



## Organizations and Onboarding: 5 Biggest Mistakes

### What are the 5 biggest mistakes that organizations make when they onboard their new hires? And why do they make these mistakes repeatedly?

The interviews went smoothly. Alex felt great about the company, her new role and team, and she wasn't relocating, so how tough could it be? But after she accepted the offer, her new organization let Alex down, in a big way—actually, 5 big ways.

#### **Fast Fact:**

*50% of all executives interviewed for Aberdeen's 2009 Onboarding Research indicated that the current state of the economy will **increase** the importance their organizations place on onboarding in 2009.*

Organizations start out with the best of intentions. They don't usually set out to fail. But when it comes to onboarding their new employees, they unfortunately, are making the 5 same mistakes over and over again, and it is costing them time, money, productivity and some really good people.

The following are the worst (and the most common) mistakes that organizations make when onboarding their new hires:

1. No contact between the acceptance and start dates
2. Not providing the basic set-up and resources
3. Lack of a structured onboarding plan with clear expectations
4. Key stakeholder meetings lack preparation and focus
5. Hiring manager does not give feedback nor role clarity

#### Mistake # 1 No contact between the acceptance and start dates

Alex (our case study) received her offer and accepted within a week. However, after she had officially accepted and the recruiter faxed back a signed offer, no one else contacted her. She had several questions, and wanted to contact the recruiter or her new manager but didn't want to be perceived as "high-maintenance" so she decided to wait. She called her hiring manager, left a voice mail and received a brief email in return that said he was looking forward to her starting and that he would answer all her questions on her first day.

#### Mistake # 2 Not providing the basic set-up and resources

On her first day, Alex reported early to the office to get her space set up and organized. She is greeted at the front desk by the security officer who doesn't have her "in the system" so she must wait in the lobby for her manager's

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assistant to come and escort her to the work area. Once there, she discovers that the assistant thought that Alex was starting the next week, so her computer, phone and office supplies are not there and have not yet been ordered. Alex also needs a Blackberry and Amex card, so the assistant has to fill out extra forms to get those items in process. Alex asks the assistant when she will be able to meet with her manager to start her onboarding process. The assistant tells her that the manager is out of the country for the next 2 weeks, but she will put her on his calendar the first day that he is back in the office. Alex would be spending the next day and a half in orientation and has a few “meet and greet” meetings set-up.

#### Mistake # 3 Lack of a structured onboarding plan with clear expectations

Alex begins to try to piece together what she believes her onboarding plan and what the deliverables should be for her first few weeks and months on the job. She does her best to meet with her team members, peers and other stakeholders. She also uses the information that she obtained during the selection process to make decisions and process information, but she makes mistakes without the context and feedback of her manager. People are starting to wonder why she is making changes in her department and her team, and are forming perceptions about her not really “fitting in” to this culture.

#### Mistake # 4 Key stakeholder meetings lack preparation and focus

As Alex begins to have more meetings with the key stakeholders in the organizations, it is clear that they were not prepared to talk with her. Most are polite and ask about her “former life” and work, how she likes the organization, her team, etc. Some have a few complaints and issues that have carried over from Alex’s predecessor, and want quick resolution. Others do not have much information to share and are very unclear as to why Alex would have them on her list as a “meet and greet” because they have very little interaction with each other. The meetings are scheduled in the first few weeks, and Alex knows very little about the organization and cannot ask meaningful questions. It is difficult for her to discern which of these stakeholders may be the ones with whom she needs to build strong relationships.

#### Mistake # 5 Hiring Manager does not give feedback nor role clarity

Frustrated, Alex meets with her manager to get some sense of how she is doing and what her priorities should be for the coming weeks and months. Her manager is late for their meeting and distracted by his email and other messages. He tells her that she is doing fine and that everyone “takes awhile to figure things out here”. Alex asks him for some additional clarification on her role and the objectives for her next 3-6 months. He tells her to “keep doing what she’s been doing” and “keep the customers and the employees happy”.

He says that he will be talking with his boss in the next couple of weeks to get a better picture of what the whole function is going to look like and he will get back to her.

He doesn’t, and Alex is gone after only 7 months on the job.

### **Did Alex fail or did the organization fail her?**

What often happens in situations such as our case study is that the organization blames the turnover of the position on a “bad hire” or a “non-fit” to the organization and takes little or no responsibility for the failure of the individual. The assumption is that the full responsibility is on the individual for her transition and that part of a new leader’s job is to “figure it out”. Our experience and work with clients has proven that a more holistic approach which blends the

responsibility of the new leader and the organization yields the best results. Both must have clear roles and actively participate in the new leader's onboarding process for maximum results.

## Summary

Organizations that avoid these 5 biggest onboarding mistakes are the ones which will have new leaders who integrate better and experience smoother transitions. Even if other parts of the onboarding process are not executed properly or activities are not timely, if these 5 critical areas are addressed, the new leader will still experience a higher level of success than he/she would have if they had been ignored. Organizations can experience some level of onboarding success if they pay attention to a few critical details, even if they are lacking a complete and consistent process.

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### About Connect the Dots Consulting

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