



managers' guide to onboarding transport and logistics

As many as 70% of staff in the transport and logistics sector work in non-desk jobs. Most are remote workers - meaning they don't work in a company office or aren't in the same physical location or vicinity as management and peers.

It is easy to romanticise these professions. Truck drivers living solitary but adventurous lives on the great open road. Pilots in crisp designer uniforms travelling to exotic locations. Sales reps schmoozing clients in fancy restaurants over long lunches. You might even daydream about the day when you yourself can work from home and wake up in the morning and go to work in your pajamas.

Reality bites

But behind these glamorous images of remote workers lies a reality that sometimes isn't always all that it is cracked up to be.

Safety

Fatigue is a significant safety risk for workers in transport and logistics. Working long hours behind the wheel or flying across time zones can have a huge toll on the body. An estimated 20-30% of vehicle collisions on Australian roads occur due to fatigue. [1]

Meanwhile, nearly one in three injuries to Australian workers are caused by incidents during manual handling. [2] For staff in the logistics sector the risk is heightened with workers spending large parts of their day loading and unloading trucks and containers by themselves.

Isolation

84% of non-desk employees believe they don't receive enough on-the-job communication. This can result in workers feeling disconnected from their fellow employees, their company, and the company's goals.

Low morale

A lot of morale and performance issues in remote workforces actually stem from a lack of trust, yet, trust is essential to working remotely. Remote employees need to feel that they can trust their manager to look after their best interests. Team members must be able to rely on each other to get things done - even when they haven't met face to face, and because managers can't personally make sure every task is being completed, they have to be able to trust that work will get done without constant reminding.

So how can do you build trust and know that remote employees are working safely and productively?

Well to coin a phrase from the words of Julie Andrews, it starts at the very beginning...



Onboarding remote workers

Onboarding commences from your initial contact with an employee and unfolds over the first 6 - 12 months of service. Staff learn a lot about the integrity and culture of your organisation through how you communicate and interact with them during this period and how well you prepare them for the road ahead.

90% of employees will make the decision as to whether to stay with an organisation by the end of the first year - so there is little doubt that the onboarding experience is critical.

But in recognition of the unique challenges of onboarding staff in non desk jobs, here are 11 tips to help managers in the logistics and transport industry engage their workforce and win employee trust right from the start.

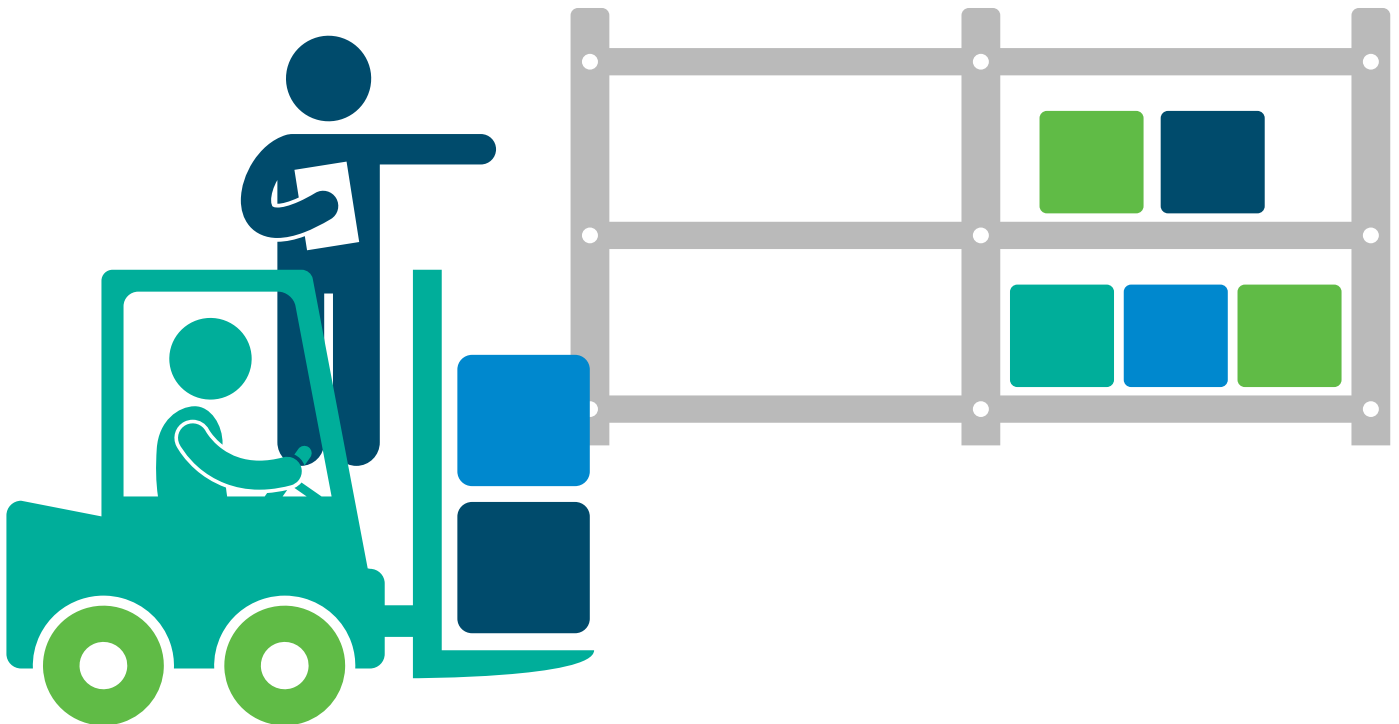
1. Express your employment paperwork

Providing clear and accurate employment contracts and forms is a great way to start the relationship with professionalism and integrity. Good onboarding software will enable you to deliver paperwork direct to your new employee's inbox and process it electronically. No errors. No delays. Getting the paperwork out of the way early also means any valuable face-to-face time in the office is not spent filling out forms.

2. Schedule regular visits

Commit to bringing your remote employees into head office at least once a quarter. Make their trip worthwhile in terms of meetings, training or team building. Take them to lunch and get to know them on a personal level.

Schedule time to go out on the road with them or visit your remote staff at their workplace. Consider working remotely alongside them yourself so that these visits don't feel like an audit or inspection.



3. Despatch communication

Remote workers require more communication than their office-bound colleagues. Yes, you read that correctly. More communication. Increased communication helps prevent isolation and disengagement from the team. Face-to-face contact is preferable but not always possible with remote staff so you will need to rely on other channels at your disposal: video calls; calls to mobiles; emails; texts; and direct messaging through IT platforms. In the end, it is important to use whichever methods allows you to connect with your staff member on a regular basis easily and effectively.

Healthy 2-way communication is essential during those early weeks and months for a new employee. Managers must keep the lines of communication open and make themselves available when an employee has

a question or needs reassurance.

The last thing you want during the early months with the company is to let the grapevine do the talking for you. Sharing as much information as you can directly with your remote workers is important to avoid confusion and miscommunication. Having the integrity to tell the truth - even if it means you are the bearer of bad news - is important. If you tell the truth you will build trust. If you lie, embellish or withhold important information, you can do irreparable damage to the working relationship.

4. Drive inclusive behavior amongst the whole team

As a manager or supervisor, how you work with and treat remote staff will guide the behaviour of others. If you check in regularly with your remote staff, collaborate and find ways to include them in decisions or projects, others will too. If you prioritise inclusiveness, it will become part of your company culture.

Your remote employees need to feel that they're a valued part of the company.



5. Jump-start social and team bonds

Technology has done a lot to help remote workers feel part of a bigger team. Onboarding systems link team members and peers through social enterprise networks where they can learn more about each other and stay in touch. A bit like the office water cooler, it brings staff together to talk over issues on an informal basis.

Introducing a buddy system can also give remote employees another person to turn to for information and guidance and feel less alone.

Remembering to celebrate events and milestones with remote staff not only shows you care but can help build a real sense of community and goodwill. Birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas celebrations should not just be limited to staff in the office. Make sure there are rituals in place to ensure remote staff never feel forgotten on important days.

6. Get on-track with safety and compliance

Educating your remote staff about workplace policies and procedures is an important part of onboarding. As a company you will be able to show you have met your compliance obligations. As a manager, you can feel comfortable that you have covered off essential information that will help protect your worker as they go about their work.

With clear and transparent guidelines, staff can go about their work more confidently, safely and productively without direct supervision.

7. Embark on performance management

Set performance expectations up front with your remote employees and check-in on their progress frequently. Support them with coaching and feedback as they work towards their probation review and then transition them on to your regular performance management processes.

Unfortunately many remote workers feel like they only ever hear from their manager when something is wrong, so make positive feedback a priority. Check that you're maintaining a healthy balance between praise and criticism in your performance discussions.

8. Help them steer their careers

Don't make assumptions about your remote workforce. Speak to them about their career ambitions, thoughts about relocation, or how they would feel about coming to work in the office for promotional or enrichment opportunities.

9. Deliver high impact training

When you have staff on the road or working off site, training becomes especially important as a means to maintain consistency in performance and company culture. Formal education and traditional training programs are one way to deliver instruction. However, there are also numerous more flexible active learning options to consider:

- Research projects - a staff member is given a task requiring them to independently seek out knowledge and then apply it back on the job;
- Peer discussions and collaboration - groups of staff are brought together in a facilitated discussion to talk over issues and develop strategies for dealing with them
- Field observations - individuals are paired with a subject matter expert that models how new knowledge can be applied effectively on the job
- Coaching - occurs when a supervisor or experienced colleague provides guidance and on-the-job performance feedback
- Mentoring - a carefully selected, more experienced person provides wisdom and advice to help an employee achieve their goals
- Just-in time - web based learning that can be accessed on demand when the learner needs it.

And thanks to technology, most of these activities can now be facilitated on-line through onboarding systems or other IT platforms.

11. Review the journey so far

Checking in over the phone or face to face as part of regular performance management process should provide ample opportunities for your remote worker to tell you about the challenges they are facing and how they are feeling about their new job. However, if you are having trouble getting them to open up, you might consider implementing a survey process whereby new staff can take the time to think through and give you written feedback on their experience with the company so far.

Out of sight but never out of mind

Effective onboarding results in new hires that are more productive sooner. A good mix of interactive formal and informal training, coaching, information sharing, goal setting, feedback, and social activities helps staff better understand how the company operates and what part they play. The more tailored and personalised the onboarding program, the faster a new team member can be up and running and performing at a high level.

Whilst distance and 24/7 rostering can make onboarding remote employees more challenging for managers, it is not impossible. It may take a bit more planning and forethought, but the benefits will outweigh any extra effort - guaranteed.

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