Photo by Mukuko Studio on Unsplash

Stirring Onboarding's
Secret Sauce

BY:

Saša Mirković, CFP®, MBA, CRPC®
Chief Executive Officer and Transitions Coach, Inspire Network, LLC

INSPIRE
network

STIRRING ONBOARDING'S SECRET SAUCE

For anyone looking to new-hire onboarding to support their businesses' financial growth, team members' selection is critical. The word "onboarding" conjures up images of new team members attending orientation sessions, "learning the ropes" of an organization, and getting "up to speed" on the requirements of their job. In recent years, thought leaders have described onboarding as a time-limited, structured process that typically lasts 90 to 100 days. But the term onboarding can be misleading, because getting on board an organization isn't like walking up the gangway to get on a ship. It's about what happens during the voyage. Our experience with leadership onboarding leads us to believe that new leaders need less to be onboarded, and more to be integrated, with all that implies for a leader's work to connect with and meld with team members' values. With that in mind, **three key principles guide our organization's approach to developing new team members**.

ONBOARDING IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

What we commonly refer to as "onboarding" should be thought of as the earliest stage of a continuous leadership learning process. A better word for onboarding might be "apprenticing," derived from the French word "apprendre," which means "to learn." Apprenticeships have been used for centuries to help people learn skilled trades from an expert. Unfortunately, the term apprenticeship is not

> **WE BELIEVE NEW LEADERS NEED TO BE LESS ONBOARDED AND MORE INTEGRATED**

commonly used to describe learning on the job in Western knowledge industries. In my organization we don't call our new team members "apprentices," but for all practical purposes, that is what they are. Most of what our new members learn happens by doing the actual job with support from more senior team members and leaders.
Which leads to our second principle:

COACHING IS THE HEART OF ONBOARDING

Many organizations say they coach their team members. Do they really? Time-strapped leaders may have one-on-one meetings or deliver top down information to groups of team members, but these encounters are not necessarily linked to learning. When it comes to onboarding, coaching is our organization's secret sauce. Our organization's leaders are fiercely committed to developmental coaching. For those familiar with the Pareto Principle (aka "the 80-20 rule")[1], the 20% of leaders' time spent coaching junior team members yields 80% of their impact on their growth and productivity. That's because, every single day, our leaders coach team members about how to connect what they've learned in formal training to the real-world demands of their jobs. Our leaders in their coaching roles don't just

---

[1]The Pareto Principle states that 80% of consequences come from 20% of the causes. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/paretoprinciple.asp

throw new members into the deep end of the pool and hope they can swim. They first give members lots of opportunities to see the work, such as exposure to client visits conducted by more senior team members. Those leaders then fully debrief such experiences to ensure that team members feel confident when they take the wheel of their new roles.

LEADERSHIP IS HARD-WIRED INTO EVERY ROLE

In our organization, onboarding encompasses both technical and leadership skills. We expect everyone on our team to develop their ability to think and act as a leader. We follow a "5 Levels of Leadership Competence Model" inspired by the models developed by John Maxwell[2] and Jim Collins.[3]

LEVEL 5	Level 1-4 plus: Ability to tie everything to WHY & develop 4+ Leaders
LEVEL 4	Level 1,2,3 plus: Ability to mobilize people & drive results
LEVEL 3	Level 1,2 plus: Ability to propose solutions
LEVEL 2	Level 1 plus: Ability to identify problems
LEVEL 1	Perform tasks with competency when given direction

As part of orientation, I review the 5 leadership levels with new team members. For example, Level 1 (perform tasks with competency when given direction) is foundational because people can only develop leadership skills if they themselves are coachable. Our team is focused on getting everyone to Level 3 (includes Levels 1 and 2, plus provide solutions) as quickly as possible, ideally within six to nine months, so they're able to act independently. At that point, we create opportunities through projects and other assignments to develop Level 4 skills (includes Levels 1, 2, and 3 plus ability to mobilize people and drive results.) Ultimately, we want all our

team members to become Level 5 leaders, where they can tie everything we do to our team's purpose and themselves develop many level 4 and 5 leaders.

The payoffs for this approach to leadership and team member development are impressive: Our leadership approach fosters a culture where everyone is on a journey to improve their skills, not only as a professional but also as a leader, both on the job and in all areas of their lives. It also helps our organization build trust both among the team and with clients.

The most enduring impact of our focus on leadership? We believe it's the only way to create a strong, sustainable, multigenerational business, one that provides continuous advancement opportunities for all high-performing team members. We are confident that this approach will allow us to serve our clients with distinction long after our founding members turn over the reins to the next generation of owner/advisors.

Contact Saša Mirković at Inspire Network to learn more about strategies for creating transformational growth or positioning your business for a successful generational transition.

Email: info@wefacilitatechange.com

INSPIRE network

[2] Maxwell, John. The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential. Center Street, 2013.
[3] Collins, Jim. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't. Harper Business, 2001.