

# The new rules of employee onboarding



6 real-life best practices from  
leading hybrid companies



A co-creation with Sophie Dopheide  
from The Culture School

**workwize**

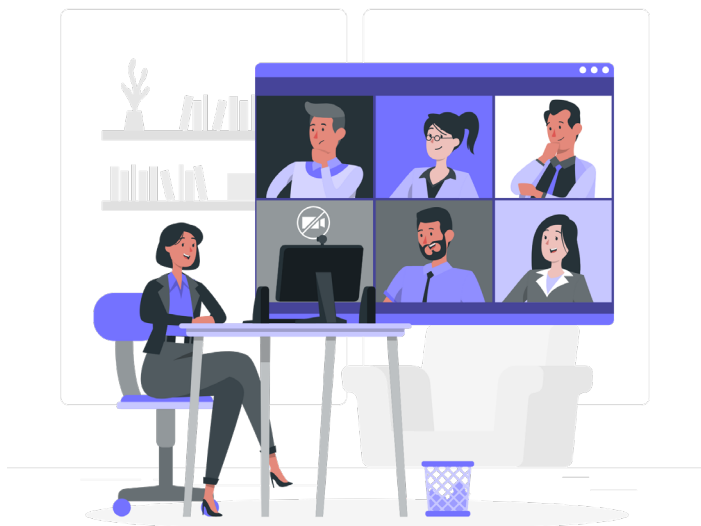
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# Introduction

Successful onboarding is a key part of any organizational management strategy. And despite the endless benefits the new hybrid work model has brought, it has also created a new wave of challenges when it comes to onboarding effectively. Forward-thinking companies must embrace the need for innovation and collaboration in this new setting and create engaging experiences to get them excited about contributing to the company's mission and goals.

Particularly given today's War for Talent, companies can't afford to underestimate the importance of onboarding. In fact, Forbes reported recently that companies with structured and standardized onboarding processes experience 54% higher productivity<sup>1</sup> from their newly employed and twice as high level of engagement. On top of this, the cost of losing a new employee within the first 12 months equates up to 2 years of that employee's salary. Their research also revealed that structured onboarding is by far the most unnoticed discipline in HR management today and the one with the most potential to solve one of the biggest global challenges for public and private companies - to retain and attract new employees.

So, how do companies implement such practices? Especially in such a drastically transformed and virtual landscape. And which forward-thinking companies are leading the charge in the new hybrid era?



<sup>1</sup> Forbes, 'Is Onboarding the New HR Secret for Company Success?' (2019)

# Contents

The building blocks of onboarding ..... **04**

The importance of connection ..... **05**

6 best practices for hybrid onboarding..... **06**

    Welcome newcomers and set expectations prior to their start ..... **07**

    Create tangible moments within an intangible experience ..... **08**

    Apply your company’s “secret sauce” ..... **10**

    Make it social ..... **11**

    Design an inclusive onboarding experience ..... **12**

    Listen, learn and act..... **13**

The key take-aways ..... **14**

About this white paper ..... **15**

# The building blocks of onboarding

Let's start with the theory. In 2010, workplace relationships expert Dr. Talya Bauer wrote a report for SHRM laying out what's today recognized as a definitive model of onboarding: the Four C's.<sup>2</sup>

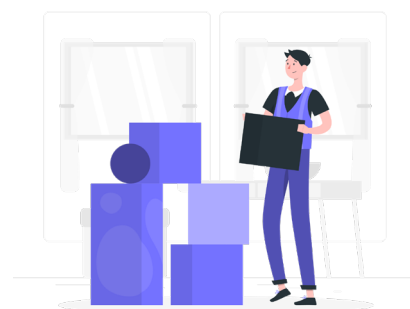
## For Bauer, onboarding has four fundamental building blocks:

**Compliance** – the most basic level and includes teaching employees basic legal and policy-related rules and regulations. Basically – all the administrative stuff that nobody loves but requires focus.

**Clarification** – ensuring new hires clearly understand the job and what's needed to excel. And the reverse, ensuring the organization clearly understands what new hires are here to do and what they seek to achieve.

**Culture** – is a broad category but essentially refers to your organizational norms. Your politics, goals and unique language. What makes the business tick, formally and between the lines.

**Connection** – the interpersonal relationships and communication network everyone builds at work. Friends, advisors, confidantes: your people's tribe.



By no means should each C be treated with equal consideration. In fact, quite the opposite. Particularly in the new hybrid era, the second two C's – culture and connection – carry a lot more weight. And by far the one that has been impacted most and is going through its own revolution is that of 'connection.'

# Why you should put **connection at the center** of onboarding through experience and engagement



Team connectivity is vital for collaboration, productivity, and organizational growth. Whilst all of the four C's are critical pieces of the onboarding puzzle, connection has a special role in the onboarding process because it can directly influence important organizational outcomes - such as new employees job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee referrals, intentions to remain, and turnover.

Research by Bauer has revealed that new employees who feel connected and accepted by their new colleagues have less initial anxiety upon entering the new organization. A summary of more than 12,000 newcomers found that connection was the most important of the C's, because it is the only aspect of onboarding related to all of the outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to forming team cohesion and inclusion during remote onboarding, almost all traditional rules applied previously have gone out the window; despite the desired outcome remaining the same. Helping new hires establish positive relationships and making them accustomed to the company culture without in-person interactions needs to be treated strategically. Particularly as how you engage with employees now, will set the tone for the entire organization moving forward. And remote work doesn't stop at onboarding.

Although, doing a complete overhaul of onboarding processes may seem daunting, there are plenty of simple and innovative practices people-first companies are already implementing.

**The key to these practices?** Engaging new hires and creating an overall experience designed to build strong relationships, greater confidence, and a deeper connection between new hires and the company.

# 6 examples of innovative practices you can use to **engage new employees**



Welcome newcomers and set expectations prior to their start date



Make it social



Create tangible moments within an intangible experience



Design an inclusive onboarding experience



Apply your company's "secret sauce"



Listen, learn and act

# Welcome newcomers and set expectations prior to their start date

## Start with pre-boarding

One of the main purposes of onboarding is to decrease the time it takes for new hires to become comfortable in their new roles and to feel part of the company. Given the foundational nature of connection, it is critical to think about what organizations can do to help new employees feel accepted and welcomed before they even start their first day on the job.

Also known as pre-boarding, many organizations hit the ground running the moment the contract is signed by providing a clear roadmap of the new hire's first few weeks, how it will look, and what to expect.

### Use-case: Tony's Chocolonely

A perfect example of this is what much-loved confectionery and impact brand, Tony's Chocolonely, does.

The company sends new hires an onboarding playbook which includes a checklist of their expected onboarding journey. Newcomers are encouraged to keep this checklist with them during the entire hybrid onboarding process so they can keep track of their own progress. By doing so, the newcomer is responsible for their own onboarding and the company is accountable for making the newcomer feel confident they will be looked after.

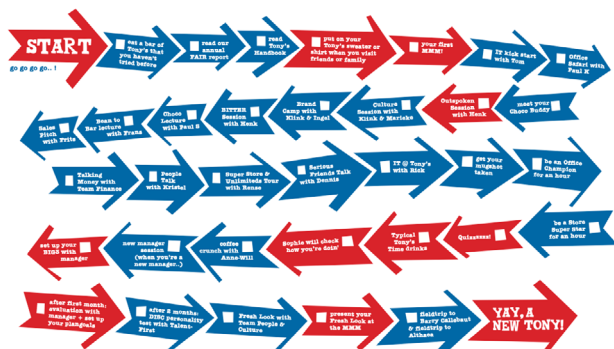
## YOUR 1ST DAY

- we welcome you at 9.30am at Pazzanistraat 1
- you don't have to bring your own lunch, and we've also taken care of lotssss of snacks
- take this poster with you so you can keep track of how far you are in your Typical Tony's Time
- meet your Chocobuddy
- come as you are: wear what you'll like! No suit or formal clothes within Tony's.. except if you feel like it!

## HOMEWORK

- read our annual FAIR report
- eat a bar of Tony's that you do not know yet
- take a picture of yourself in your Tony's Tee and send it to Sophie (that rhymes..)
- read Tony's handbook
- give a Tony's bar to your mother, neighbor or someone in line at the supermarket – and tell our story
- learn all Tony's names by heart from the website! Just kidding, you will learn in due time

## TYPICAL TONY'S TIME



# Create tangible moments within an intangible experience

## Arm new hires with the tools to succeed from day one

Even if onboarding is done primarily (or entirely) online, it doesn't mean you can't create physical experiences. Having a physical presence is actually crucial to make new hires feel included and at ease that they are in safe hands.

Perhaps the most crucial element to this is facilitating new hires with the software and tools to succeed – which includes having an adequate home office setup. New hires must have at the ready all the equipment required to complete their role. This means having the right furniture, monitor, laptop (with the correct IT systems installed) from day one.

In fact, installing remote offices proved one of the biggest problems for HR departments throughout the transition to hybrid work. Now, forward-thinking companies use platforms such as Workwize to automate and streamline this entire process so HR can focus on more important elements of onboarding and their job overall.

### Use-case: Workwize + StuDocu

Online learning and sharing platform, Studocu was looking for a way to automate their onboarding processes in keeping with their rapid company growth. They also sought a means to recirculate equipment they already had in their office in a streamlined manner.

StuDocu curated a product catalogue based on their employees' varied needs and centralized this on the Workwize platform. Already provisioned equipment as well as additional office stock were also accounted for to ensure a full asset overview.

The Workwize platform completely simplified the equipment ordering for employees. All they had to do now was login to the system and order the products that suits their unique situation and were align with the company's budget parameters. Better yet, it cut significant hours for Studocu's HR team and led to **31%** in cost-savings for their equipment management.



Even aside from the fact that it's already cheaper to do it through Workwize, you also have the benefits of unburdening, and the perfect employee-experience.



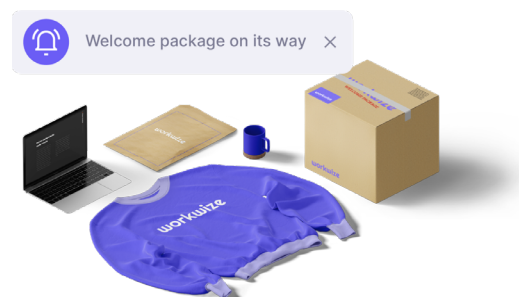
Marnix Broer, CEO & Co-Founder



# Create tangible moments within an intangible experience

## Ensure the first impression counts

Workwize also enables companies to send Welcome packages to new hires. This is another effective way to delight new employees and encourage them to post a happy snap on their LinkedIn. After all, you only have one shot at making a first impression, so it's important to make it impactful.



## Use-case: Tony's Chocolonely

Tony's Chocolonely executes this brilliantly by sending new hires "the happy box," which contains company merchandise and "goodies" plus their onboarding poster. The company utilizes this key moment to not only define onboarding expectations but to emphasize their culture, their vision and purpose, and to encourage participation and inclusion from day one. The happy box even includes homework that's both informative and social such as reading the company handbook and annual report; but also: eating a bar of Tony's, taking a photo of yourself in the brand tee, and giving someone else a Tony's chocolate bar.

# Apply your company's “secret sauce”

## Leverage your unique company culture & values

‘Connection’ is the most important element of onboarding as it underpins all stages and above all, it is the main mechanism to communicate company culture. To depict company culture in a hybrid or remote setting, companies need to be explicit with it. It's important that an organization's mission and core values are reflected in every touch point. Whilst this may seem like a daunting exercise, keeping an open-mind and being authentic in your approach can make it a super enjoyable experience for all parties. And ensuring some level of personalization and collaboration is gold.

### Use-case: WeTransfer

Introducing new hires formally to the wider company is integral for growing companies to keep track of fresh faces, but also in empowering new hires to demonstrate their company fit. Despite this being a formal part of the process, the introduction itself doesn't have to be “formal.”

WeTransfer makes this a fun and memorable experience in a very unique and creative way. Prior to their start date, new employees send in a photo of themselves, in which other WeTransfer colleagues convert into artistic portraits using WeTransfer's digital drawing tool called Paper. These are shared company-wide as well as on WeTransfer's external channels such as LinkedIn. What's better, in addition to showcasing their employee growth and demonstrating their creative culture on their channels, they are also promoting one of their cool platform features.



# Make it social

## Assign buddies

Building a buddy system for new hires ensures that they have someone to talk to, which is important in the first nerve-racking weeks of a new job. The purpose of an onboarding buddy is to bond and form positive connections with each other. By fostering such human connections, it promotes employee productivity, engagement and retention.

They don't always have to talk about work-related topics; it could be on how they spent their weekends or a new hobby they picked up recently. You can even think of having a buddy as someone whom you can ask all the "stupid questions" to. Meaning, the type of questions someone might not be confident enough in asking their manager, perhaps in fear they should already know the answer.

## TIP: Donut be strangers

Use Slack at work? Now you can even automate introductions between newcomers and other employees with the Donut integration. This integration seamlessly helps expand new employee's networks by connecting them directly with another employee within Slack. The messages can prompt new hires to a buddy, a new "lunch pal," set up a job shadow and even facilitate 1:1s with managers

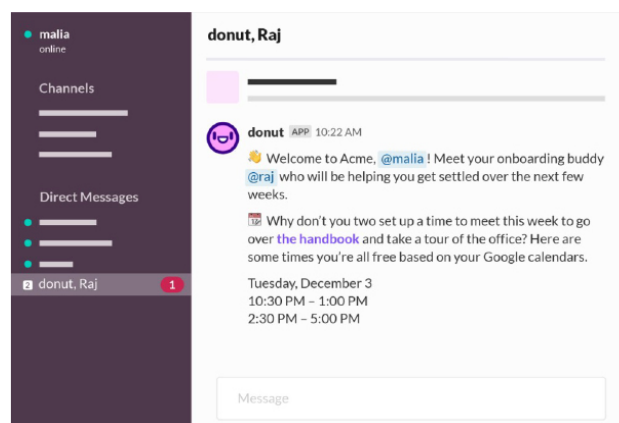
## Use-case: Microsoft

Microsoft tested their buddy program's efficiency by looking at the difference in hires who were assigned onboarding buddies versus those who were not. The research revealed that after their first week on the job, new hires with buddies were:

**23%** more satisfied with their overall onboarding experience compared to those without buddies.

This trend continued at 90 days, with a **36%** increase in satisfaction.

Those with buddies also reported receiving more active support from both their manager and the broader team.<sup>4</sup>



# Design an inclusive onboarding experience

## Be authentic with your DEI goals

Already, hybrid and remote working models have created more diverse organizations as it enables them to hire people with a specific set of skills regardless of background, location, gender, race, or disability.

However, the concept of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) needs to be continuously recognized and referred to in every business facet. And onboarding is absolutely integral in demonstrating a company's pursuit of inclusion from day one.

Within the first week of a new hires' job, companies should be proactive in sharing their company's DEI goals as well as showcasing the diversity of their organization through representation and visibility.

### Use-case: Otrium

For example, end-of-season marketplace, Otrium, does this by making the first week of every month "onboarding" week. All newcomers participate in this online program, which is full of presentations and activities run by a range of employees. This does two things: firstly, enables new starters to grow close to fellow starters and secondly, introduces them to the organization to get them up to speed.

Otrium also reaffirms their global, inclusive mindset by democratizing all information and activities through the cloud. In September 2021, the digital-first company launched their "HQ in the cloud." Essentially, everything from their meetings, documents and daily communications are accessible online, alongside their communication in real life or in their hubs. This is based on their belief that "all Otrium employees should receive the same employee experience" in which their hubs can be "social places where (employees) can collaborate, concentrate and create." They don't want this to not occur simply because of one's location or time zone.

WeTransfer commits to a similar concept in globalizing communications, particularly in a newcomer's first week, by abiding by the "Golden Hour" rule. Live onboarding sessions are always planned during "Golden Hours," which is the period of time all global employees are online.

Both Otrium and WeTransfer also demonstrate their dedication to inclusivity by equipping all global employees with ergonomic home offices - despite one's location or role - through Workwize. Both companies allocate budget via the Workwize platform, so new hires can order the equipment that's right for them and their situation. This promotes their dedication towards creating an inclusive, universal experience for all whilst instilling employee confidence that their employer has faith in their own autonomy.

**Learn more about how companies are prioritizing DEI in our blog post here**

**Learn more**

# Listen, learn and act

## Regularly check the temperature of your employees

For a new employee, onboarding does not stop after the first week. They are still in the process of learning and adjusting. This is an opportunity to continue to acknowledge your new joiners' experiences and find ways to improve your processes. After all, new employees are the ones with the firsthand experience of the onboarding process. Treat this as an invaluable opportunity to ask them how the experience was and how it can be improved. This enables organizations to recognize and celebrate progress to generate greater inclusive outcomes.

Employee onboarding feedback questions can have many variations. Some companies ask open-ended questions whilst others ask employees to rate their thoughts on a 5-point scale. Then, they compare answers at key intervals. The type of questions you ask (open-ended vs. ratings) is less important than what they reveal and how employee attitudes change over time. The best rule of thumb is to implement this feedback gathering stage during the following stages: end of first month, end of first three months then end of first six months.

Regardless of which employee onboarding feedback questions you ask, you should aim to uncover the keys to employee engagement and have your company goals back of mind.

- ✓ **Commitment to organizational goals**
- ✓ **Identification with company mission**
- ✓ **Job satisfaction**
- ✓ **Feeling energized at work**

### **TIP: Go beyond employee feedback surveys and listen to key signals**

Employee experience signals are indicators about how an employee feels towards your company, offered through a collection of direct and indirect behaviours. Some examples of this include: Slack or email usage, meeting attendance, PTO or sick time patterns, etc.

Onboarding surveys help employees feel connected, but only if they feel like someone is listening to their feedback and acting on it. When you identify a problem an employee is having and solve it promptly, they feel valued. Lastly, make sure to take all feedback seriously as it can present early warning signs of employees disengaging or detect changes in attitudes.

This gives you an opportunity to address these issues before they become larger organizational problems. This alignment is crucial to maximizing employee productivity and achieving organizational goals.

# The key take-aways

Despite the upheaval of work practices remote work has created, the long-term outcomes are overwhelmingly positive for both the employee and the employer.

01

Building the foundation to your company culture through connection, engagement and collaboration during onboarding is something to feel empowered by. Be authentic to your company mission and values by tying in your unique culture as much as possible.

02

There is no right or wrong approach. The key is to embrace the change, and view onboarding as an experience, not just a process.

03

Ensure employees' remote workspaces are effectively equipped for healthy and productive work. Use tools - such as [Workwize](#) - to streamline this process, but more importantly, to give employees the freedom to personalize their set-up based on their unique needs.

04

Find the right balance between online and offline, and use tangible moments where possible. Utilize these moments to enhance your company culture and enable employees to build a strong connection towards the organization.

05

Inclusivity is vital. Organizations need to be authentic in their commitment to DEI which relies on leadership buy-in and representation. Therefore, DEI must be embedded in every business facet, policy and practice starting from the top.

06

Gathering employee feedback is just one step towards successfully improving your greater onboarding process. Oftentimes, the most invaluable information lies between the lines of the answers already provided to you. Begin fine-tuning your ability to recognize and act on these insights in order to consistently improve the first few crucial months of your employees' tenure.

# About this white paper



This article was a research collaboration between Workwize and Sophie Dopheide from the Culture School

## About The Culture School

The Culture School is on a mission to put culture on the map in every organization. Because making your culture explicit and bringing it to life is a recipe for success. The Culture School is here to help you build a strong culture and an awesome experience - from onboarding to offboarding and everything in between - so your team can thrive and your organization can scale strong.



### Wanna talk culture with Sophie?

Follow [The Culture School](#) on LinkedIn to stay connected.

## About Workwize

Workwize was started late 2020 after the world saw an explosion in demand for home office products. It became clear that the majority of employees prefer hybrid working models. But for companies, this has presented a range of logistical and administrative challenges.

Workwize makes the facilitation of equipment for remote employees as easy as possible for companies such as HelloFresh, WeTransfer, Lightyear, FrieslandCampina, Mollie, and more. Our intuitive technology takes care of the entire equipment lifecycle: from order requests, the sourcing and delivery of equipment, centralized tracking of inventory and invoicing, and even the pick up and re-integration of offboarded equipment.

By automating manual processes and centralizing an accurate equipment record, Workwize helps HR, IT and facility managers stay agile and productive. Better yet, it makes their employees feel more valued in the process. Because, at the end of the day, happy employees are an employer's best asset.

Interested in using Workwize?  
Schedule a demo today!

Book Demo