



Executive Onboarding During the Pandemic: Both Pitfall and Opportunity

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[Hiring and Retention](#), [Leadership](#), [Remote Work](#) / by [Bob Ryan](#)

Talent managers, human resources practitioners, and executive coaches continue to perfect work-from-home and make it the new norm. As they do, they find a hidden pitfall in their work becoming more evident each day. We're talking about executive onboarding – specifically, for those new team members C-Suite and just below.

So how, in a remote world of work, does the new team member get to know their new colleagues?

Let's say you just started that new position in the (now virtual) executive suite. You are looking to become part of the team quickly. Chances are you have already thought about how you are going to talk to your direct reports. You have a sense of how to communicate and collaborate, of course. To help matters, your new boss and you have already figured out how you will interact. As some of our clients initially thought, there is a general sense of feeling good about their new situation. And yet, the piece that is missing is an important one.

The fact is we miss the opportunity to connect in person – especially as the new addition. And we haven't yet learned how to get to know our peers in the organization while working remotely.

Executive Onboarding: A Challenge Even in “Normal” Times

As is the case when working in-person at an office, remote teams and group leaders tend to become siloed. After all, when working alone, it is easy to become narrowly focused on our own departments. Although a natural occurrence, this makes it difficult for the new chief marketing officer, for example, to know much about what the chief financial officer is doing.

Scheduling video calls with equals is not typically on executives' wavelengths. But in today's world of work, it should be – it must be. Because when the left-hand does not know what the right hand is doing, problems result. Company efficiencies and productivity suffer. As we coach our clients: You are not just joining the team you will run, you are joining your boss' team. Neglecting to invest in the development of relationships with team members and leaders at your level, in your situation, creates a leadership dysfunction that is not good for the company – any company.

Developing Relationships in a Virtual World

The key to a successful onboarding process and the development of one-on-one relationships is active listening. In the new work-from-home landscape – where the watercooler conversation, spur of the moment “let’s grab a coffee,” and unannounced pop-in are absent – how does one develop those relationships? Where are the opportunities for active listening? It is not through only one’s direct reports, nor is it solely from your boss – a key source of learning comes from peers.

Your peers will likely have various levels of experience and institutional knowledge about the company. That experience and well-earned knowledge will likely become essential resources for your own team’s success at some point. After all, the Chief Procurement Officer will likely need to rely upon the Chief Supply Chain Officer, and vice-versa, to succeed. Not only will they know the business, but they will also know your people. And developing those relationships, over time, is an integral part of being a good executive.

So how does a new executive team member develop those relationships while working from home? Here are three suggestions:

Develop a Comprehensive Communication Plan

Along with your hiring manager, develop a detailed onboarding plan that ensures you will communicate with all stakeholders. This is especially important for [connecting with new peers](#), an oft-forgotten cohort. It is natural to devise a plan to configure best practices for your new boss and those reporting to you. But developing those relationships with your equals is critical to your success because these people will help you navigate the workplace culture from your same vantage point.

Plan for Spontaneous Connection

Leaders at every level must find a substitute for the unplanned office drop-in to say hello. Those interactions are typically low-stress and ultimately derive high returns when it comes to relationship-building. For WFH, we suggest keeping a pad near your computer to write down a reminder of what you might say when you virtually drop in. That means preparing what you want to say in that short text and quick call—no need to schedule a videoconference to relay that “job well done” encouragement.

Schedule Virtual Happy Hours

Carve out some valuable end-of-the-day time for an after-hours virtual coffee or cocktail with your new team and with your peers. New leaders should accomplish this task through one-on-one meetings or in small groups. Be sure to develop these relationships in a more casual setting because everyone a more relaxed environment will encourage team building and team bonding.

Connecting with one’s peers within the organization should happen regularly for established leadership teams, regardless of work circumstances. When it comes to onboarding in a remote work situation, we encourage our clients to intentionally reach out to their new colleagues via video call or telephone call. Not to accommodate formal meetings, but just to say hello. This

aspect of virtual executive onboarding will also help understand the company culture and, just as importantly, what you can anticipate others will expect of you.

How Will You Improve Executive Onboarding?

Deliberately making that introduction, sharing enough personal information to form a bond, and offering your help to new colleagues will surprise some new coworkers and fellow leaders.

Those actions will also make an excellent first impression and go a long way toward easing the transition into that new position—all while working from home.

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