well. You want the new person to be productive quickly...very quickly.

So you have the motivation. Next step is to have the buy-in of the senior team. Without the buy-in your efforts will be challenged as too costly, time consuming, wasteful etc. Once you go down this slippery slope you might as well forego everything else.

How do you get buy-in? Run the numbers. A failed hire costs x where x is defined as the recruiting cost including your time, salary and benefits paid, opportunity costs for lack of productivity etc. Or show the positives. Efficient start. Understands our culture. Gets buy-in from colleagues. Builds an effective team. Makes sales. Reduces cost. Finds new markets.

Does an effective EOB guarantee success?

No it doesn’t but experience from a number of firms show that it reduces assimilation time and shows the new hire that the firm is serious about their start and success. There is a synergistic effect on personal and group productivity.

David Novick, Vice President, Human Resources of David’s Bridals says: “Many executives... find it hard to believe our company takes so much time to provide an extensive, comprehensive on-boarding program. Many of them start out by trying to have an immediate impact, but over time, they learn to appreciate the investment we make in them.”

Lesson 2 – Have a Plan and Execute It

That assumes you have a plan. The firms with an EOB process in place have well-defined plans. In fact their plans are developed and refined well in advance of a newly hired executive.

Without a defined plan you are destined to failure or at best mediocrity. Too many firms on-boarding process is defined as get the new person on payroll, show them the restroom, let them read some manuals, and get them logged into the computer system. Perhaps even the perfunctory walk-around to meet other employees.

The better firms have a plan tied into objectives. Each objective is linked to a business objective with the overall goal to help the executive become fully versed in the culture, business dynamics and even vocabulary of the organization.

Lesson 3 – Master the 3 “A’s” – Anticipation, Adjustment, Accountability

You might have the best plan and intentions but you need fluidity to make it all work. Situations change. Perhaps the new person is not getting up to speed fast enough for your tastes. What do you do?

We recommend that you develop contingent plans to account for different scenarios that might happen. If you only expect the best case you will be unlikely to handle the challenges ahead. Have you ever seen a new executive who is asked to prove himself or herself before being organizationally accepted, has trouble getting their team’s respect and attention, or is having interpersonal issues? You have to expect and overcome some obstacles to make the new relationship work.

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Executive On-Boarding for too many years has been cast aside as something nice to do but not required. Assimilation programs and processes have typically been targeted for individual contributors and middle managers.

It's only been recently that some firms have seen the benefit of a comprehensive, well thought out Executive On-Boarding process.

The results have been there. From our vantage point we have a pretty good idea on what lies ahead for a newly hired executive.

We encourage our clients to keep us in the formal loop to help in the transition. Even for those firms that don't have a structured EOB, we serve as a consultant on transition efforts and keep in touch with the hiring manager and the newly hired executive on a regular basis especially during the first six months.



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And you have to adjust your on-boarding plans as the situation changes. A plan that is too rigid or doesn't take into account reality is not going to be effective. Don't be afraid to admit errors. Learn and move on.... And quickly.

Finally be accountable for your decisions and step back and assess. In order for an on-boarding process to be effective you need to learn from prior mistakes. Don't pass blame. You'll be better off by learning now and so will the next executive hire.

Lesson 4 – Treat this effort as an Investment

Too many firms, especially the small and medium size ones, are troubled by the time and cost it takes to get an effective on-boarding process in place. The rationale is that the executive at this level should be able to assimilate essentially on his or her own. Organizational resources are better spent on other priorities like computer systems or marketing brochures.

In reality you need good technology, marketing etc. but at the core you need leadership. When you go to market and find a person who can help your firm reach its goals, then you need to look at the person as an asset. Your job is to secure, develop, grow and protect that asset such that you maximize "it's" potential.

Everyone understands this concept at some level. But too many people still get caught up in language that signals their true feelings. Talent management and development, including on-boarding, is an INVESTMENT. If you consider it an expense you will not spend the appropriate resources to develop the asset. Novick of David's Bridals says, "*There is a correlation between successful on-boarding, performance and retention.*"

You need to figure out how much of an investment you want to make on any asset and the payback you expect to realize.

Lesson 5 – Your newly hired Executive must also take ownership

As much as you want to control and manage the process, the new hire plays the most important role. Your new person should be, at this level, confident and assured, to take on the challenging responsibilities. They should have their own plan prepared so the real key is the integration of the executive and company's on-boarding plans.

The time to check on this item starts during the interview process. You should get a clear and complete assessment of the executive's plans if/when they come on board and from a behavioral standpoint assess what they did in their former jobs.

Prior to the start date the executive and the hiring manager should sit down and discuss the on-boarding process, clarify and set expectations, and set up a joint on-boarding plan. This simple step will eliminate initial confusion and signal the start of dialogue.

Once the executive has started work you need to monitor the plans and expect progress to plan. Both you and the executive are in this process together.