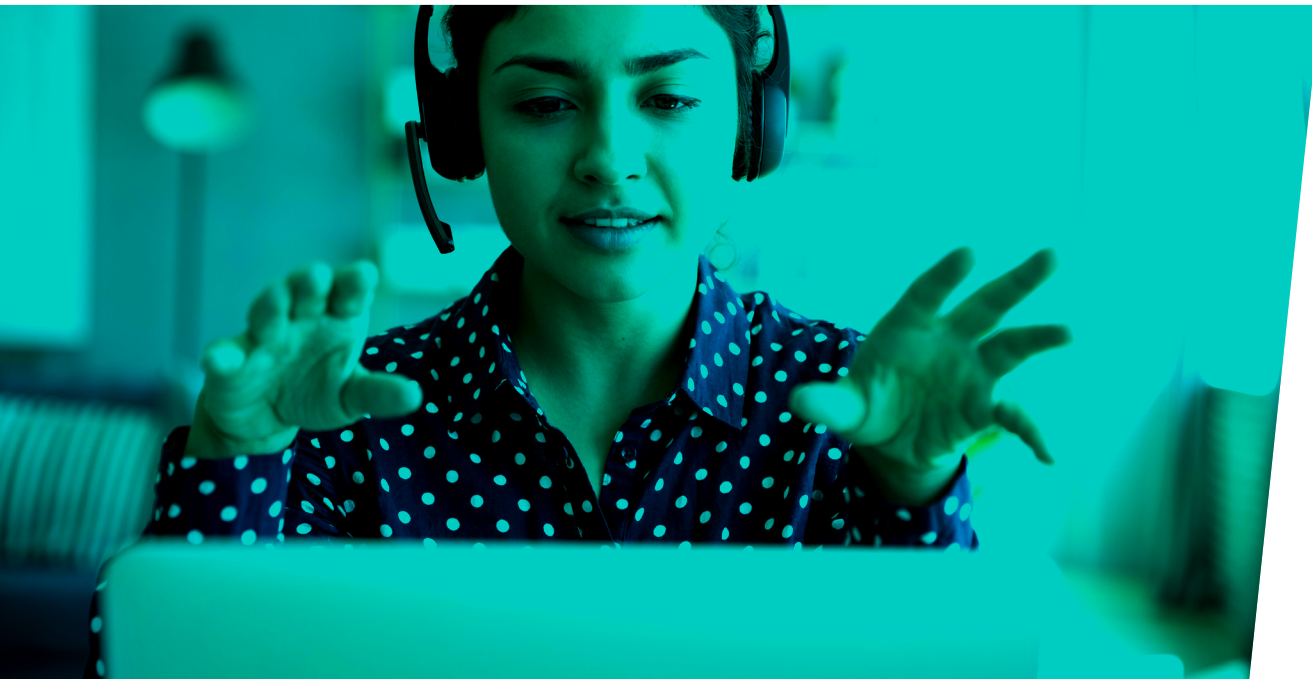




# HELLO FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Virtual hiring and onboarding are turning out to be a lot trickier to pull off than anticipated. What smart firms are doing to find—and keep—the right people.



### The problem:

When it comes to hiring and onboarding, many organizations are still using in-person methods that don't translate virtually.

### Why it matters:

In a remote-work world, virtual hiring and onboarding practices are crucial to attracting and engaging talent.

### The solution:

Choreograph systems for a virtual environment that create a sense of belonging to the organization's people and culture.

Grit. Openness. Being full-hearted. These are some of the core values of The Trade Desk—and the digital advertising technology company takes them very seriously. So seriously, in fact, that hiring managers use a company framework with specific questions aligned to each value when interviewing candidates.

By its own admission, The Trade Desk's unique interviewing process has turned out to be a challenge in a virtual environment. The framework, after all, came with the simple assumption that most interviews would be in person. "We pride ourselves on hiring for emotional intelligence, for instance," says Vina Leite, the company's chief people officer. "Teasing that out can be a bit difficult on a video interview."

Welcome to yet another thorny issue brought on by the COVID-19 era. Like The Trade Desk, firms across the globe are discovering that removing the in-person element to hiring and onboarding is a dramatic shift.



Indeed, in many cases, decades of honing best practices have vanished—perhaps forever. In their place, smart firms are racing to solve the puzzle of incorporating a face-to-face system with “modern” interviewing.

For many, the transition hasn’t exactly been smooth. Lorraine Hack, a Korn Ferry senior client partner who specializes in technology and digital transformation, says during the initial months of the pandemic there was a lot of consternation on the part of both organizations and new hires about offering or accepting a job without meeting new bosses and team members in person. “Both sides felt a little like they were wearing blindfolds,” Hack says.

Some of that feeling, experts say, hasn’t left. But many months into the process, key human resources leaders have begun to realize that a better choreographed virtual hiring and onboarding experience can be a competitive advantage. The trick, says Hack, is knowing how to shift the process—creating a fast connection to the firm, its people, and its culture. It’s a matter, experts say, of going virtual—but still going human.



At first, organizations saw upside in the fact that closing offices and creating remote workforces meant they could hire someone from virtually anywhere. No costly flights

At the pandemic’s start, hiring “felt a little bit like all sides were wearing blindfolds.”



to offices to meet candidates. No time-consuming arrangements.

But few realized back then how hard converting to virtual would be. Early on, many organizations that were hiring and onboarding simply converted in-person processes to a virtual environment, which basically amounted to little more than a handful of video interviews, a few webinars on corporate policy and culture, followed by an introduction at the team meeting. The result was that many new hires reported it all felt very clinical, a more isolating experience.

Indeed, Hack says candidates couldn’t envision how working with new colleagues and meshing with the corporate culture would be. And neither could their bosses. “You can’t feel the vibe of an office over video,” she says.



# VIRTUAL ONBOARDING: 4 LESSONS FROM THE FRONT LINE

A picture is starting to emerge of how a best-in-class virtual hiring and onboarding experience for executive talent looks. Here is what recruiting experts—and the executives who have been through the process—see.

1

## **Start high touch.**

Create a structured onboarding program that involves frequent contact at first but tapers off formal activities after a few weeks.

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3

## **Don't over-rely on video.**

Video is great—until it isn't. Mandate its use appropriately and sensitively, as not everyone enjoys being on camera all day long.

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2

## **Schedule time mindfully.**

Build in short breaks between meetings to mimic grabbing coffee, walking between office floors, or internal networking.

4

## **Experience matters.**

The more senior the hire, the more apt they are to personally drive certain aspects of virtual onboarding, such as how often to talk to direct reports and how best to build relationships with peers and superiors.



Paul Lidsky, CEO of the information technology services company Core BTS, which provides digital and video collaboration tools to corporations, says many organizations would end up “booking time without thinking of scheduling.” Put another way, there would be four- and five-hour blocks booked on people’s schedules, which meant they were literally in front of a screen and, moreover, on camera for that long without any breaks. That means no coffee breaks, no change of scenery, no walking from one room to the next. “It doesn’t seem like much, but it’s a big difference in the virtual world,” says Lidsky, who advises his managers to build in short breaks between meetings to allow new hires to decompress.

Senior executives may also feel frustrated with virtual onboarding that is scripted. “Senior leaders are often quite adept at building relationships,” says Ellen Williams, a Korn Ferry senior client partner and member of the firm’s Financial Officers practice. As she explains, they know who they need to know.

*“When you hire the right people, you tend to find that getting to know each other isn’t that much of a challenge, virtually or otherwise,”*

Williams says new executive hires have found some aspects of virtual onboarding work to their advantage—scheduling calls or video chats with individual C-suite members, even if it’s just a quick 15-minute meeting to introduce themselves. It might normally have taken weeks to formally meet in person because of travel or other work issues.

Robert Grecco, for instance, started his new job as corporate controller of the travel services provider Internova Travel Group when the company was already in work-from-home mode. “I’ve been doing this for 30 years, I know how this is supposed to work,” says Grecco. “Experience and instinct just took over.”



Under normal circumstances, Grecco says, within the first few weeks of starting he would have traveled to meet all of his direct reports, which would have involved going to Virginia, Minnesota, Kentucky, London, and Mexico. But as of Father's Day, he had yet to meet any of them in person. So he decided to share with his team and direct supervisor an article he wrote for his previous employer's corporate newsletter about his family's holiday traditions as an icebreaker. "It ended up serving as a jumping-off point to establish personal connections with my team and others within the company," says Grecco, who

adds that people reached out via email after reading the article to schedule time for a get-to-know-you Zoom coffee.



At The Trade Desk, where Leite is currently interviewing candidates for a number of senior executive roles, the company has been training managers on adjusting interviewing skills and ways to assess people in a virtual context, among other changes to its hiring and onboarding framework. "We tweaked some questions to better gauge things like empathy and compassion on-screen," says Leite.

For Timothy Davidson, who went through the virtual interviewing and onboarding process before joining The Trade Desk in mid-June, the virtual experience factored into his decision to join the company. "The balance they created in the interview process and the unique features of the onboarding made me feel comfortable right away," he says. For instance, Davidson says the real-time online video segments about the organization's core values created an intimacy from colleagues that helped form a bond that eased the transition to work-related collaboration.

To be sure, experts say one way to better choreograph virtual



onboarding processes to create a sense of belonging is to follow a high-touch model in the beginning—with frequent check-ins, a key connections checklist, interactive learning sessions, and social activities—but then to taper it off slowly and steadily.

Other best practices include adding elements to onboarding sessions that create emotional connections, providing interactive components to sessions to generate engagement, breaking out smaller groups to create more intimacy, and assigning a “peer buddy” from another team to help with the cultural transition, among others.

“When you hire the right people, you tend to find that getting to know each other isn’t that much of a challenge, virtually or otherwise,” says Core BTS’s Lidsky.

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