

By Sara Moss

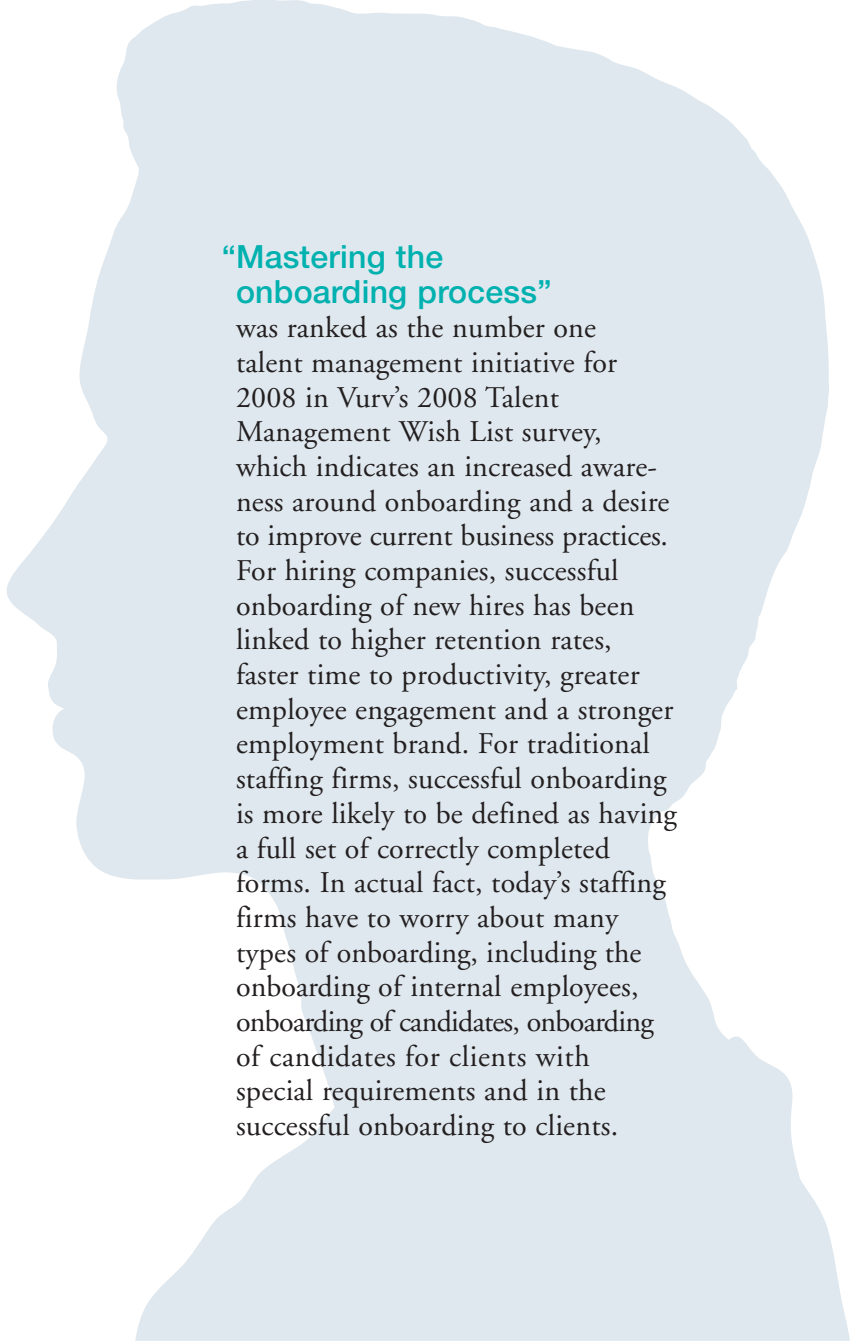


THE MANY FACES



OF ONBOARDING





### “Mastering the onboarding process”

was ranked as the number one talent management initiative for 2008 in Vurv’s 2008 Talent Management Wish List survey, which indicates an increased awareness around onboarding and a desire to improve current business practices. For hiring companies, successful onboarding of new hires has been linked to higher retention rates, faster time to productivity, greater employee engagement and a stronger employment brand. For traditional staffing firms, successful onboarding is more likely to be defined as having a full set of correctly completed forms. In actual fact, today’s staffing firms have to worry about many types of onboarding, including the onboarding of internal employees, onboarding of candidates, onboarding of candidates for clients with special requirements and in the successful onboarding to clients.



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### Onboarding Internal Staff

The staffing industry is known for having a high rate of staff turnover, especially in front office roles. In many cases, front office staff aren't able to reach expected performance levels fast enough. Stronger onboarding programs within staffing companies could lead to quicker ramp-up times and higher employee retention rates.

Employee engagement expert and author of *The Truth About Getting the Best from People*, Martha Finney, explains that onboarding, if done fully and well, can even start as early as the job seeker's initial exploration of the company. The company's reputation for its values, its behavior toward employees and its expectations of its people give job seekers a clear picture of whether they are a fit inside that particular organization's culture. Finney points out that the company's Careers tab on its Web site is an excellent place to broadcast those messages. "This is an opportunity for the company to use the voices of its current employees to give the job seekers the inside scoop into what it really takes to be successful in the company, what the company's values are, what kinds of behavior are permissible and definitely what kinds of behavior are taboo." With that early message in place, the actual onboarding experience is already started by the time the candidate receives the job offer.

For Tom Gimbel, CEO and founder of The LaSalle Network, an 85-person Chicago-based staffing firm, internal onboarding starts the minute the offer

is made. "LaSalle has developed an onboarding strategy that has greatly improved our retention rates and increased the productivity levels of our team members," says Gimbel. At LaSalle the hiring manager, VP or even the CEO makes the job offer. "We want to make sure the candidate feels wanted, gets excited about the opportunity and knows how much we value our staff." After the offer has been accepted LaSalle keeps the recruiting momentum alive by sending the new

**On their first  
day of work we have 100  
balloons waiting in the  
lobby and a welcome sign  
with streamers at  
their desk.**

employee something – maybe a LaSalle T-shirt or backpack or even news articles about LaSalle or the industry, and organizing a happy hour or lunch to keep them thinking about LaSalle. "On their first day of work we have 100 balloons waiting in the lobby and a welcome sign with streamers at their desk. We want our new employees to feel as special as a little kid on their birthday." Gimbel personally meets or calls new employees on their first day to welcome them. "I want them to understand how important they are to LaSalle's success. I also participate in new hire orientation sessions to personally explain company expectations, core company values and how to be successful here."

Once orientation is complete LaSalle continually "re-recruits" its employees by celebrating each person's birthday and company anniversary, listening to their feedback and by providing over 150 hours of training to each employee every year. "At LaSalle recruiters that make it past the six-month mark stay with us three years, on average. At LaSalle we track retention closely and know that our onboarding investment makes us more successful."

### Onboarding Candidates

While internal staff onboarding has the primary goal of retention and productivity, candidate onboarding in contingent staffing tends to focus heavily on correctly completing what seems like an excessive number of paper forms. Hiring companies have to collect data too, but nowhere near staffing company proportions. Staffing companies screen and interview volumes of candidates each day and capture data and paperwork on many more candidates than they actually place. Most staffing firms ask candidates to complete paper or online employment applications and paperwork very early in the evaluation process. Because staffing companies are charged with filling jobs quickly, new hire paperwork is often completed as early in the process as possible so that the candidate is ready to start work immediately upon finding the right assignment.

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### Onboarding Defined

Onboarding best practices used to focus on creating the best possible first day. Now, experts suggest that onboarding begins with the employee offer and ends 3 to 12 months later.

**Begins:** When employee offer is made  
**Ends:** 3 to 12 months after start date  
**Success measure:** Engaged and productive new employee

#### Business benefits may include:

- Higher employee and candidate retention
- Faster time to productivity
- Greater employee and candidate engagement
- Stronger employment and staffing brand
- Higher compliance
- Lower recruiting costs
- Improved candidate experience
- Increased client satisfaction

#### Functions include:

- Forms and task management
- New employee orientation and training
- Benefits enrollment, IT and physical access, equipment and space allocation
- Socialization and assimilation

#### Other buzz words:

Preboarding, virtual onboarding post-hire support, offboarding **SI**

such as birth date data, further complicate the forms management process during onboarding. Moreover, the standard onboarding process may require additional variation in order to accommodate client's special onboarding requests. Regional, national or global clients often require tailored services. These clients may request additional forms or additional tasks that impact the staffing company workflow, such as requiring a clear background check prior to starting the assignment. Fulfilling these requirements and tracking compliance on each and every candidate and assignment can be a near impossible job.

Making the forms and task management portion of the process as efficient and easy as possible goes a long way toward creating a positive candidate experience. Once the forms have been completed, ensuring a full set of documents have been received, filed and stored for each candidate can require staggering administrative effort. Then just try and find the full set of complete documents for a particular candidate upon the request of a client, auditor or lawyer!

Once the staffing firm's hiring decision is made, candidates may be asked to participate in additional orientation exercises, such as training around timecard completion, benefits enrollment and codes of conduct. Onboarding can mean that everyone gets the same new hire manual or video, but it may also be stretched to provide candidates with access to refresher courses or skill-building training for their next assignment.

Once placed, recruiters typically check in with candidates at regular intervals to see how things are going, but integrating placed candidates into the staffing company's culture has not traditionally been a key focus for staffing firms. Some firms have dedicated candidate care staff, and others are providing more online resources to candidates to answer their questions, increase candidate retention and build a stronger sense of community. Millennials are said to expect and require more forms of communication and socialization. Perhaps this trend will drive staffing firms to focus more on assimilating and supporting candidates.

### Influencing Client Onboarding Success

On the permanent placement side of the house, recruiters are not responsible for onboarding new hires to their clients but they will be penalized if the onboarding process results in undesired turnover by having to honor guarantees and perhaps even finding a replacement free of charge. When placing direct hires into their clients, staffing companies become dependent on a successful onboarding outcome.

Recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) organizations face similar challenges. In some cases, the RPO takes on the onboarding function but in many cases their role ends on the new hire's first day. For these RPO engagements, a seamless hand-off of the onboarding process to the hiring

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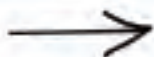
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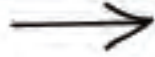
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organization is critical in achieving onboarding success.

“In the RPO world onboarding is considered one of the points of service and can be offered as a separate service (though we seldom see this) or bundled as part of a full life-cycle solution where we replace a client’s internal recruiting organization,” explains Kim Davis, SVP of Adecco RPO. “We always consult on onboarding even if we don’t deliver it because we are held accountable for overall results.” Clearly, it is necessary to onboard the right people and the

right number of people to achieve onboarding success. “We believe that retention starts with recruitment and we do everything we can to maximize retention. Whether we’re directly responsible for onboarding or not, we have an important role in the process, and our client’s attrition rates commonly decrease by as much as 20-50% once we get involved,” states Davis. “We achieve this by ensuring a favorable recruiting process, clearly and accurately depicting the work environment (a day in the work life), by making a good match between the candidate and the

company, and by starting new hires on a positive note on day one.”

WorkforceLogic (WFL) Vice President of Client Services, Laurie Hearne, explains, “One of our service offerings is to manage on- and offboarding of all the non-direct staff of our clients including all temporary labor, vendors and consultants. For our very largest clients this involves the recruiting, hiring and management of over thousands of contingent workers.” Clients are asking for full visibility of everyone on their campus and want complete



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control over who's coming, who's going and their access. "WFL's role is to ensure total visibility of contingent labor and deliver non-direct employees, ready to go." WFL ensures that new resources complete all of the required forms, are oriented to both WFL and the client, and have everything they need to be productive on their first day. This may include allocation of a computer, an email address, a security badge and ensuring the new person is loaded into internal systems, like the client's HRIS. WFL's clients have started asking for a global solution. "We are rolling out our service offering globally," explains Hearne.

"Onboarding is just one aspect of managing a contingent workforce worldwide. There are many challenges because there are so many differences in employment laws, forms, workflow, reports, rules – not to mention currencies, language and contracts, but it's a challenge we are conquering."

The BPO case is the most complex onboarding process of all. Since employees are hired by the staffing organization but work at the client's facili-

**We believe that retention starts with recruitment, and we do everything we can to maximize retention.**

ty, they must be onboarded to both the staffing firm and to the client. "At Kelly Services we take a holistic view of onboarding," explains Jeff Warnecke, VP of Kelly's BPO business unit, Kelly Management Services (KMS). KMS takes on the role of staffing and managing entire client business functions like running a warehouse or an entire call center. Kelly blends its own onboarding requirements with those of their clients. "We can't appear to have two onboarding processes," notes Warnecke, "that would be too confusing to our candidates, too inefficient and too expensive." According to Warnecke, onboarding in the BPO environment has its own set of challenges, "We have the administrative burden of onboarding the candidate as a Kelly employee, and we also have to be successful integrating the new employee into the client's environment. We make a big effort to help our KMS employees feel a part of both the Kelly community and the client community. Our onboarding process has been designed with this goal in mind. We have seen productivity and retention increase when the employee feels valued and comfortable, is clear on their role and who



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they work for and is confident that they are making a contribution to both Kelly and to the client. Clearly, there is a big difference between onboarding and just completing new hire paperwork.”

The average company faces a single set of onboarding challenges but onboarding at staffing companies is much more challenging and complex than the corporate environment. In addition to onboarding internal staff, staffing companies onboard high numbers of temporary candidates, which involves ensuring suc-

cessful completion of masses of paperwork and being fully compliant with client requirements, perhaps even taking over the onboarding function for their clients. Newer business models like RPO and BPO require that staffing companies be even more engaged in their client’s onboarding success.

### Why Turnover of Internal Staff Is High in the Staffing Industry

According to Scott Wintrip, founder and president of StaffingU in St. Petersburg FL, there are two key reasons.

“The first reason: Staffing and recruiting professionals are selling the only product that can say ‘no’. The second reason: poor hiring practices.” Staffing companies may be great at recruiting for their clients but they often don’t use the same formal and rigorous business processes for internal hiring and end up hiring the wrong people. Wintrip has been tracking recruiter retention since founding StaffingU in 1999. He says that many people change jobs or even leave the industry within two years or sooner. “I’ve seen a lot of stellar sales people fail at staffing. Why? Because it can be a

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very hard sell. It's not the same as selling other services or products. It's challenging being a great matchmaker, and they lose control over the product."

### Executive Onboarding

Psychologist, MBA and long-time executive onboarding expert Chris Dawson knows that the socialization and assimilation of executive new hires is especially tricky and risky. "Companies wanting to transition their culture frequently change out senior leadership. Executive level new hires represent a significant

investment, perhaps in the range of \$400,000-\$500,000. Losing executive new hires because they didn't appreciate the new corporate culture or were rejected by the incumbent leadership can be very costly," explains the president of Dawson Consulting Group. Dawson has a multistage executive onboarding program that starts with a discovery phase around the company culture and success factors for the position. Dawson participates in the interview team and provides a leadership evaluation of each candidate. Once a

selection is made and the offer is accepted, coaching sessions begin. In the early days of their employment, Dawson helps guide the executive new hire on how to be most successful. Dawson develops and executes an "Assimilation Roadmap," which addresses key challenges for the onboarding team, including stakeholder misalignments, new hire blind spots and priorities. With the goal of ensuring retention and increasing the executive's effectiveness, Dawson helps them navigate the line between being a change



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agent while being successful in the engrained culture.

#### Onboarding Technology

There used to be very little technology available to automate the onboarding process. Today, there are a number of software applications, modules and component technology that provide onboarding functionality:

- Candidate and Client Relationship Management (CRM)
- Career Pages
- Configurable Workflow
- Document Management
- e-Forms
- e-Signature
- Optical Character Recognition (OCR)
- Portal (Employee and Pre-Hire)
- Talent Management Suite
- Task Management
- User Provisioning
- Virtual Onboarding

“The onboarding process used to result in death by 1,000 paper cuts,” jokes Brian Platz, SilkRoad Technology COO. Onboarding organizations are working hard to standardize onboarding business processes, and once a process has been streamlined, technology can be leveraged to make it more efficient. “A number of staffing companies are using SilkRoad’s RedCarpet product to make paperwork processing massively more efficient. Technology makes the staffing company’s onboarding process so much cheaper,

and they can pass along that cost savings to their clients. Additionally they are able to differentiate their service offering by tailoring our communication tools, workflow and portals.”

“Our RPO and BPO offerings have resulted in our adoption of new technology and functionality,” says Hope Bradford, Kelly Services’ Director of Global Service Technology. “A lot of systems need to be engaged to enable

**Onboarding organizations are working hard to standardize onboarding business processes, and once a process has been streamlined, technology can be leveraged to make it more efficient.**

a client’s recruiting and onboarding processes. We’ve implemented systematic checklists and CRM functionality to make sure all the correct steps are completed and ensure candidates and client communication while being as efficient as possible. For BPO we need to then bring those candidates from the BPO systems back into our pay and bill engine for processing. More recently, we’re enabling virtual onboarding so that we can bring on staff even where we don’t have a branch footprint for those items that can be performed virtually.” **SI**

**Sara Moss** (sara@thecodeworksinc.com) is CEO of The Code Works Inc., a software consulting firm based in San Jose CA.



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