



Well@Work Podcast Episode 23: Onboarding

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is brought to you by a grant from SAMHSA. On this episode, licensed clinical social worker Cambria Walsh discusses stages and tips for effective onboarding.

Hello, I am Cambria Walsh, a licensed clinical social worker and member of the University of Kentucky's Secondary Traumatic Stress Innovations and Solutions Center. This podcast focuses on onboarding new staff in trauma-exposed workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2017 Gallup report revealed that 88% of employees believe the organizations they work for don't onboard well and this was long before the current pandemic. Changes in the COVID-19 workplace, both for remote and on-site workers, have complicated onboarding further. Let's look at this a little bit more by breaking it down into two basic stages for the onboarding.

The first stage is pre-employment and starts once you extend an offer. Here, it is vital that you stay in touch and start the process even before the formal onboarding begins. Help them get a feel for the organization, think about what you can share with them to help them understand the culture: brochures, websites, articles, etc., and feel welcome, office supplies, organizational swag. You should also consider what needs to be ready for them on day one. What equipment do they need? What will the schedule for onboarding be? And when will your regular meetings take place? What supportive measures are in place in case a personal or workplace traumatic event occurs during the employee's orientation? In other words, get the onboarding plan ready before they start.

The second stage is once the employee starts work and orientation begins. Here, you want to focus on both individual connection, as well as on integrating them into the organization and team. Steps to take here include scheduling time with them one to one to orient, but also on an ongoing basis to check in. Share policies and procedures related to safety, both physical and psychological safety, for staff. It is important to also consider this as it relates to COVID-19. If they will be in person at the organization, highlight what is being done to create safety for workers and clients, walk them to the space to show how these policies look in reality.

Share organizational health information for your organization, highlight what supports are available to them, and how they can be accessed. This should include employee wellness resources and how to use the EAP. It should also include training on potential issues that could arise like secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and moral distress. It is critical to normalize these issues so that the preventative measures can take place. This may include low impact processing, how to use accountability partners, or



plugging people into peer support networks to address issues as they arise. See our other podcasts on these topics for more information.

Remember, anything that you present to them during onboarding must reflect actual programs and policies that you have in place, so this may be a good time to take stock in what you're currently offering and areas that you may need to increase supports for all staff. Consider them having one-on-one time with others in the organization and how to schedule that. What will that look like if done in person? Online? How will staff participating in this be supported so that it is a psychologically safe experience for the new employee? For remote workers, ask for a tour of their remote workspace and make sure they have what they need to do their job. Discuss what the transition from work to home will look like. This is especially crucial for those working remotely because addressing traumatic material when in your home can leave trauma reminders in a space that they are occupying outside of work hours and this is important to address.

Regardless of whether they are in person or remote, it is critical to set expectations around when team members are online or available to connect, including yourself. This stage also involves team building and acquainting them with their peers. Plan out team building activities to start in the first few days and to continue onwards. This might include icebreaker games, a chance for each person to introduce themselves and share something about themselves both professionally and personally. Keep in mind that the learning that a new hire gains from overhearing discussions or water cooler conversations when everyone is working in the same building doesn't occur when everyone is remote or keeping distanced from each other.

Creating opportunities for interaction between the new and existing team members is important. Just as important is to consider what information that they may share. Having some conversation with team members about what to share in a one-to-one conversation may give it some structure. Checking in after these sessions is important, too. Consider creating a mentorship program. Again, here you want to be sure that staff who are involved in this are supported and will also be a positive influence on the new team member. Finally, it is important to ask the new hires for feedback on the onboarding process throughout and to make adjustments as needed.

For more information on other areas around employee well-being, check out the resources at our website and in the description of this video. And remember to stay Well@Work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast. Follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work.