



What Does Effective Sales Onboarding Look Like?

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If you're a sales leader, you know how challenging it is to hire and retain strong sales talent. To complicate matters further, building a high-performance sales team doesn't end when you hire the right seller. Even skilled sellers need support to integrate into your organization's culture, learn your selling methods, and prepare to interact with your buyers.

That's why it takes an average of three months for a new seller to be ready to interact with buyers. Lost time means lost sales, so every day counts.

This is the value of a well-realized onboarding program. A new seller is an investment, and you won't see the

ROI unless you equip them for success in onboarding and beyond.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG ONBOARDING PROGRAM

Organizations with effective onboarding are 6.3 times more likely to

prepare their new hires to succeed, according to the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research. Unfortunately, only 35% of survey respondents rated their company's sales onboarding as extremely or very effective. This is a major concern when onboarding sets the standard for performance.

Effective onboarding results in:

- **Less Time to Productivity:** With the time it takes for new sellers to actively contribute to the team, a strong onboarding program should aim to ramp sellers up to a point of productivity. With an effective onboarding process, sellers are four times more likely to be productive in under three months.
- **Better Performance:** With an effective onboarding process in place, sales managers are more than twice as likely to be effective at getting maximum performance from their sellers.
- **Higher Retention:** Between recruitment costs, onboarding costs, and salaries, turnover is a major loss for any organization. With a strong investment in onboarding, you'll have fewer false starts and retain more sellers.

The difference is staggering. With extremely effective onboarding, average new hire turnover decreases from 50% to 12%. That can mean tens of thousands of dollars or more for your organization.

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING

In our research, four components defined the most effective onboarding programs.

Component 1: Training

Having a well-planned education system for your team is necessary for developing your sellers. Companies with an extremely/very effective onboarding process are:

- 4.6 times more likely to report that training on their offerings is comprehensive
- 3 times more likely to report that

training in sales technology tools used is strong (e.g., CRM, lead generation software, sales enablement platforms, etc.)

- 2.9 times more likely to report that training on their company's sales process and methodology is strong

Training new sales hires tends to be more foundational than training for veteran sellers. However, onboarding sales training can represent the first step in a more comprehensive sales education experience throughout a seller's tenure with your organization.

Component 2: Support

An onboarding program is an investment in your new sellers, and the support you offer them should reflect this. Rather than relying on ad hoc support, build a consistent schedule of touchpoints into the program to give new hires opportunities to ask questions and focus on areas of improvement.

If you rely on new sellers to ask questions when needed, they may not come forward. Respondents at companies with extremely/very effective onboarding programs are 4.2 times more likely to report that new sales hires feel supported throughout the onboarding process.

Component 3: Teamwork

From the start, new sales hires should be fully immersed into their teams, collaborating with colleagues, and integrated into existing workflows.

Selling can be isolating. Consider the ways your organization silos sellers and how you can break down those walls. Sixty-one percent of respondents at companies with effective onboarding programs report that teamwork and collaboration are emphasized, as opposed to only 15% of the rest.

Component 4: Coaching

Building a high-performance sales team starts with management in the onboarding process and beyond.

This happens when managers make time for a regular schedule of sales

coaching. Coaching touches on all the other three components; it requires sales coaches to collaborate, provide consistent support to new hires, and have a hand in planning and executing training. Coaches must also set expectations for what new hires should be doing and hold them accountable.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR ONBOARDING PROCESS

The onboarding process should be consistent with your sales process and methodology. In fact, 51% of sales organizations don't have a defined sales process, making it far more difficult to ensure standards of quality for new sellers.

In contrast, the best sales training and onboarding programs are deliberate and repeatable. The following three steps provide a blueprint for building yours.

Step 1: Craft

If you're tracking the right performance metrics, you already know which skills and actions drive results for your organization. Identify your desired outcomes for new sellers and the metrics that indicate success.

Next, determine how you'll achieve these metrics. You need a clear vision for your strategy and steps to reach your desired outcome. Solicit the help of leaders across your organization to properly align the strategy and set clear expectations for new hires, managers, and enablement.

Consider using a competency model for the skills your sellers will need to succeed in your organization. This model can serve as the basis for the learning curriculum and be adapted for different sales roles.

Step 2: Deliver

With objectives and strategy defined, you're ready to deliver training in a way that sets sellers up for long-term success.

Modern training and onboarding are more than classroom sessions. They blend simulations, knowledge



A smooth sea never made a skillful mariner.

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checks, exercises, and partnering with other team members. Many organizations have opted for a hybrid delivery model that includes in-person and virtual elements.

Regardless of your exact approach, the onboarding program should aim to be applicable, engaging, collaborative, and tailored to your organization's selling methodology.

New sellers should be exposed to these topics repeatedly and over time. Reinforcement through spaced repetition helps sellers retain key concepts and build strong sales habits.

Step 3: Enable

Once the onboarding program is crafted and delivered, you still need to enable sellers to succeed. This is where effective managers will be integral, as they'll be the ones providing feedback and ongoing coaching to your sellers. Managers need a grounding in their training methods to be properly equipped to observe sellers, coach them, and hold them accountable.

You also need to monitor your metrics. This includes lag measures (the end results you're targeting) and lead measures (the signposts indicating you're moving in the right direction). While the onboarding process should be consistent, it should also be iterative. Solicit feedback from participants, build on what works, and reconsider elements that don't.

When it comes to enabling sellers, think continuous learning – or "everboarding." When the follow-up is just as strong as the initial training program, you'll build a sales team that retains critical skills, is aligned with your organizational strategy, and drives results. ■

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