



## Virtual Onboarding

A year into the pandemic, we have all now learned a new way of working. But our world is still in constant flux and our learning cannot stop.

As we continue to reshape habits in the face of this “new normal”, and perhaps even slowly return to the office, we must continue to invest in the wellbeing and success of new joiners and of those returning to work after a year of incredible change. Investment in the following nine steps will maximize Belonging for new hires and for those returning to work.

**Support:** Ask the right questions to understand what new colleagues need.

This time last year, we may have felt uncomfortable asking about our colleagues’ homelives. But we need to know the answers to offer the right support. Are they home-schooling children? Do they live alone? Do they have a quiet space where they can work? Do they have family they are worried about? Asking these questions, showing that we care and adapting accordingly are the first steps in building a trusted relationship with openness, honesty and empathy.

**Relationships:** Build over time – we’re not “one and done”.

We are in this for the long haul – it’s not enough to have just one conversation with a new joiner. Spend time together regularly across a range of topics, formally and informally – and encourage all team members to do the same. Investing time now will pay off in the long-term and will help everyone transition to the “right” balance of home and office working.

**Re-joiners:** Take just as much time and thought as we do when onboarding new joiners.

“You have all been through this together, but for me, it is still new and very strange.” We have been on a journey and have learned this “new normal” together. Reintegrate re-joiners with empathy and effort – they will need time to readjust. Give them all the support we would a new joiner. Think about whether they need a mentor, perhaps someone who has been on the same journey. Adjusting is hard work and tiring – give them the space to ease back in gently

**Technology:** Get it running smoothly before Day One.

New employees must have all the technology they will need BEFORE Day One – and you should include re-joiners in this too. In our virtual reality, nothing will happen without it. “If you’re a new joiner, technology is vital – I have to work from home, but I wasn’t supplied with a computer or a phone on my first day, which made it incredibly hard to add value or to feel valued!” Have our systems been adapted for this purpose? Strong goodwill is created when a new joiner has a spectacular and seamless Day One.



## Mentors: Drive trust and are even more important than before.

Mentors help build trust and psychological safety. Personal-level connections are inherent to developing senses of Belonging. Virtual new joiners are unable to “bump into” anyone around the office or easily establish informal networks. Now, more than ever, mentors are critical to the creation of open dialogue. The “right” mentors for virtual joiners should have broad networks, be organizationally savvy and be highly empathetic. Their role in boosting the new joiners’ senses of Belonging cannot be underestimated

## Time: Allow more.

New joiners will feel new for longer. We can work hard on virtual integrations – but we need to recognize and appreciate too that new hires will need more time than “normal” to fully integrate. Make this clear to everyone – guide both the new joiners and the team to adjust expectations. The high-performing new joiners may be disappointed by their ability to make less impact and to do so less quickly. Reassure them.

## Communication: Be an active listener – are we giving them what they need?

Most organizations have a “typical” onboarding plan. Seek feedback from new hires and adapt this plan with them for the virtual world. Remember that speaking up can be hard, especially when someone is new. Asking early on and being open to change is the first step in building a relationship of trust. Make it easy for new joiners to say what they really feel. “My induction plan was so thorough that I didn’t have time to do my work – and it was stressful. Thankfully, my mentor checked in on me and we were able to change it to achieve more balance.”



## Networks: Create new virtual networks.

Design virtual networking groups to connect and introduce new hires across the entire business (to peers, stakeholders, functional teams, etc.). Remember to connect new joiners to other new joiners – they can go through this together. “Once I had established a network, my value was much greater. It’s like when you wear excellent skiing clothes and they make you a more confident skier.”

## Return-to-Office: Repeat – integration needs to happen again.

Returning to full-time office working or a split between office and home will be an adjustment for everyone, and especially so for new joiners who may feel their “newness” all over again. Sit down together and in-person to understand how to best integrate them into the team and culture. And keep asking them what they need.

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## THE BELONGING PROJECT

Deep senses of Belonging show a massive 56% increase in job performance and a substantial 50% drop in turnover risk.\* Our project focuses on the tactics our clients can use to retain exceptional talent.

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