The Ultimate Guide for Sales Rep Onboarding

Traditional onboarding methods can lead to high turnover and lost opportunities. How can effective onboarding increase retention and improve sales performance?

Quantified

Sales are the lifeblood of your company, and your sales teams are the arteries. That's why building and maintaining a healthy sales organization should be a top priority.

Yet, if you follow traditional patterns in hiring new reps to build up your sales team, you're likely to lose many of them just as they're becoming truly productive for your business. Consider these stats:

- It takes an average of 3.2 months to fully train a new sales hire, and that person won't reach peak performance for about 15 months. Yet, the average new sales hire will leave within 18 months.
- Only 60% of sales new hires will remain in your organization for even six months. That means that, on average, 40% will leave before they become truly productive.
- The average annual turnover rate for sales professionals in the U.S. is 27%.
- A TechJury onboarding statistics report indicates that replacing a new hire who leaves costs about 16% to 20% of their salary.

What this indicates is that if you try to build up your sales organization as it has traditionally been done, you'll lose many of your new team members just when they should be reaching peak productivity, forcing you to start the expensive and time-consuming hiring/training cycle all over again.

That kind of turnover exacts a huge price in terms of organizational churn, unnecessary expense, and lost sales opportunities. If you want your company to survive and thrive in today's challenging marketplace environment, you need to change that pattern. But how?

The answer, according to both research and experience, is that companies can significantly reduce attrition among their sales staff by doing a good job of onboarding new hires.

The Importance of Effective Sales Onboarding

Onboarding is the process of integrating new sales employees into your organization and providing them with a strong foundation of the knowledge, skills, and tools they'll need to be successful in their roles.

In contrast to the negative attrition statistics we saw before, let's look at the benefits an effective sales onboarding program can provide:

- According to Glassdoor, organizations that have a strong onboarding program increase new hire retention by 82%.
- 80% of high-performing sales teams rate their training as outstanding or very good.
- Research shows that implementing a systematic onboarding program helps new employees get up to speed 50% faster.
- The TechJury onboarding statistics report reveals that 69% of employees who say they had a great onboarding experience stay with their organization for at least three years.
- When Google instituted an effective onboarding program, they boosted the productivity of their new hires by 25%.

The contrast with companies that have a less effective onboarding process is striking. Yet, the sad truth is that more than a third of companies have no structured onboarding process at all.

Goals of the Onboarding Process

Your sales onboarding program should aim at educating new hires about the company's products and services, as well as imparting the skills and best practices they'll need for selling those products and services. New reps also need comprehensive knowledge about the company's industry, customers, and competitors, as well as information concerning legal or regulatory requirements and effective selling techniques.

Those things are certainly essential, but they're not enough. Effective sales onboarding programs put an even greater emphasis on optimizing the behaviors sellers exhibit as they interact with customers.

The Importance of Focusing on Soft Skills During Onboarding

What are the behaviors your onboarding program needs to address if it is to be effective in helping new reps improve their sales performance?

According to the American Management Association, the [most important factors](#) for sales success are the soft skills reps draw on as they interact with customers face-to-face. That's why focusing on enhancing soft skills during the onboarding process is critical.

What are soft skills? Quantified, maker of an AI-based sales training platform that focuses directly on soft skill enhancement, provides this definition:

> "Soft skill is the ability to interact in a socially acceptable way, communicate effectively, listen, manage time effectively, and exhibit empathy."

Most new hires won't come into your organization already equipped with the soft skills they need for maximum sales success. Your onboarding process should help them to gain those skills and incorporate them into the habitual behavior patterns they exhibit as they interact with customers.

Why Coaching, and Not Just Educating, Is Crucial

[Research shows](#) that the best way to bring about behavioral change is through one-on-one coaching. According to statistics curated by the G2 Community website, effective coaching can improve a company's sales performance by [as much as 29%](#).

Sales coaching traditionally involves having a more experienced seller, usually the sales manager, observe a new salesperson's behavior during live or simulated sales calls. The observer provides immediate, constructive feedback that helps the trainee replace any sub par behaviors with new habits that can yield greater sales success.

How AI Can Turbocharge Your Onboarding Process

In recent years, highly capable AI-based sales enhancement platforms have come upon the scene. Used correctly, such solutions can lift a company's sales

onboarding program to new levels of effectiveness. They do so not by replacing sales managers as coaches, but by acting as force multipliers to extend a human sales coach's reach and relieve them of mundane and time-consuming tasks.

Let's look at some ways in which an AI coach does this:

- **Saves sales managers time.** Most sales managers simply don't have enough time in their workweek to give every member of their sales team the personal coaching attention that each individual needs. But an AI coach has no such constraints—it can devote as much time as needed to each team member.
- **Provides individualized training at scale.** An AI sales coach can work with each sales rep individually. The Quantified coaching platform, for example, adapts to the unique learning style of each user and provides an onboarding experience that's optimized for that person's experience level, skill set, knowledge base, and individual training preferences and needs.
- **Creates realistic training simulations.** An AI coach can create simulations that allow reps to master skills through role playing. Trainees interact with virtual customers in highly realistic sales call scenarios and can do so over and over until mastery is achieved. The Quantified platform even uses customer avatars that ask the questions you specify to make the simulation as realistic as possible. Plus, it can provide detailed feedback in each scenario by measuring more than a thousand behaviors across 24 conversation skills and calculating standardized scores that allow the user to compare his or her performance to those of the top sellers in your organization.
- **Delivers objective, quantifiable, and actionable feedback.** Unlike human coaches, an AI coach doesn't depend on informal impressions of how well a trainee did during an actual or simulated sales call. The AI can review video or audio recordings of those encounters, calculate specific numeric performance metrics, and offer suggestions for improvement at each step in the process. Trainees and managers can track (and hopefully be encouraged by) the progress achieved as the rep proceeds through the program.
- **Allows reps to own their onboarding process.** Online AI coaching platforms like Quantified allow users to access them at any time and from anywhere. That enables trainees to fit the onboarding program into their schedule and, in effect, take ownership of the process.

The AI force-multiplier effect is real—[research shows](#) that when humans and AI coaches work together, the combination outperforms what either could accomplish alone.

Elements of an Effective Onboarding Process

What does it take to build an effective sales onboarding program? Let's take a look.

1. Standardize Your Process

Sales onboarding shouldn't be viewed as a one-and-done event, but rather as a process that unfolds over six to twelve months. That kind of program can't be haphazardly pulled together on the fly—it must be intentional and well planned based on the competencies you want your reps to achieve.

It's particularly important to define 30, 60, and 90-day milestones that allow you to assess whether trainees are on schedule or may need additional assistance.

2. Leverage the Unique Simulation Capabilities of AI

We've all heard the phrase, "Practice makes perfect." While that might not always be true, it's a good rule of thumb. That's why your onboarding process should encourage trainees to practice, practice, and practice some more. Have the AI set up role play simulations for all the selling scenarios, buyer personas, customer settings, and buyer objections your reps typically encounter with customers. Reps can then iterate through practice sessions on their own schedule and at their own pace.

You can also create a library of recorded simulations by your best performers that newcomers can watch and emulate. The benchmarks the AI platform logs from such sessions can be a roadmap to excellence, setting the standards against which your trainees compare themselves as they progress through the program.

3. Be Thorough

Your onboarding program should not only prepare your new reps to navigate successfully through all the scenarios and issues they may face with real customers, but should also ensure they become familiar with important issues such as your company culture, your products, services, and industry, the

competitive landscape your company faces, effective sales strategies, and, perhaps most importantly, what's expected of them as an integral part of your company's sales organization.

4. Be Personal

[According to Phil Harrell](#), VP and Sr. Research Director at Forrester,

> "Every new seller should have an onboarding plan tailored specifically to their skills and knowledge."

For example, you might vary the simulations your AI platform creates based on each individual's level of experience and knowledge. You don't want trainees to have to wade through material they've already mastered or have no need for—that's a sure path to frustration and disengagement.

A good way to improve your onboarding program is by inviting feedback from participants themselves. Tonni Bennett, VP of Sales at Terminus provides a [good example](#):

> "Every time we onboard, we adjust parts of the onboarding based on feedback from our new hires about how they best retain information, giving them space to absorb the material and to practice in their own way."

5. Set Clear Expectations

People do better when they have a clear understanding of what's expected of them. Your new hires should know what you expect them to accomplish by the 30, 60, and 90-day milestone points. Not only does that show trainees what they need to shoot for, but it also gives managers a yardstick by which to assess whether anyone is struggling and needs additional help to get back on track.

One mistake many sales managers make is pegging expectations to sales metrics such as meeting quota. Such measures are lagging indicators that are only evident after the fact. It's much better to identify leading indicators that allow you to intervene as early as possible when a problem arises.

6. Don't Rush

You naturally want to get your new reps up to speed as quickly as possible. But remember, as [Deborah Hanamura](#), Executive Director of Sales & Marketing for Paladino and Company warns:

> "The worst thing you can do is hire a salesperson and rush them out to market without integrating them into the business."

It takes an [average of three months](#) just to get a new salesperson ready to interact with real, live customers. But, as the TechJury onboarding statistics report notes, employees whose onboarding programs are longer attain full proficiency far sooner than others. As the report advises, a longer onboarding process is better for both you and your new hires.

7. Partner New Reps With Veteran Mentors

In a [study with 600 employees](#), Microsoft found that partnering new hires with experienced mentors during onboarding yielded highly positive results. At the end of the first 90 days:

- 97% percent of new hires who met with their mentors more than eight times reported that the mentor helped them quickly become productive in their role.
- The same was true for 36% of those who met with their mentors at least once.
- New hires who had mentors were 36% more satisfied with their employment than those who didn't.

Microsoft concluded that the most important thing a new hire needs for success is the kind of support partnering them with a mentor during onboarding provides.

8. Make It Safe

People tend to shy away from situations in which they're unsure of themselves and think they're going to be critiqued. You can avoid that happening with your onboarding program by encouraging trainees to use the AI platform for private role-play simulations, with a manager only reviewing the rep's progress at stated milestone intervals.

9. Make It Fun!

People enjoy playing games and they enjoy winning. That's why gamification can be so beneficial to the onboarding process. Your AI platform can keep track of features such as contests, points, badges, and leaderboards that encourage participants to compete to become top performers. And it's effective.

One [HubSpot study](#) found that 89% of workers say gamification increases their productivity, and 71% say it increases their energy levels. But it's important, says Cody Normand, HubSpot's Senior Manager of Sales Productivity and Enablement, to reward *behaviors* that help reps succeed in their objectives rather than focusing on numbers.

Getting Started with AI-Assisted Onboarding

The Quantified Simulator is an AI-based sales enablement solution that can be the centerpiece of a great sales onboarding program. To see what a state-of-the-art onboarding platform can do for your company, [contact us today](#).