

4 Must-Have
Components of a
**Remote Onboarding
Program** That Builds
Company Culture

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SHARED EXPERIENCES CREATE POWERFUL BONDS.

That's the essential truth behind the power of employee onboarding, which has been shown to influence important human resources metrics, such as employee engagement and retention.¹ Despite the fact that effective onboarding can dramatically affect whether or not new employees feel connected to their workplace,² researchers from Gallup found that only 1 in 10 employees strongly agree that their companies are great at onboarding.³

In a post-pandemic hiring landscape where many companies are transitioning to permanently remote or hybrid workplaces, onboarding has become an even more critical touch point for establishing and inviting new employees to participate in the company culture. Increasingly, it's taking place remotely.⁴

"In a remote workplace, we can't default to traditional sources of company culture like the energy in the room or small talk over coffee and cookies," said Crystal Luukkonen, senior training and organizational development manager at Ergotron. "Right at the start, from setting up a new employee with the technology they need to log in for their first day of work, we've had to reinvent our onboarding process and challenge ourselves to find creative ways to expose people to the culture of our organization."

*"When people think about onboarding, on a day-to-day basis they're thinking about HR, employee handbooks or compliance or new-employee orientation. **But onboarding is so much more than that ... it's actually more like a journey than an event.**"*

DANNY LEE

Global Leadership Coach and Senior Learning Consultant,
Gallup



Only 1 in 10 employees strongly agree that their companies are **great at onboarding.**

With the location of work no longer standard, organizations must create systems and processes that allow connection and culture to flourish between people anywhere — and the best opportunity is during the onboarding experience. Here are four cornerstones of a successful remote onboarding program:

FOUR CORNERSTONES OF REMOTE ONBOARDING THAT BUILDS CULTURE



Company values, not company culture



Connection for strong relationships



Choice and personalization



Measurable success

SUCCESSFUL REMOTE ONBOARDING ...

Is built around company values, not company culture

One of the biggest mistakes companies can make when transitioning to remote onboarding is to assume that the traditional approach will translate perfectly into a digital format. While much of the educational content, such as compliance information, may transition just fine, a lot of the interactions that previously built company culture will be lost.

To make up for this gap, organizations must build a program that takes intangible elements of company culture and makes them tangible in the new format. That process comes not from trying to re-create the culture in a remote format but by revisiting company values and identifying ways to bring them to life online.

“We all know how an office works, even if it’s just from watching a thousand sitcoms where employees connect at the watercooler,” said Valentina Thörner, a remote leadership consultant and head of product and director of remote at Klaus, a conversation-review and quality-assurance platform for support teams. “But there’s no one-size-fits-all playbook for remote work. Many companies tried to move that in-office culture to a digital format and ended up on Zoom for eight hours a day. People quickly burned out, wondering why it’s not the same as it was in the office.”





Thörner explained that organizations can't just copy in-person connections to virtual settings and expect it to work seamlessly. Remote onboarding that effectively builds company culture starts with a renewed focus on company values, which can then be translated into the remote culture. Organizations need to take that opportunity to step back and think about what is actually required for employees to be productive at work, then extrapolate that to the overall remote work situation.

"You don't need to defend your company culture when you are remote," Thörner said. "You need to defend your company values, which are the foundation of culture."

*"The shift to fully remote work took a lot of companies by surprise and many were not ready to move their in-person processes online. The biggest change has been in how companies are approaching onboarding; rather than simply adjusting to the medium, **many companies have revamped these processes altogether.**"*

ALEKSANDRA SULIMKO

Human Resources Director, The Soul Publishing⁵

SUCCESSFUL REMOTE ONBOARDING ...

Builds connection for strong relationships

Connection is not a nice-to-have. It's critical to nurturing belonging and helping employees feel as if they're part of something bigger than themselves. Research from Harvard Business Review found that high rates of belonging are linked to bottom-line benefits: a 56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in the risk of turnover and a 75% reduction in sick days, loosely translated to an annual savings of \$52 million for a 10,000-person company.⁶

Connection is a common theme throughout any onboarding experience, but it's especially important during remote onboarding because there's no baseline interaction to fall back on. When an employee begins their first remote workday, they're alone in their workspace with a laptop. Connection and relationship must be planned and facilitated or they may not happen.

Overcoming obstacles was the first step for Luukkonen.

For example, Luukkonen and her team would normally try to keep new employees away from technology during their first two days to encourage focus on the experience of this new milestone, to network throughout the organization and to begin to establish a solid sense of community. But that's not practical for the first day of a remote role. For these employees, they need a computer, equipment, and security and login information so they can even participate in their first day of work.



LUUKKONEN AND HER TEAM BRAINSTORMED OTHER WAYS TO BUILD COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:



Virtual building tours: Provide video and photo tours of the building for employees who have not yet set foot inside the physical workplace.



Warm handoff between recruiter and onboarding team: The new-employee welcome process should include a clear transition from recruiter to onboarding team, demonstrating a culture of sharing and support.



Executive guest speakers on the first day: Connect new hires with executive leaders, including director level and above and the CEO, who can introduce and share their connections to cultural values and show their interest in all employees, no matter their role or level of seniority.



Cohorts to create community: Organize new hires into cohorts to emphasize the shared experience of going through onboarding at the same time.



Customer testimonials to show company culture in action: Ask customers to share their experiences with the company so employees can see how culture plays out in the end product.

“In years past, a new hire’s first week was just that: the first week at work,” Luukkonen said. “We recently evolved our onboarding to support a first week that makes a much bigger impression and sets the tone for how work will take place. This also takes the pressure off of the new hire’s immediate team to share general information about company policies and culture because that information has already been shared during the onboarding process. We were fortunate to already have the wheels in motion for this type of experience when we were faced with the need for remote onboarding.”

“To promote connection in a hybrid workforce, look for ways to level the playing field between those who are in the office and those who are not. For us, that took the form of a digital-first approach to meetings. Even if some people are in the office, everyone logs in separately to attend meetings so that we’re all in the same situation.”

VALENTINA THÖRNE

Remote Leadership Consultant and
Head of Product and Director of Remote, Klaus

SUCCESSFUL REMOTE ONBOARDING ...

Highlights choices and personalization for new employees

“A vital part of the Ergotron brand — sitting less and moving more — is something that new employees can see and pick up on even in virtual settings. Standing desks and monitor arms give our team the ability to work in a way that’s most comfortable and productive for them. We value well-being, flexibility and choice, and we want our newest employees to understand that, too.”

CRYSTAL LUUKKONEN

Senior Training and Organizational Development Manager,
Ergotron

In the transition to remote onboarding, some companies try to develop a one-size-fits-all structure that works for everyone. However, this is rarely effective and undermines one of the biggest advantages of remote work: Employees can set up their workday to maximize their productivity.

Making remote onboarding employee-centric is an investment in your employees. It shows you care and makes employees feel empowered about their career with your organization. Small touches, such as the ability to personalize your workspace and furniture, can have a big effect on how welcome and connected an employee feels to the company at large.

“For us, the ergonomics of work is very important and naturally makes its way into our onboarding process. It’s important to find ways to provide choice and personalization for new employees as they begin to engage with your company culture,” Luukkonen said. “We want to create spaces where employees can be their most productive and effective selves.”

SUCCESSFUL REMOTE ONBOARDING ...

Makes success measurable

It helps to capture baseline metrics and measure progress over time when navigating any change, and it's especially important when shifting from traditional onboarding to remote onboarding. The intersection of remote onboarding, company culture, and employee engagement and retention is uniquely complex.

Here are a few sources of culture-related metrics companies can collect to get a clear picture of progress:

Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)

Time to effectiveness as measured by hiring managers

Performance evaluations

New-hire interviews about onboarding

First- and second-year retention rates

The more data an organization can collect about its company's health, the better, and the more clearly the company can see positive changes. For example, by keeping track of simple metrics, such as eNPS, Luukkonen could identify a marked improvement in company culture over the period of time her company adjusted to the pandemic and shifted into remote operations.

It's also worth getting creative with the metrics you use to define success. Writing for Inc.com, Maria Haggerty, CEO of Dotcom Distribution, said that companies might need to start paying more attention to figures that might have previously been more peripheral.

"Instead of blindly measuring against pre-COVID-19 [key performance indicators], where the monetary results of tactics may have previously taken center stage, focus on the metrics that factor into steady growth and recovery,"⁷ she wrote.

Creative metrics for company culture might include measures like attendance at team-building events, employee referrals, internal transfers or even customer feedback.



Remote or On-Site, Organizational Health Starts With Onboarding

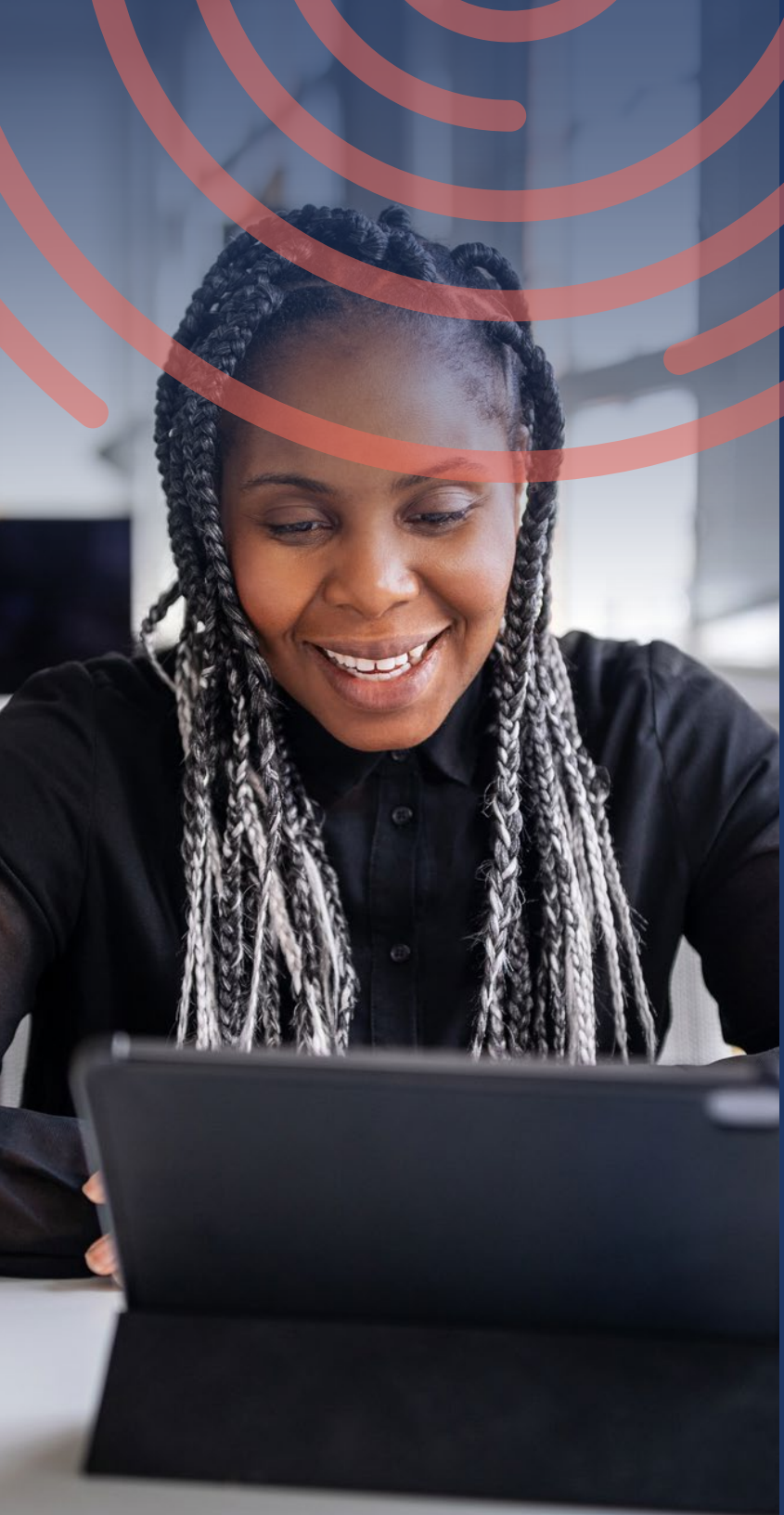
The where, how and why might change, but onboarding will continue to play a crucial role in maintaining organizational health, building company culture, and engaging and retaining employees. Organizations that rely on these four cornerstones will have an advantage in creating a healthy, flexible and unique company culture, no matter where employees work.



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Over nearly four decades, the company has earned more than 200 patents and established a growing portfolio of award-winning brands including WorkFit®, CareFit™, LearnFit® and JÜV™. Ergotron is headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, with a global sales and marketing presence in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific. All products are designed in the United States and produced in Ergotron's facilities in St. Paul and China.

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