



NGS GLOBAL

SPECIAL REPORT

# Executive Onboarding: Making the Process Work for Success

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Research and conventional wisdom both suggest that new executives have approximately 90 days to prove themselves in a new organization. This finding underlies the importance of a good first impression that transpires during the executive's onboarding phase. Onboarding - the action or process of integrating a new employee into an organization - is a significant factor to the success, and ultimately, the retention of an executive. Simply put, good onboarding is a predecessor to a greater outcome of meeting organizational goals and retention rates. Karla Dorsch, Managing Partner of NGS Global - Dubai discusses how a carefully planned and thoughtful recruitment/onboarding process underpins the future success of C-suite talent. Additionally, Ms. Dorsch explains how executive search firms play a key role in the process by partnering with clients to identify and engage top candidates with the right background, cultural fit and personality traits bolstering successful outcomes and retention of talent.

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## ONBOARDING STUDIES

Both academic researchers and those responsible for onboarding understand that the best programs are those that are based on solid research and make sense in practice.

Research analysis has shown:

- Half of all senior executive hires are pushed out, fail or quit within their first 18 months in a new organization.
- 32% of global executives say the onboarding they experienced was poor.
- Estimates vary, but the cost of a single failed executive level role can be as high as \$2.7 million.
- Companies that engage in formal onboarding by implementing step-by-step programs for new executives are more effective in producing successful results than those that do not.

Interpretation of these findings suggest that a formal orientation process focusing heavily on sharing organizational structure, culture, and how things get done, plus a written plan are key elements



of assimilating a new executive into an organization; however, small things— like greeting them warmly, taking them to lunch, and providing a functioning workstation on Day 1 are just as critical. Many

organizations believe that the most important day on the job for a new hire is the first day and in response, the CEO will take the new executive to lunch. Studies show the trajectory of a new hire's success is set as early as the first two weeks, hence, it is important to make the first day a special one.

## ONBOARDING EXECUTIVES VS. NON-EXECUTIVE PERSONNEL

Corporate organizations understand that executive onboarding differs from traditional onboarding. Getting executives up to speed quickly is critical because leadership positions are highly visible and face significantly greater performance expectations impacting the organizations bottom line. Executives have more stakeholders with whom to interact and are normally brought in to help with strategic initiatives that may require changing the work environment rather than fitting into it. They are often confronted with unique and challenging situations that require solutions. Because of the delineated differences above, it is important to review several best practices that organizations can implement into the formal onboarding process.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR POSITIVE RESULTS

Effective onboarding is the key to accelerating success and reducing risk for new hires as well as facilitating higher levels of employee satisfaction. Implementation of three roles in the detailed onboarding plan can increase the likelihood for positive results exponentially. An Orientation Navigator can assist the executive in the orientation phase, completing new employee documents and navigating the day-to-day challenges of working at the company. A Peer Mentor, usually another leader, serves as both "buddy" and mentor, providing moral support as well as ensuring the new hire gains an understanding of the people and processes important for getting things done. A Transition Mentor serves over a longer term as a sounding board and coach outside the peer group, assisting in a variety of ways to promote the executive's growth, development, and success as a leader. Finally, any onboarding process is significantly compromised without the active participation of the CEO, meeting regularly with the executive to clarify expectations and solve problems.

During the onboarding phase, newly placed executives can play a crucial role in their own assimilation by building informal power - increasingly important and valued. Informal power encompasses the combined elements of internal networking, expertise gained by showing - not telling and displaying interest in others. Building a strong internal network, even if a new executive's preferences for behaviors, relationships, attitudes, values and the environment exactly match their new organization's culture on paper, doesn't matter until the members of the organization hear it, see it and believe it. Therefore, it is important to converge into an organization before trying to evolve it.

Executive search firms can play an integral part in the future success of newly placed executives by partnering with clients before, during and after the selection process, talking to clients about onboarding from the outset and part of the client's strategic plan. Too often, selection is focused on technical skills, knowledge and experience; little attention is paid to the "softer" factors such as cultural or psychological fit with other team members. By using their expertise in executive recruitment and selection, search firms are more apt to identify the most qualified talent using a matrix of experience, leadership capabilities, cultural fit and personality traits that best fit the specific role. Failures in executive placements almost always come back to either poor fit, delivery, adjustment or onboarding.

Given the critical role that C-suite leaders play in business transformation, hiring new talent is a huge investment and clients need to consciously manage the risk thorough preparation. It's about getting the framework right - in terms of organizational design, rules of engagement and support network - to create a climate in which the incoming leader can achieve success. Getting the selected candidate's signature on a contract should never be the end of it,

but the pivot point. Success demands a balanced approach, with input from executive search partners managing the situation in tandem with the client to flag issues and take corrective action over an extended period during onboarding. As cross-industry moves become more common, culture inevitably enters the equation, thus executive search firms and their clients need to observe due diligence to ensure they not only land the best candidates but hang on to them.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

As the future success of an organization is reliant on strong leadership and profitable performance, it is imperative that executives are viewed as showing a high level of integrity, ability to inspire others with positivity, commitment and passion about their mission, innovative ideas and an insightful collaborator, key elements to great leadership. This is hard to achieve without a great onboarding process for executives which provides the tools, knowledge and structure they require to build strong relationships and success in their role. Theodore Roosevelt said, “The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.” Strong relationships will strengthen the company in two key ways, performance and dedication. A thoughtfully planned executive onboarding process has a long-lasting effect and is the linchpin to success.



## ABOUT NGS GLOBAL

With offices across the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia, NGS Global provides the extensive resources of major global executive search firms along with high-touch service, accelerated completion cycles and superior candidate access made possible by a mid-sized platform without external shareholders. Through our commitment to industry expertise, cultural knowledge and partner-led search execution, we deliver exceptional value to our clients.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Smart, B. (1999). Top grading: How leading companies win by hiring, coaching, and keeping the best people. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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<sup>5</sup>Bauer, Tayla. “Onboarding New Employees.” SHRM, 17 Oct. 2017, [www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/special-reports-and-expert-views/Documents/Onboarding-New-Employees.pdf](http://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/special-reports-and-expert-views/Documents/Onboarding-New-Employees.pdf).

<sup>6</sup>Ross, W E, et al. “Executive Onboarding: Ensuring the Success of the Newly Hired Department Chair.” Current Neurology and Neuroscience Reports., U.S. National Library of Medicine, May 2014, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24667516](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24667516).

<sup>7</sup>Bradt, George. “Executive Onboarding: The Key to Accelerating Success and Reducing Risk in a New Job.” Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 25 Jan. 2018 [www.forbes.com/sites/georgebradt/2012/02/15/executive-onboarding-the-key-to-accelerating-success-and-reducing-risk-in-a-new-job/#2861ae6421ab](http://www.forbes.com/sites/georgebradt/2012/02/15/executive-onboarding-the-key-to-accelerating-success-and-reducing-risk-in-a-new-job/#2861ae6421ab).

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Karla Dorsch is Managing Partner at NGS Global and is based in Dubai. Ms. Dorsch has been closely associated with the Middle East for over 15 years helping to establish and launch organizations with development of their businesses in a rapidly changing environment. As a trusted partner to her clients, she has been instrumental in the recruitment of senior-level professionals in financial services, energy/infrastructure, technology and real estate to meet their talent acquisition and business goals. Building on her professional experience, Ms. Dorsch has a unique breadth of recruitment experience enabling her to quickly assess and provide expert advice on how to solve complex recruitment challenges; a service fostering long-term business relationships with clients and candidates.

Early in her career, Ms. Dorsch worked as a Regulatory and Policy Analyst at the New York Federal Reserve Bank concentrating on assessing the capital, assets, equity, liquidity and management of member banks. She then joined Merrill Lynch Investment Bank in London providing clients advice on their investment requirements and solutions. Just prior to joining NGS Global, Ms. Dorsch was the Founder and CEO of Piedmont Ltd. for over 20 years – a boutique executive search firm based in London and the UAE.

Ms. Dorsch received her undergraduate degree at Columbia University, graduating with honours. She studied for an MSc degree at the London School of Economics, and then received an MBA in Finance from NYU's Stern School of Business.

She is an active member of the International Woman's Forum, a dynamic network of women of diverse interests and achievements.