# Thomas Halder

## The Most Important Points at a Glance

- ➔ Preboarding: Excitement and connection begin before the first day of work.
- ➔ Onboarding Day: First impressions matter – focus on culture, interactions, and positive energy.
- ➔ Team Integration: Belonging grows locally – buddy systems and clear rituals build security.
- ➔ Gameplan: Transparent 30/60/90/180-day plans create clarity, focus, and motivation.
- ➔ Role of Leadership: Crucial for success – active engagement strengthens trust, retention, and productivity.

## Onboarding – More than an Administrative Process

Onboarding is far more than an administrative task. It marks the beginning of a profound journey that determines whether new employees are merely physically present – or truly arrive emotionally and intellectually within the company. A strategically designed and empathetically implemented onboarding process not only fosters belonging and orientation but also ignites sustainable motivation that extends well beyond the first weeks. It is the foundation for long-term, successful collaboration.

With over 15 years of experience shaping company cultures and developing talent at leading organizations such as Klarna, Solaris Bank, and DR SMILE, I have designed, co-created, and facilitated countless onboarding programs from scratch. This extensive practice has given me one essential insight: the most effective and sustainable onboarding experiences are built on five clearly defined elements that work hand in hand to enable holistic integration.

Guiding my entire approach are my personal values, which I bring into every interaction and concept: empathy, helpfulness, motivation, and inspiration. I firmly believe that people can only unlock their full potential when they feel welcomed, understood, valued, and empowered from the very beginning. These emotional anchors are crucial for fast and effective integration.

Here are the five fundamental building blocks that transform a standardized onboarding process into a true success story, benefiting both the company and its new employees:



## 1. Preboarding – Creating Excitement Before Day One

The onboarding process doesn't begin on the first official day but the moment the offer is accepted. Preboarding is the golden opportunity to build excitement, proactively reduce uncertainty, and give new colleagues the feeling: "We are genuinely thrilled to have you and can't wait to welcome you to the team." It's about creating positive expectations and fostering an initial emotional bond.

In my previous roles, I designed and implemented a wide variety of preboarding measures – from interactive digital welcome guides to personalized video messages from managers or future teammates. The consistently positive feedback was clear: employees who are personally and thoroughly engaged before day one start more motivated, confident, and secure. This reduces nervousness and speeds up integration.

**Practical tip:** A personal welcome note from the manager, a small branded gift, or early access to relevant information (e.g., org chart, team structure, first project overviews) can make a big difference in strengthening the connection from the start.

## 2. Onboarding Day – First Impressions Last

The first official working day is emotionally crucial. It shapes the first and often lasting impression of the work environment. A well-structured orientation not only delivers essential knowledge about mission, values, and structures but also fosters deep connection and inspiration. The goal is to make company culture tangible – not just to transfer facts.

At Klarna, we deliberately designed onboarding days as holistic experiences. Instead of dry lectures, there were interactive sessions encouraging participation and questions. Storytelling was a core element, bringing the company's history, successes, and challenges to life. We also created space for informal exchanges with colleagues across departments. The ultimate aim: new employees should not only intellectually understand what the company stands for but also feel it emotionally and identify with it.

**Practical tip:** The first day should inspire rather than overwhelm with excessive information. Focus on human connections, building relationships, and spreading positive energy – not endless PowerPoint slides. A team lunch or an office tour can work wonders.



## 3. Team & Project Onboarding – Belonging Happens Locally

Employees don't just join a company – they join a team. It is within this immediate environment that trust, collaboration, and psychological safety either thrive or falter. The team is the microcosm where company culture comes alive.

At DR SMILE, we developed detailed team-onboarding blueprints, including structured welcome rituals, buddy systems, and transparent role handovers. The results were clear: employees integrated faster, felt more secure in their roles, and engaged in projects earlier and more proactively. Productivity rose, and turnover dropped.

**Practical tip:** Every new hire should be paired with a buddy or mentor to support both practically and socially. Early opportunities to actively experience the team culture, attend meetings, and contribute are key. A team-building activity within the first weeks can be especially effective.

## 4. The Gameplan – Clarity Creates Security and Focus

One of the most common onboarding pitfalls is a lack of clarity: "What exactly is expected of me? What are my goals? How is success measured?" A structured 30/60/90/180-day plan is an essential roadmap, providing orientation, clear expectations, and motivation through measurable progress.

At Klarna, I collaborated with leaders to design individualized gameplans with learning goals, project priorities, and success metrics. Employees repeatedly reported how much these structured plans boosted their confidence, security, and focus, enabling them to hit the ground running.

**Practical tip:** A transparent yet flexible gameplan works wonders. It should be reviewed regularly (weekly or biweekly) between manager and new hire and adjusted as needed.



## 5. The Role of Leadership – Decisive for Success

My years of experience in employee integration have confirmed one undeniable truth: the role of the manager is the single most decisive factor in onboarding success. The attitude, engagement, and visible presence of the direct leader shape the experience far more than any HR program or checklist.

Onboarding is not just a formal HR exercise or a series of trainings. It is the first and often most formative phase where new hires encounter company culture, expectations, and team dynamics. The leader is the anchor in this process. When managers embrace onboarding as a core responsibility – rather than delegating it to HR – they create an environment where employees feel welcome, valued, and quickly productive.

At DR SMILE, we invested specifically in empowering leaders through toolkits, checklists, and targeted training. Where managers actively owned onboarding, retention, satisfaction, and performance all improved significantly.

**Practical tip:** Onboarding is leadership in action. HR can provide frameworks, but the real impact happens in direct manager-employee interaction. Engaged leaders who listen, provide orientation, and build trust are the key to long-term onboarding success.

## Conclusion – Smile & Shine

Onboarding is far more than a process – it's the foundation for motivation, retention, and employee success. Those who welcome new hires both structurally and emotionally lay the groundwork for long-term productivity and collaboration.

That means: show empathy, provide orientation, enable connections, and inspire. This is my approach – guided by my motto: Smile & Shine. It reflects the conviction that a positive, appreciative environment creates the best conditions for growth and development.

When people feel seen, supported, and motivated, they bring out their full potential – contributing their strengths to both company culture and shared success. Effective onboarding is, therefore, an investment in the future of the company and its most valuable resource: its people.

## About Thomas Halder

I am a certified Business Coach (IHK) with over 20 years of experience in onboarding, training, people development, and change management. I have built international teams, onboarded employees, and implemented sustainable learning concepts – at DR SMILE, Klarna, Solaris, and beyond

My areas of expertise include communication, self- and time management, and agile leadership. What matters most to me is motivating people, recognizing potential, and successfully driving change. Colleagues describe me as "positive, full of energy" and "a coach who makes others shine."