

Sweetening the first day for new Microsoft hires

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October 30, 2018



Productivity is the name of the game at Microsoft.

Not surprisingly, Microsoft strives for efficiency in everything it does, including the approach for an employee's first day.

Called New Employee Onboarding (NEO), the Microsoft onboarding experience is primed for disruption, says Robert Koester, a senior IT service operations manager in Core Service Engineering and Operations (CSEO).

"We're looking at how much friction there is between showing up for NEO and actually being productive," Koester says. "We've been doing a lot of work to transform this experience."

When new employees show up for their first day, there are several—OK, more than several—services and items they need to sign up for to get started.

It was too much.

“I noticed that people had to constantly look away, switching from one tool or application to the next,” Koester says. “Navigating through multiple tools and interfaces was counterintuitive, and having to click about everywhere was only adding to the confusion and aggravation.”

Making it worse, new employees were often asked to provide the same information multiple times.

Seizing the opportunity to enhance the new hire experience, Koester led the development of StepBar, a homegrown app that brings all the applications an employee needs to prepare for their first day into one place. “The idea is that procurement could have a laptop waiting, and with StepBar, a new hire could access all of the different tasks they need to accomplish through one simple interface,” Koester says.

With StepBar, signing up for passwords, PINs, emails, and Microsoft Teams is more easily managed. “This allows new employees to collaborate with their colleagues straight away,” he says. “This is something they want to do as quickly as possible.”

First day flavor

It’s a typical Monday morning in Building 92 at the Microsoft main campus in Redmond, Washington. The scents of handcrafted lattes and pastries sweeten the air, as does an air of excited nervousness. Guides ease this week’s new hires through a series of welcoming stations, including an inspiring keynote, laptop setup, and employee registration via StepBar. A Microsoft Teams channel is created for each set of new hires, a kind of gathering place where they can get their questions answered and talk with each other.

Like a lifeguard on the beachside, Koester keeps an eye on those gathered for the day’s session and the Teams channel. For the most part, the NEO village doesn’t need him and is self-sufficient. To him, this points to the success of the new Team’s channel.

The work of the CSEO team and the way it has transformed the onboarding process hasn’t gone unnoticed.

“What Robert and I are trying to do is keep the negative emotions down and keep the experience as positive as possible—and really obsess over and celebrate the new hires,” says Alexis Apostol, a learning and development consultant in Microsoft Global Learning and Development. She manages the company’s onboarding experience from a learning perspective. “The hope is to make new hires feel they can do their best work here.”

Along with wanting to make new employees feel safe and supported in their new workspace, a key goal of onboarding is to show new hires what Microsoft is all about.

“We really are an amazing launchpad for employees to—as we say—empower every person, and every organization on the planet to achieve more,” she says. “We want to show new employees we really live our mission.”

Empowering new hires has more tangibly measurable effects too, Apostol says. Data shows that an employee’s onboarding experience can directly affect whether they choose to leave right away or stay long-term. Employees that stay for the long haul are beneficial to the company, while those quick to depart can leave gaps on their teams and are typically associated with costing the company money.

Apostol says Microsoft has been striving to make joining the company easier and more intuitive. “Sometimes being new is hard, but at Microsoft new hires can be assured that we’re working tirelessly to transform their onboarding experience,” Apostol says. “We’re streamlining the onboarding experience and we’re also trying to make it fun and exciting.”

For more information on working at Microsoft, visit the [Microsoft careers site](#).

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