

Creating a Great First Day for New Hires



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Introduction

Are you responsible for any part of the onboarding experience at your organization? We've curated an expert panel of HR industry leaders to answer your most difficult onboarding questions, including how to create the best first day and beyond. Let us walk you through how these industry leaders onboard their best in class teams - from setting everyone up for success, the first day, and ensuring they show up for the second day! You'll also learn best practices for common onboarding challenges, such as onboarding remote or international employees, asking for investment, or measuring the success of an onboarding process. The panelists include:



Maureen Adams, Independent HR Consultant. Adams manages SMB client relationships - with a combined employee base of more than 3,000 employees worldwide. Prior to her career as an independent consultant, she was an HR leader at Microsoft Corporation from 2005 to 2012. She has a BA from the University of Waterloo.



Corey Berkey, [JazzHR](#)'s Human Resources Director, holds a SHRM-SCP and has been in HR for over 10 years. He specializes in early stage companies and tech. He has a B.Sc in Human Resources Management from Indian University of Pennsylvania.



Sarah Koller, GoCo's People Operations Specialist, holds a BA from Miami University and a B.Sc in Computer and Information Systems.

Chapter 1: Before the First Day

The hire-to-onboard experience, particularly the work that happens before the first day, plays a key role in shaping the first impression new hires form about your company. To orchestrate the perfect onboarding experience, the organization has to begin the onboarding process *way before* the first day.

The role of any HR department is to quarterback the onboarding process, but the team involved is much wider as it can truly take a village to onboard a new hire: the hiring manager, the new hire buddy, team, IT, operations, and so on.



To make the first day successful is a team effort.

Maureen Adams · Independent HR Consultant



As the HR team, you'll need to coach and prepare each person for their role in the onboarding process. One of the biggest onboarding pain points our panel identified is coordinating with other team members, so take the time to explain to each of them why onboarding is so important and how it can impact success, retention, and the overall experience of the new hire.



Personalizing the experience is important. Really knowing who the person is. Where did they come from? What are they values? What are their beliefs? How do they align with your organization's beliefs?

Maureen Adams · Independent HR Consultant



You'll need to complete practical tasks before the first day, such as setting up the new employee's physical space. You can use this opportunity to personalize their onboarding experience—try to integrate what you know about them into their onboarding experience!



Your goal is to have everything at your new hire's fingertips without them having to ask for it.

Corey Berky · Director of HR · JazzHR



You can also help your new hire feel welcome and ready when they show up for their first day.



Remember that, even though you've done this hundreds of times, the experience still needs to be unique and special for your new hire. Technology can automate a lot of the basic stuff so you can make the human touch points very genuine.

Sarah Koller · People Operations Manager · GoCo



An automated feature, like GoCo's Slack integration, can make it simple to announce the new team member to the wider team or department so they can welcome your new hire on their first day.

Ask the new hire to sign their paperwork in advance so they can focus on meeting the team instead of finding their social security number. You can use an HRMS platform to send their onboarding documents early, allowing them to complete the paperwork from the comfort of their own home. This can give them an opportunity to ramp up before they even start!

Chapter 2: On the First Day



Your goal for the first day should be to make sure the new hire shows up for the second day.

Corey Berky · Director of HR · JazzHR



On the first day, you have the opportunity to remind your new hire why they chose your organization *and* let them know that you're excited to have them join. We highly recommend that you look for opportunities to personalize the onboarding process whenever possible. Think about the experience you are creating and how you can make it seamless. Imagine this - they sit down at their desk, and what's there? The desk is set up, but it's not just a desk and a laptop. We want their swag waiting and their laptop set up and provisioned with their accounts already.



The more you invest in the new hire, the more output you'll get in the long run. The longer you invest during the onboarding process, the longer the employee will stay

Maureen Adams · Independent HR Consultant



Make sure the day isn't overwhelming by focusing your training on digestible pieces of information. Day One sets the stage for Week One and Month One. The first-day training plan should be customized for each company, but here's the advice from our panel of experts on what to include to set everyone up for success:

1. **Share your organizations' history, values, cultural mentality, and social norms.** You can utilize the power of storytelling to share your organization's history, values, and culture. These are powerful messages that can inspire your new hire to feel a sense of belonging in your organization. We'll dive into the importance of integrating culture into the onboarding process later!
2. **Schedule time for the new hire to hear from a senior leader.** For smaller companies, this may be possible to do in person, but for larger companies, it can be in the form of a pre-recorded video. This message should inspire the employee to align with the organization's mission and purpose. Senior leadership can define an organization, and introducing your new hires to them early is critical to their understanding of the company's culture and values.
3. **Assign tasks to others in the organization** so that your new hire can hear more voices on the first day instead of spending it with the HR team! In a recent poll with HR.com, we learned that coordinating with other teams is one of the hardest parts about onboarding for HR. By utilizing technology to automate pieces of the onboarding process, you can reduce the burden on the HR team and create a seamless experience.



4. **Introduce the new hire to their support system:** hiring manager, onboarding buddy, IT, operations, and so on. You'll want them to know where to go when they need help or have questions that they may not feel comfortable asking HR or their new boss.
 - *Pro-tip from Corey:* Ensure the support system under the new hire is really clear. This is a big and important step of onboarding!
 - *Pro-tip from Maureen:* Choose an onboarding buddy or mentor that has something in common with the new hire to further personalize the onboarding experience (e.g. are they a single mom like me? do they have a similar role? Did they also relocate for this role?).
5. **From a practical standpoint, spend time on systems.** You'll need to ensure their laptop is set up, all of their accounts are logged in, and that they can start doing their job right away. This is important so they can do everything in their "post first day" training plan.
6. **Pair the new hire with someone in a similar role** to them so they can experience "a day in the life." The goal is for them to learn the core functions of their team and to learn more about how their team works together. At this point, they are saturated with knowledge. We want them to feel satisfied about what they've learned and excited to come back that next day.

The last thing most people want to do is spend time in a conference room with HR talking about handbooks and benefits. It's important that people understand this, but we don't want compliance and HR to be the focus of the first day.



How can technology support the hiring and onboarding process?

GoCo is HR software that allows us to focus on the people; not the paperwork. The first day can often be under-utilized by organizations! We don't want to welcome new hires with a big stack of paperwork and as a hiring manager, GoCo can be a game changer to have new hires focusing their first day on the company and not paperwork.

Your new employee can spend their first day building a connection with their team and organization instead of completing HR paperwork. You can automate tasks, such as new hire and onboarding documents to be completed before their first day. This includes payroll information, health benefits enrollments, non-disclosure agreements, etc.

With GoCo, new hires can digitally sign and complete documents all from the comfort of their own home. Doing so allows them to focus on their team, new role, and the company—not on HR policies. This elevates your employee's first-day experience! You can view these features with [GoCo's Free-Forever Plan](#).

You can further automate your HR processes by integrating GoCo with an Applicant Tracking System (ATS), such as [JazzHR](#). An ATS is a powerful recruitment software that powers your ability to find and hire talent. It can support you with candidate sourcing, employer branding, interviews, compliance, reporting, collaborative hiring, and much more. Once someone is marked as "hired," it automatically starts the onboarding tasks through [the ability to integrate an ATS with GoCo](#). By automating these processes, we can make the hiring and onboarding process seamless and reduce the administrative burden on your HR team.



Chapter 3: Beyond the First Day

Onboarding is often focused on compliance and paperwork—benefits, payroll, retirement, policies, etc. You can get these out of the way before the employee’s first day, allowing you to focus on the more important aspects of onboarding during the first day, week, month, and beyond.

Focus on Culture

It’s crucial to create an onboarding experience that puts culture first—employees are more successful when they have a better understanding of the values and behaviors that make up the company’s culture. Changing organizations is tough, and the steepest learning curve is often understanding the social norms and values that underlay every decision. An upfront commitment to culture in the initial week can increase engagement and set the new hire up to be productive in navigating the workplace sooner.

At GoCo, we start to instill our values from the very first day. We are a transparent, collaborative workplace that encourages a sense of community. We invite new hires for lunch on their first day, and after the first day, we ask them to join our regular lunch-time board games. We instill our company values through these connection points, and we showcase this from the first week. We’ve set the tone for GoCoNuts to know the behaviors that we want to encourage so that we can continue to provide the most value for our clients.



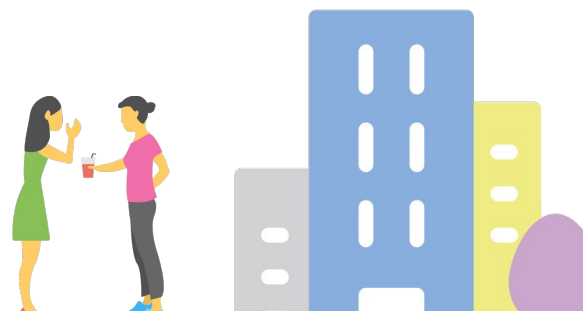
Maureen speaks to the importance of *“beginning the culture conversation starts before the first day”* and including it as part of the recruitment process. Before you can speak to the company’s culture, you need to know what it is. *“Can you articulate the company’s culture? Can everyone that works for the organization articulate the company’s culture?”* You can think about this on the flexibility-to-stability axis or the independent-to-interdependent axis. These impact the organization’s ability to respond to change and how the people within the organization interact with each other. Over-communicate this before the first day, on the first day, and after the first day. You can thread the culture throughout the hiring, onboarding, and training processes. Remember—*“culture will eat strategy for breakfast.”*

Encourage Connection Through ‘Knowledge Sprints’

Introduce your new hires to others in the organization who are outside of their business unit. For example, set up a time for your new salesperson to meet someone in the product team. They won’t walk away as an expert in Product, but they will have a deeper understanding of the organization and how each business unit contributes to its success. It will help them go beyond *“what’s my role?”* to *“what is this organization”*? This creates greater strategic alignment around the vision of the company. At [JazzHR](#), they set up a knowledge sprint with each business unit.

Ask for Feedback!

Use this opportunity to learn more about your onboarding process—what works and what doesn’t work. We recommend that you create a survey and send it to new hires after the onboarding process. Their insights can improve the onboarding experience for future new hires.



Chapter 4: Onboarding Challenges

We've compiled a Q&A section about the most common onboarding challenges answered by our expert panelists.

How do you convince management to invest in improving the onboarding experience?

In a small to medium-sized company, the impact of a lost employee is felt across the organization. This makes the case for onboarding much easier as we can tie the investment in onboarding into retention and engagement. For larger companies, we are in a state where it's difficult to hire top talent. Onboarding is not a sexy topic, but if you can connect it to the bottom line and establish a sense of urgency by communicating what it costs to hire and train a new employee, you'll have more success convincing others to invest in onboarding. You'll need a team to build a business case for onboarding. And remember to celebrate short-term wins—it won't happen overnight.

How do you measure the success or failure of your onboarding process?



You have to be prepared to get feedback from your new hires.

Corey Berky · Director of HR · JazzHR



You can utilize metrics to measure the success or failure of your onboarding process. In some roles, you can measure productivity—but this doesn't work for every role or organization. Another way to measure is by surveying your newly hired employees at the 30, 60, 90, or 180-day markers (e.g., What did you think of onboarding? How does your career align with expectations? Does the role you have now match what you were hired to do? Do you see opportunities for advancement?). You can also review retention rates at those markers and utilize tools to automate this process.

What can we learn from the mistakes of companies with poor onboarding?



It should be exciting for them! New hires are probably both, excited and nervous to start their new jobs. Onboarding shouldn't be so paperwork intensive – It's the best opportunity to let them know they made the right decision by joining your team.

Sarah Koller · People Operations Manager · GoCo



The biggest mistake we see is underutilizing the first day. Too often, companies take an excited employee and put them in a conference room to fill out paperwork and read policies on the first morning. [GoCo](#) can provide you with the tools to complete this paperwork in advance so that we can fully utilize the first day and build on the new hire's excitement.

How to onboard remote or international employees?

Onboarding won't look the same for every employee. You'll need to consider if they are remote, international, or relocated for this role. During our panelists' conversation, we saw that many of you are responsible for onboarding remote, international, out of state, or field employees.

It is difficult to support these employees' onboarding journeys, so we turned to our expert panelists to understand how to support employees in these situations. Here's what we learned:



You can personalize the experience for every circumstance

You'll need to create additional support systems for employees in these situations, for example introduce remote employees to other remote employees or in the same country. If they've relocated themselves or their families for the job, make sure they have a support system to land well in their job but also in their new city.

Remote onboarding doesn't have to be remote—we recommend that you bring the employee onsite for the first day if possible. However, it's not always possible to bring someone onsite *or* sometimes the team is 100% virtual. In those situations, you can utilize a self-guided onboarding experience with a tool like GoCo so everything is in one place and they don't need to go to multiple tools. You can make the self-guided onboarding interactive, which makes your new hire feel like part of the team much more quickly. At GoCo, for example, as soon as a new hire is onboarded, they can view the company's directory and the employee handbook. This allows them to learn about the various teams and about the organization before they start. They can also fill out their swag sizes and let us know their snack preferences! At GoCo, we have their swag and snacks waiting for them on the first day in the office, but you could also mail it to them if they will onboard remotely. We also recommend that you extend the onboarding process for those who are remote beyond the 30/60/90 days to 90+ days as it's much more difficult than onboarding with a team of people around you.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At GoCo, we're committed to creating a great onboarding experience for new hires. Our mission is to make operating a business easy, and to empower companies to take care of their employees. Our panel of experts outlined how you can create a great first day while utilizing software solutions to automate the compliance aspects of onboarding.

Are you interested in elevating your new hires' recruiting and onboarding experience? Take a look at [GoCo's integration with JazzHR!](#)



Contributing HR Panelists

Maureen Adams, Independent HR Consultant



Manages SMB client relationships - with a combined employee base of more than 3,000 employees worldwide. Prior to her career as an independent consultant, Adams was an HR leader at Microsoft Corporation from 2005 to 2012. At Microsoft, she was responsible for shaping and driving the comprehensive human capital strategy for Microsoft's go-to-market in Canada, Middle East, Africa, and International Finance.

Corey Berkey, Human Resource Director @ JazzHR



Owner of all things "people" at JazzHR, Berky oversees the recruitment and employee engagement of JazzHR. He is responsible for building their world-class team and keeping them happy! He holds a SHRM-SCP and has been in HR for over 10 years. His experience spans large and small business and many different industries - but he's always had a soft spot for tech and early stage companies.

Sarah Koller, People Operations @ GoCo.io



Sarah is on a mission to make GoCo the best place to work in Houston. Koller is responsible for attraction, recruitment, and retention of the awesome humans behind GoCo. She also develops the programs and policies that protect and nurture the company's core values and culture.

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Automated HR + Benefits

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Compliance Support

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