

5 Common Onboarding Mistakes to Avoid



New hires are a major investment. It can cost as much as **\$28,000 to hire a new employee**, and that doesn't even include soft costs like accounting for time-to-productivity or time spent on recruiting. So how do you make sure that investment is worth it? It all starts with **onboarding**.

On average, you only have **44 days** to convince a new hire to stay. This makes a good onboarding program crucial to employee retention—if onboarding falls flat, you have very little time to overcome a poor first impression.

To turn your onboarding process from a liability into an asset, there's a few simple fixes you can start with. Read on to learn about the most common onboarding mistakes and how you can make changes for the better.

Free: The Definitive Guide to Onboarding

Hiring a new employee is expensive and time-consuming—and what happens during onboarding can make or break long-term retention. In this in-depth guide, you'll learn actionable tips for creating better first days.

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The 5 Most Common Onboarding Mistakes

1. WASTING THE FIRST DAY ON PAPERWORK

A lackluster first day on the job often starts with a thick folder of paperwork and a company-branded pen. For some organizations, onboarding is synonymous with filling out forms. And while those forms are necessary, they don't need to consume the entire onboarding process.

If you wait to begin onboarding until your new hire's start date, you'll be spending most of the first day on paperwork, and your new hire won't have much time to get acquainted with their role. Not only does this stretch out the length of onboarding for new employees—**1 in 3 new hires** express frustration over **long onboarding processes**.

But it's also an administrative headache. Tracking down signatures, searching for documents, and uploading important information last-minute puts an excessive burden on your HR team and increases the risk of costly errors.

Try This Instead:

Preboarding is an easier and more efficient way to deal with the paperwork. Once a new hire has officially accepted their position, send them digital versions of all the onboarding forms you need them to fill out, and request that they complete the forms before their start date. This helps you stay organized and allows new hires to spend their first day on more meaningful onboarding experiences.

2. INFORMATION OVERLOAD

As bad as it is to miss important details during onboarding, it can be just as bad to try to stuff too much in. If you attempt to cover an excessive amount of content within just one day, your new hires can suffer from cognitive overload.

Cognitive load, the amount of new information our brains can process at one time, has a huge impact on our ability to learn. For example, if you make new hires sit through an entire day of presentations, they'll eventually stop absorbing the content—this is called **information paralysis**.

The challenges of cognitive load put onboarding leaders in a tricky position. You want to share information at a pace people

can actually process, but a lengthy onboarding program draws on time resources and becomes inconvenient for both new hires and your HR team.

Try This Instead:

Most new hires like a bit of ramp-up time, but they also want their onboarding to be efficient—56% of new employees prefer onboarding to take one to two days. With that in mind, aim for about two days of structured onboarding, with the densest topics evenly distributed between the days.

Beyond the structured all-day onboarding, give new hires an onboarding roadmap (a schedule of trainings and check-ins) for at least their first week, so they have a clear plan for getting up-to-speed on information not covered in the first few days.

Free Template: BambooHR Onboarding Roadmap

Set new hires up for success with this four-week onboarding schedule. This customizable template suggests weekly milestones to help you make your new employees' highway to success an easy road.

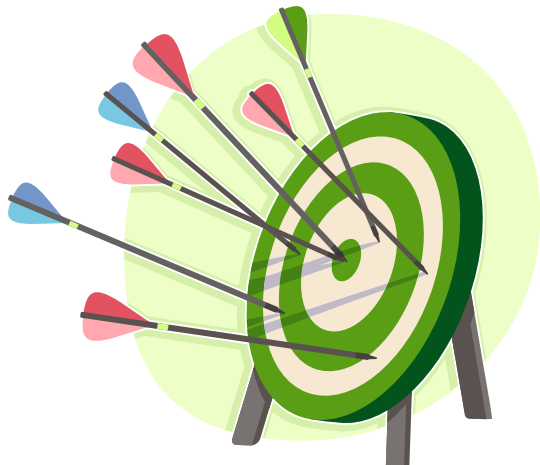
[GET THE TEMPLATE](#) →

3. NO CLEAR GOALS

If your onboarding doesn't include any goal setting or a discussion of expectations, you're essentially throwing new hires into the deep end, expecting them to figure out their jobs through trial and error.

A lack of **goals** or key performance indicators (KPIs) can make new hires less confident and effective in their roles. From a retention perspective, that 44-day decision window is going to be filled with insecurities about performance and miscommunication with supervisors, leaving a new employee disheartened and more likely to quit.

Unclear expectations will also hurt engagement and productivity in the long-run, with employees never fully understanding their roles and responsibilities. In fact, **over half of all US workers** don't know what's expected of them, according to Gallup (unsurprisingly, BambooHR research finds about half of US workers are **also interested in finding new jobs**).



Try This Instead:

During onboarding, ask supervisors to work with their new hires to set goals for the first 30, 60, and 90 days. These milestones will help a new hire gradually ramp up to meet the typical KPIs for their role. For effective goal-setting, encourage supervisors to identify goals that are realistic for the timeframe and align with a new hire's responsibilities. For example, if a role is more project-based, a new hire's 30-day goal should be to finish a project independently, rather than to finish a certain number of projects within the first month.

4. NEGLECTING COMPANY CULTURE

You might think you've checked all the onboarding boxes: You've done the paperwork, finished the required training, and gave the new hire a copy of the employee handbook. But while you've done everything you need to do, your onboarding is missing a crucial factor that determines employee success: **company culture**.

Almost all (96%) new hires want to hear about a company's mission and values. Emphasizing culture also helps with retention—according to **SHRM**, employees who like their company's culture are 83% less likely to look for a new job. On the other hand, if your onboarding doesn't introduce new hires to your company's culture and values, they may feel apathetic to their roles and disconnected from the workplace community.

Try This Instead:

Welcoming **new hires into your company culture** is worth the time and effort. Talk to new hires about your core values. If you're hiring large groups of people at once, this may look like a monthly or quarterly presentation. However, if you're onboarding one-on-one, this could become an informal conversation on what makes your company culture special.

Aside from educating new hires on values, an easy way to introduce culture is through peer connections, such as assigning onboarding buddies or hosting a welcome lunch. **Connecting employees with their coworkers** is a good thing to do in its own right—**loneliness has become a public health concern**—and it allows new hires to experience company culture firsthand.

5. MISSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK

Even with a well-organized, thorough onboarding program, you could still be falling short if you aren't taking advantage of feedback opportunities. Giving and receiving feedback ensures that onboarding is having the intended impact.

For new hires, **receiving feedback** helps them know how they're doing early on. If that initial check-in isn't part of a new hire's onboarding plan, their supervisor might not take the time to give feedback until much later, leaving new hires on their own for those first few months.

While onboarding might seem a little premature for giving feedback, it's never too early to promote employee engagement with some praise and constructive advice. One Gallup study found that **80% of employees** who had received meaningful feedback within the past week were highly engaged in their work.

Feedback is also essential for **measuring the success** of your onboarding program. New hires could be loving—or hating—onboarding, and you'll never know if you don't ask.

Try This Instead:

Incorporate feedback practices throughout onboarding. To make sure new hires are getting **performance feedback**, ask supervisors to schedule a check-in as part of the onboarding roadmap. This check-in should take place a week or two past the start date, and it can be an opportunity to discuss goals, see how the new hire is adjusting to their role, and give feedback on their work so far.

To collect feedback from new hires, send out an **anonymous survey** at the end of onboarding. If you want to get a higher response rate, consider offering an incentive for filling it out, like a small gift card.

You should also gather informal feedback throughout onboarding—asking if things make sense or checking on how new hires feel is a great way to open up communication and make the onboarding process more dynamic.

Free Resource: BambooHR Onboarding Checklist

Create better first days with BambooHR's onboarding checklist. We've broken down essential tasks for HR pros, IT managers, managers, and peers so your new hires will hit the ground running.

[GET THE CHECKLIST](#) →

Fixing Your Onboarding Problems: Where To Start

GATHER FEEDBACK

If you feel like your onboarding process isn't working, you need to ask why. If you aren't already collecting feedback on onboarding, now's the time to start. **Send out an anonymous survey to recent hires** to get feedback on what they did or didn't like about their experiences. You can also reach out to stakeholders such as supervisors, HR, and IT to find out what they need from onboarding.

After you review survey results and anecdotal **feedback** from colleagues, you should be able to identify the biggest pain points that need to be addressed with a new onboarding program.

BALANCE FORMAL AND INFORMAL ONBOARDING

Onboarding happens in formal ways, such as in workshops, scheduled milestones, and assigned onboarding buddies. But onboarding can also take place informally, with new hires learning on the job and asking questions as issues arise.

If your onboarding process is taking too long, or on the other hand, has a lot of gaps, consider how you can balance formal and informal onboarding. Formal onboarding is necessary for tracking important paperwork and making sure new hires have a consistent time to productivity.

However, not every detail of a job can be explained through formal onboarding, and it makes sense to leave some room for organic learning experiences. Categorizing your onboarding needs as either formal or informal will give you a better sense of how you should allocate time and resources in your new onboarding strategy.

GET THE RIGHT TOOLS

A lot of your onboarding outcomes will come down to the tools you use. If your current HR tech is slow or difficult to use, consider looking for an all-in-one HR information system (HRIS). An **all-in-one HRIS** brings all your HR tools into one platform, allowing you to **streamline onboarding** and avoid any double data entry.

As you shop for a new HRIS, look for a platform with comprehensive, easy-to-use onboarding tools, such as preboarding templates, automated emails, document management, and task tracking. You should also prioritize a platform that includes **payroll** and **benefits administration**, so all the important information you collect during onboarding can flow straight into your compensation process.



Free Resource: The HRIS Buyer's Checklist

When you're shopping for an HRIS, it's important to choose the solution that's right for your business. Our checklist will help you accurately identify your needs, loop in the right stakeholders, and compare your options.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#) →

How AI is Changing Onboarding

AI has arrived to the world of HR, and in the case of onboarding, it's making a significant difference. AI can automate the more tedious aspects of onboarding and make the process more accessible to new hires.

As AI becomes more and more prevalent in HR, it's essential to know how to leverage these tools while keeping a human touch. Here's some examples on how you might effectively use AI in onboarding.

Discover the Power of AI in HR: AI Starter Course

This free course helps you understand how AI is transforming HR—from speeding up recruitment and payroll to enhancing employee satisfaction and performance.

[SIGN UP FREE](#) →

AUTOMATED MESSAGES AND DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

AI tools make preboarding easier than ever. With automated messaging tools and document management, most preboarding tasks can happen without you lifting a finger. And when your day isn't filled with manually sending reminder emails, you get to give more complex onboarding issues the attention they deserve.

TRANSLATION

Do you have a multilingual workforce? AI translation tools can help ensure your new hires receive important onboarding materials (such as safety trainings or legal forms) in their preferred written language.

Just remember: AI can't replace the value of human communication. Any translations of particularly sensitive information should be checked by a real person, and if verbal communication is an important element of your workplace, you may benefit from using an in-person translator in addition to AI tools.

CHATBOTS FOR FAQs

With an **AI chatbot** connected to your HRIS, you can provide new hires with instant answers to their most common questions about compensation, company policies, and more. By empowering new hires to access information for themselves, they can become more confident and productive, and you get extra time to focus on the bigger HR picture—it's a win-win!

ANALYZE YOUR ONBOARDING DATA

By leveraging AI, the onboarding data you never had time to look at can finally be put to use. AI can conduct in-depth data analytics and offer you actionable insights. For example, you can use AI to generate qualitative summaries of large batches of open-response feedback, so you can get an accurate picture of how new hires really feel about onboarding.

Give Onboarding an Upgrade

Onboarding is the foundation of the employee experience, and to make it count, you need the right tools. With a powerful platform like BambooHR®, onboarding goes from being a chore to being a major win, setting your people up for success from day one.

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