

## Where's the party?

by Geoff Ramey - Manager of HR systems at Xstrata (formerly Falconbridge Ltd).

Has anyone out there departed from a company recently? Of your own free will, that is. Perhaps one that you have worked at for quite some time, where you achieved a great deal of accomplishments and perhaps made some friends along the way? What happened in those last few days or weeks leading up to your last day? Perhaps a few lunches with colleagues, you may have received some gifts or company swag and perhaps even the odd party. What a great way to depart - with some wonderful memories!

### **Moving on**

Now, let's partake in the suspension of disbelief and assume that you went through an absolutely perfect recruitment process at the new company you joined – define perfect as you will. Let's fast forward to the days leading up to your first day of work at the new company. Were you contacted by your new manager AFTER accepting the offer? Did you know where to park on your first day? Did you know what time to arrive? Who to ask for? What personal information to bring with you for the infamous first day paperwork? I could keep going here, but I think you get the point.

Okay, so here we are now on your start date and the first few days of your new job. Let's compare your experience so far to the one you just left at the last company where things were familiar. Did they throw a party for you on your first day? Did you get any company swag? Rather than being paraded around as “the new guy or gal” and shown off as the latest trophy prize in a tough to fill position that was vacant for 3 months (we'll talk about the work piling up on your new desk in a few moments), did your co-workers make an effort to come and meet with you? Once again, the list could go on, but I think I've made my point.

### **Buyer's remorse**

We've all heard about buyer's remorse. It happens every day. It's human for us to second guess ourselves, especially on some of the really big or important decisions that we make – should I have paid a little extra for the sunroof? Should I have chosen hardwood instead of laminate? Should I have bought the size 32 instead of trying to squeeze into the 30? Should I have stayed at my last job where I was comfortable, people liked me, I had good benefits, a great pension plan and a boss who understood my needs?

As that new employer, we need to be aware of “buyer's remorse” and address the needs and concerns of our new employees as soon as possible and as often as possible. When you buy a brand new car and spend a lot of money on it, do you immediately drive it while revving the engine as high as you can? Do you see how long you can go without oil changes until the car begins showing signs of needing one? Probably not. Why then, do we hire new employees and put them hard to work on their first or second day? Why do

we throw them out there “into the fire”, often without the full knowledge or tools to do their jobs and wait for them to try and figure out all the right questions to ask?

## **What to do**

Onboarding? Integration? Orientation? Whatever the flavour of the month or buzzword is, it is something you need to be aware of; it’s something you need to address. For our purposes today, we’ll call it onboarding. Even more important than what you call it, is recognizing where it starts and where it ends. This has been a debatable point for years. This is my article, so I’ll give my perspective, and you can adapt what works for you.

Onboarding begins the moment your new employee accepts the job offer. Up to this point, it has been the job of the recruiter, interviewers and hiring manager to sell the job and your company to the candidate. Obviously that sell job worked and now you have yourself a new employee. However, unlike the car we spoke about earlier, your new employee has choices, feelings and emotions to contend with over the coming days. It’s now your job to help make this an easy transition.

I have seen articles about the many hats of recruiters or the many hats of HR professionals. Organizations need to figure out who puts on the onboarding hat, otherwise, this is where the process typically falls apart. Here are a few common generalizations:

“I’m the recruiter, I found the person and now I need to move on to the next hire. I’m too busy to answer all these questions and deal with the paperwork.”

“I’m the HR generalist, and the employee hasn’t started yet. I don’t really know the person, and it would be strange for me to call him/her and have a discussion.”

“I’m the hiring manager, and I’m way too busy right now to deal with someone who is not yet even an employee. I’m still doing all of the work that this new person will be doing. I don’t know why he/she had to give 2 weeks notice and couldn’t start right away. Oh, by the way, I’m out of town at a meeting on his/her first day, so HR, I’m hoping you can bring him/her by the department and have one of my other direct reports show him/her the ropes.”

Do any of these sound vaguely familiar? As is often the case, there is a blurred line as to when your new employee is no longer the responsibility of the recruiter and is now the responsibility of someone else. This usually occurs during the new employee’s notice period at the previous employer, and can sometimes, in rare cases, catch you off guard with a post-acceptance counter-offer.

The hiring manager should not lose contact with the new employee once the final interview stages have been conducted. After the offer has been accepted, the hiring manager should be in contact with the individual at least every couple of days – to congratulate them, to share information about the first day of work, to indicate if the team

is taking the individual out to lunch, to inform them about what information they should bring. The hiring manager should also follow up to see if the new employee has any questions, or to share additional information such as dress code, upcoming company events or the names and contact info for co-workers that they'll meet on the first day- this way, the employee can spend some time reviewing this information and names and come prepared. For the hiring manager, this allows for building rapport long before the new employee starts.

### **Too much of a good thing**

Properly preparing your new employee is beneficial but it is equally important to remember not to overload them. Many organizations are good at the aforementioned practices, but then take it too far. New employees do not necessarily need a 3" binder of company policies to "become familiar" with prior to the first day. Don't give the employee the binder on the first day either! Perhaps share bits and pieces of it over the first couple of days or weeks.

So, what does the ideal first day look like? The first week? This will vary depending on the size, resources and culture of your company. As a general rule of thumb, you want the employee to feel welcomed, accepted, comfortable and happy about the choice he/she made. You don't want to have too much administration too early, or over burden the employee with company acronyms. It may even be a great idea to provide the names of new hires to the company CEO or the most senior person at the location. He or she can drop by the new employee's desk sometime in the first week to welcome the employee to the company.

### **Where does it end?**

You've found a great employee. That great employee had access to an extranet employee web portal with useful information after accepting the offer, had the hiring manager contact him/her, then joined your organization, completed the required paperwork, had some meetings, went to a lunch "celebration" with the team, received some company swag, found out where all the local hot spots are and the CEO stopped by to say hello. Now we're done, the employee is happy and ready to get right to work, right?

Nope. The above statement is only partly true. Assuming that some form of adequate training has been provided, the employee should be quite content, had any sort of buyer's remorse mitigated and will be somewhat productive in the new role. However, the key is maintaining this momentum. Here are some ideas that may be useful:

1. Have the employee feel that he/she can help improve the process by asking him/her to complete a short onboarding survey – this may be part of your post-hire survey (discussed in prior articles)
2. Organize an event 3-6 months into employment that includes new hires (and their managers). The event should provide hard to find information about the company, common FAQs, and provide an opportunity to network with others in the

- company who started around the same time, and most of all, it should be fun!(perhaps structure it as a wine & cheese event toward the end of the business day)
3. Provide a mechanism for new hires to access training and further information about the company – perhaps a new hire section on an intranet site (maybe offer “credits” toward a prize or award for each piece of material or training that is reviewed)
  4. Assign a buddy and/or mentor to the employee from day one (or before) and have periodic scheduled check-ins for the duration of the first year
  5. Assign an HR person or recruiter to follow up with the hiring manager on the quality of the hire at 3, 6 and 12 months (use this info when hiring future employees for the same manager, or the company)

These are just a few ideas; why not see what other things your company already does, and make some changes or additions if required.

### **Windfalls and pitfalls of technology**

This is a section that could be an article unto itself, and may be at some point. A Google search for “employee onboarding solutions” returns more than 121,000 results. Suffice to say that if you are a company that wants to seek out a technology solution to manage the onboarding process for you, then there is probably something out there. Just remember that a bad process with new technology often becomes a really expensive bad process. It’s important to get the basics correct before leveraging a technology to help you in automating that process.

### **The final word**

You may agree with me or you may not. Your definition of where onboarding begins and ends is up to you. Starting the relationship out right from day one has been proven to improve employee engagement over time, so long as a positive employee-employer relationship is maintained and each side delivers on its commitments to the other. Think about the last time you bought a large piece of furniture from one of those big Swedish furniture stores and imagine what it would be like to put that item together without instructions. Put yourself in the shoes of a new hire who “made the purchase” but now has to figure it out on their own; it’s up to you to create a pleasant “shopping experience” for your new hires. Eliminate buyer’s remorse and give them that great warm hearted celebratory experience. Don’t save the parties for departing employees, use them to welcome new employees to the team too.

### ***Bio:***

Geoff is currently the Manager of HR systems at Xstrata (formerly Falconbridge Ltd). He has also held past roles in recruitment at various notable companies. As someone who currently focuses on HR systems to support the lifecycle of an employee beyond hiring, Geoff devotes his energy at present (and in the past) to developing and delivering

processes to support employee onboarding, learning, development, performance management and compensation.