Creating & Sustaining Onboarding for Service-Based Businesses

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Onboarding, the process of how an employee is oriented from the time of hire through his or her first few months of employment, is an integral part of all businesses. Whether formal or informal in practice, onboarding is essential in bringing an employee up to speed with an organization. Unfortunately, however, many small service-based businesses do not practice any sort of onboarding program. Throughout the pages to follow, I analyze the benefits and best practices of implementing such programs in small businesses. The information gathered is then synthesized into a implementable program for Cole Academy, a dance studio located in Muncie, Indiana. While the program is specific to Cole Academy, it could also be adapted for many similar service-based businesses.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Carla Flores for advising me throughout this project. Her instruction through this past year was but a fraction of the guidance she has provided to me throughout my time as an HR major.

I would also like to thank Tracy Navas for providing me the necessary experience and information needed to make this project a success for Cole Academy.
As a Human Resource Management major, I have learned the importance of an effective onboarding program in all organizations. However, I noted that this is often only applied in large businesses, despite the need in all business settings. The research below thus outlines what I have learned about the benefits of implementing such programs in small, service-based businesses as well as best practices on how to create said programs.

To conduct this research, I first looked to cites such as the Society for Human Resources Management. Based on the articles I read through, I next searched through Bracken Library’s database of journals. Specifically, I was looking for onboarding programs used by service-based businesses. Unfortunately, I found limited information on this precise topic; however, I did find a number of great resources detailing the benefits of creating onboarding programs in small organizations. This, combined with my own expertise and what I have learned in my HR classes, allowed me to infer how to create the best possible program.

This research will be applied to Cole Academy, a local dance studio. As a former dance instructor at the studio, I saw an opportunity to apply what I had learned in the classroom to my real-world surroundings. Following the research below, I have constructed an onboarding program and guide for Cole Academy.

Working on this project has given me an opportunity to put what I have learned in my HR classes and in my research into real practice. It was challenging at times to apply a concept primarily utilized by formal programs in large companies to a small, service-based business. Nevertheless, I have learned how to adapt such programs for one such business and believe the results below can be modified for other similar business types.
Relevant Research & Findings

Outside of the corporate realm, many are likely unfamiliar with the term onboarding. Onboarding is how an employee is oriented to a new place of work and occurs from the time a job offer is made through his or her first sixty, ninety, or more days with the company. This can vary dependent upon the organization. For the purposes of this project, the onboarding process occurs from the job offer through the employee's first six weeks on the job.

Although formal programs are found primarily in large businesses, onboarding exists to some degree for all organizations. As Dr. Tayla N. Bauer says in Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success, employees in many smaller organizations experience informal onboarding, "the process by which an employee learns about his or her new job without an explicit organization plan" (2). While effective for some organizations, research shows that formal onboarding programs create a number of both short-term and long-term benefits for employees of all types of organizations.

Short-term, employees who have been formally onboarded typically feel a higher degree of self-efficacy in their jobs. This translates to their job performance. Bauer also mentions, "To the degree that a new employee feels confident in doing the job well, he or she will be more motivated and eventually more successful than less confident counterparts" (4). Employees that fully understand the organization, organizational goals, and their roles in reaching those goals will be more engaged in their jobs and will ultimately be more successful. Successful onboarding also gives new employees social integration with others in the organization. In a survey looking at social integration in the workplace, it was found that failure of a successful, formal onboarding processes was attributed to failure to establish effective working relationships in sixty percent of managers (Bauer 5). This is likely true for lower-level employees as well. Finally, onboarding allows employees to understand their fit within the organization and its culture. Every company is different, which inevitably means some aspects will be different, even from seemingly similar organizations. In order for employees to feel that they are truly a part of the organization, it is important that the company's specific customs, culture, etc. are shown to them (Bauer 4-6).

In addition to the apparent short-term benefits, there are also a number of long-term benefits provided by formal onboarding. Statistically, employees are much more likely to perform better more quickly, and stay with their organization longer. Bauer mentions that a good onboarding program improves retention rates by fifty-two percent (6). Yet another report found that organizations with top onboarding programs yield a ninety-one percent retention rate, while lower performing companies only yield a thirty percent rate ("Get on Board with Onboarding"). Employees who are not efficiently integrated will be less likely to remain in an organization in which they do not fully understand their role. Onboarding can also decrease employees' time to productivity by as much as sixty percent (Bauer 6). It allows employees to know exactly what will be expected, and therefore to plan their time while at work better. They can use the time they would have spent getting up to speed themselves elsewhere and more productively. Finally, companies surveyed about their onboarding programs found that customer satisfaction was fifty-three percent higher in companies with effective onboarding programs than it was in those without (Bauer 6). These statistics are demonstrated proportionally in Figure 1 below.
Despite the inherent benefits, only thirty-seven percent of organizations invest in a formal onboarding program ("Get on Board with Onboarding"). This same source suggests speaking with employees to identify current flaws in the process. As a former employee of Cole Academy, I noted the need of such a program throughout my two years working there. Cole Academy is a dance, gymnastics, and cheer studio located in Muncie, Indiana. As I spent my time as a dance instructor, the dance program will be the focus of this program. The studio typically hires a number of Ball State students, and therefore experiences a great deal of turnover every couple of years when these students graduate. As the program grows, there is also a need for expanding numbers of teachers. The purpose of this onboarding program is to bring these new teachers up to speed quickly in the fast-paced environment. In doing so, Cole Academy stands to enhance satisfaction among teachers, dancers, and parents. The program guide to be provided to studio owner, Tracy Navas, is included in the pages to follow. Also included is a new hire checklist for employer use only.
Dance Teacher's Onboarding Guide

So you're about to start teaching dance at Cole Academy, congratulations! The following pages will detail all that you need to know on your first day, and throughout your coming months. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Tracy Navas at (765) 717-1675.

First Day Checklist

- Bring your first day: I-9 documentation, voided check, headshot, short bio
- Have you toured the facility?
- Have you filled out your I-9? (Will need U.S. work authorization: driver's license, SS card, passport, etc.)
- Did you submit a voided check for direct deposit?
- Did you provide a headshot and short bio for the website?
- Do you have a thorough understanding of the information below?
- Have you set up your follow-ups with Tracy?

Background

Cole Academy offers both recreational and competitive dance, gymnastics, and cheerleading programs all under the direction of Tracy Navas. The school has served the Muncie community for over 67 years. Students range in age from 1 to 18 years old, and perform in both Winter and Summer Recitals each year. Currently located on South Keesling Rd., the facility offers three dance studios, a fully equipped gymnasium, and a number of other amenities for students. There is a planned facilities expansion to the corner of Morrison and Bethel.
Facility Details

A floorplan of the facility can be found below. Please note, not drawn according to scale. Red lines signify doors leading outside. Other line spaces signify internal doors.

![Facility Floorplan](image)

Tracy opens the facility each day. Should an instructor need to meet at the studio on a day it is not typically open, arrangements should be made with Tracy in advance. If the instructor is the last teacher of the night, he or she is expected to lock up and turn out lights:

**Closing & Locking Up Duties**

1. Ensure each external door (marked in red above) is locked. All doors must be locked from the inside.
2. Exit through the Big Room and lock the door behind them.
3. Ensure all lights are out when locking up. Light switches can be found in each entrance to each room.

Music equipment can be found in one of the corners of each room. Instructors are required to bring their own music. Each stereo system is equipped with an auxiliary cord. Phones, iPads, and laptops are most recommended.

Dance Breakdown

**Recreational Dance**

Recreational dance classes are available for students of any age. Classes are divided by age, and each class performs a routine in both the Winter and Summer Recitals (see Recitals section for further details). Respective classes available for each age group can be seen below.
Dance Companies

The Dance Companies are competitive groups of dancers with extensive training and experience. Groups include the Baby Cole Kids, the Cole Kids, the Junior Company, the Tween Company, and the Senior Company. Dancers are trained in ballet, tap, jazz, musical theatre, hip hop, modern, contemporary, and acro dance. These groups travel across the country for competitions and opportunities to study with a variety of well-known entertainers, dancers, and choreographers. Dance Companies in numerous competitions each season, perform in both Winter and Summer Recitals, and participate in a number of other performance opportunities as well.

Ladybugs and Performing Lines

The Ladybugs and the Performing Lines are groups for dancers wanting to experience competitive dance, but not at the competitive commitment level of the Company. The Ladybugs are ages 4-6 and train in tap, jazz, and ballet. Junior and Senior Performing Lines are trained in tap, jazz, ballet, contemporary, and hip hop. These groups each practice twice per week, attend two annual competitions, and perform in both Winter and Summer Recitals.

Competitive Hip Hop

Competitive Hip Hop Teams are for dancers interested mostly in the hip hop style. These groups range in ages from 7-15. The dancers learn one hip hop routine, compete in a number of competitions, and perform in the Winter Recital.

Cheer & Gymnastics

Cole Academy also offers classes in both cheer and gymnastics. Cheer groups include Recreational Cheer/Tumbling, Special Needs Cheer Squad, Competitive Cheer, Cole All-Star Prep Teams, and Cole Competitive Hip Hop teams. Gymnastics groups include Recreational, Intermediate Level Recreational, Twisters, and Boys Only.

Recitals

Cole Academy performs in two Recitals each year: Winter and Summer. Each recreational class performs one dance in each recital, choreographed by the class's instructor. Occasionally, various classes may perform individual sections of a larger routine with other classes. Recital themes are typically decided by Tracy in advance. Instructors are notified via email when a decision has been made. Song choices in accordance with the theme should be decided upon three to four months in advance.
Instructors are encouraged to suggest song choices. Two to three choices can be provided to Tracy by the end of August for the Winter Recital, and by the end of February for the Summer Recital. Tracy will then decide on songs based upon fit with the theme. Costumes are chosen by Tracy.

In addition to recreational dance classes, Performing Line and Company classes often perform routines in both Recitals as well. Dances in the Winter Recital typically coordinate with the theme, while dances in the Summer Recital are typically those the groups compete.

Each Recital will have two days of dress rehearsals prior to the performances, all of which are held in Emens Auditorium on Ball State's campus. Instructors are expected to account for their routines at both dress rehearsal and Recital. This includes preparing the dancers backstage, leading necessary rehearsals, etc.

**Competitions**

Both Performing Line and Company groups compete. The competition season typically begins in January or February and ends around May through July. The Performing Line typically competes in two competitions, while the Company competes in four to six. Competition venues vary year to year, and locations range throughout the Midwest. The competition schedule is sent to teachers when available, typically no later than October.

Tracy will assign groups to each teacher, and each teacher is then responsible for the group's song, choreography, and costumes. Choreography should typically be done by early November, and costumes ordered by Fall Break (early October). Tracy will periodically check in on the progress of choreography, and can help arrange additional time with the dancers if needed. Costumes can be ordered from any of the catalogs in the front office. Instructors are asked to choose a first and second choice of costume, in the case of unavailable sizing or unreasonable pricing. If the instructor would like to create a costume outside what is offered in the catalog, he or she may shop on their own and provide receipts for reimbursement to Tracy. It is highly encouraged the instructor first speak with Tracy to receive necessary sizing and budget information. The instructor first speak with Tracy to the instructor first speak with Tracy to receive appropriate sizing and budget information. See the graphic below for a timeline of events preceding competition season.
Teachers are responsible for their own transportation to competitions. Instructors are encouraged to carpool, and Tracy will reimburse instructors for mileage if reasonable (instructor made an effort to carpool, stay longer at the competition if necessary, etc.). At the competition, teachers should prep their routines and ensure all dancers are ready to compete. Awards will conclude each competition. If teachers have multiple routines performing on varying days, Tracy can book a nearby hotel room to be shared with another staff member. Tracy will provide instructors with a confirmation for a reservation made under his or her name.

Other Events and Performances

Both dancers and dance teachers may be asked to participate in other events throughout the year. Tracy will give notice and information of such events. For teachers, the largest commitment is Dance for Kids’ Sake. This event is a fundraiser for Big Brothers Big Sisters and typically takes place in April. Each dance teacher is assigned a local couple (husband/wife, father/daughter, friends, etc.) that is well-known in the community and typically have little to no dance experience. Teams will meet to discuss a song and style, and will then have six weekly, hour long rehearsals to prepare for a competitive show among the couples. Rehearsals must correspond with the couples’ schedule as well as room availability at Cole. Routines are typically approximately two minutes in length. Please note that while required of all Cole Academy staff members, Dance for Kids’ Sake is a volunteer event. Tracy will provide additional details as the event approaches.

Classes and Private Lessons

Classes are typically consistent from week to week. Teachers are responsible for finding subs for classes they are not able to attend. A sub contact list is provided below. If no one is available, outside dancers may also be used.
Teachers may be asked by Tracy or individual dancers to teach private lessons. These are to be set up between the dancers and the teachers outside of the dancer’s schedule class/rehearsal times. Parents pre-pay for a set amount of hours of private lessons. For each half hour, they are given a red ticket. These tickets are given to the teacher at each lesson. Teachers will be provided an envelope to place tickets in until they can be counted and the time is added to the teachers’ paychecks.

Instructors are expected to start and end all classes on time, always. Cole Academy apparel or a staff shirt and appropriate dance shoes should be worn at all times when teaching. This is especially important while teaching recreational classes. Instructors should make an effort to get to know not only each dancer, but also the dancers’ parents.

Pay

Class & Rehearsals

Teachers are paid at the hourly rate agreed upon between the teacher and Tracy upon hire for class and rehearsal times.

Private Lessons

Teachers are paid at a rate of $10 per half-hour for private lessons. An envelope will be provided to place tickets in until they can be counted and added to the paychecks.

Competitions

Instructors are paid their hourly rate starting one hour prior to their first routine. If the instructor is responsible for multiple sequential routines, he or she is paid the hourly rate until the routines conclude. Instructors are paid for thirty minutes during any award session he or she has routines participating in. Instructors are not paid during down time or for watching in the audience. Should an instructor not be able to attend a competition, he or she is responsible for finding another staff member to account for the necessary routines and let Tracy know. Instructors are responsible for tracking and recording their hours during competitions.

Important Dates

Tracy will provide a calendar of important dates for each season when available. A sample calendar of 2016-2017 has been included on page 13 for reference.

Next Steps

Now that you have an overview of Cole Academy and how it operates, what should you do next? You will soon hit the ground running with your classes and routines. Tracy will be setting up a time with you after two weeks to discuss your progress and any questions that may have arisen. At the conclusion of this meeting, you will set a time to meet in another four weeks.
And now, it is time to begin planning! Feel free to use the space below to brainstorm ideas for classes and/or routines.
### Additional Resources

**Staff Contact Information/Sub List (may change year to year)**

- Tracy Navas (Owner): (765) 717-1675
- Teressa Dance Director Sypes 765-717-2708
- Mackenzie Alva 755-212-7270
- Tracy Navas
- Tori Cashman 260-415-3999
- Jacq Clark 313-510-3268
- Shannon Kaminski: (630) 363-2190
- Kamryn Kennedy: (765) 639-4599
- Rachel Weinfeld: (517) 898-3658

### Sample 2016-2017 Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Event</th>
<th>BSU Homecoming</th>
<th>Muncie</th>
<th>October 22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convention</td>
<td>NUVO</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>November 18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Event</td>
<td>Christmas Sing</td>
<td>Muncie Fieldhouse</td>
<td>December 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Recital</td>
<td>Dress Rehearsal</td>
<td>Emens Auditorium</td>
<td>December 8 @ 4:30-8:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dress Rehearsal</td>
<td>Emens Auditorium</td>
<td>December 9 @ 4:30-8:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Recital</td>
<td>2 Shows</td>
<td>Emens Auditorium</td>
<td>December 11 @ 2:00 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention</td>
<td>Hollywood Connection</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>February 13-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Optional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>BSU Halftime</td>
<td>Muncie</td>
<td>February 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Celebration Talent</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>February 25-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Starbound</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>March 3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Pacers Halftime</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>March 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>The Power of Dance</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>April 7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Dance for Kids Sake</td>
<td>Muncie</td>
<td>April 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Ticket to Broadway</td>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>May 13-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Recital</td>
<td>Dress Rehearsal</td>
<td>Emens Auditorium</td>
<td>June 8 @ 12:00-7:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Recital</td>
<td>Dress Rehearsal</td>
<td>Emens Auditorium</td>
<td>June 9 @ 1:00-8:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Shows</td>
<td>Emens Auditorium</td>
<td>June 10 @ 2:00 &amp; 6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Starbound Nationals</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>July 16-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Hire Checklist

- Offer made
- I-9 received & appropriate identification copied
- Voided check provided
- Headshot uploaded
- Bio uploaded
- Onboarding Guide given
- Follow-up meetings scheduled
Works Cited


