



Onboarding Tips for Tribal Leaders

Onboarding is the process by which new associates acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective in their role. Whether you are onboarding a newly hired staff member or elected councilperson, how you onboard a new associate paves the way for a favorable tenure. Consider incorporating the following tips when creating your onboarding plan:

1. REVIEW GUIDING DOCUMENTS.

Any effective group needs a set of agreed upon guiding documents, or operational guidelines. These guidelines can range from a short approved policy to a detailed employment ordinance. The key is that they are consistent, supply enough detail to provide the needed guidance, are easily understood, and most importantly, involve a shared commitment to adherence. Reviewing these documents with your entire team regularly, not just while onboarding your new associates, will help ensure everyone fully understands expectations and contributes to a healthy team dynamic.

2. CREATE A ROADMAP.

An integral part of the onboarding process is a well thought out plan and timeline. Consider what you need to cover (your onboarding manual), when you should cover it (timeline), and who to involve. A good onboarding plan includes review of expectations, meetings with team members, and most importantly, an overview of culture.

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3. TAILOR THE MANUAL.

In creating your onboarding manual, you will likely have a consistent set of core onboarding components (e.g. position summary or description, relevant ordinances and handbooks, team agreements, policies), but will also have certain components tailored to each incoming associate, depending on their experience with your nation and the role (i.e. group history, processes, expectations). The most important step is to ensure these documents are current and accurate.

4. EXPAND THE TIMELINE.

Be intentional about your onboarding timeline. Too often onboarding stops after one or two days, and focuses solely on human resource forms and job duties. Revise and extend your onboarding timeline and process so new associates receive a thorough and supportive introduction to the team. Traditional onboarding can feel like drinking out of a firehose; build yours to more resemble long sips from a garden hose. Consider breaking your onboarding up into segments based on priority: day 1, week 1, month 1, quarter 1, etc.

5. FOCUS ON CULTURE.

Culture is the cornerstone of any successful team and you should spend as much time during onboarding covering culture as you do position duties. This includes Tribal, organizational, and team culture, including those written and unwritten rules. For example, here are some components of culture you might review with a new associate:

- How decisions are made
- How you communicate
- Generational differences
- Demographic differences (racial, Tribal, economic)
- How mistakes are treated
- How conflict is managed
- The ground rules (i.e., are folx late, early)
- How feedback is given
- What gets rewarded
- Shared history and trauma

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6. INTRODUCE THE BROADER ECOSYSTEM.

People who understand how their work fits into the larger strategy are significantly more likely to be inspired in their role. During onboarding, don't only cover the people and activities most immediate to your new associate; provide visibility to the broader organization, staff, and strategies. Review the organizational chart and any values, goals, or objectives that exist at the micro and macro levels. Set up meet and greet sessions with your new associate and members of other teams where they can talk about what they do, and how it interacts with your new associate.

7. TRAIN AND DEVELOP.

Consider what training (on-the-job, mentorship, off-the-job) is needed to prepare your new associate to be successful in their role. Challenge any assumptions about existing knowledge they should have, and instead provide opportunity for training and development. Moreover, consider regular group training for the entire team. For example, all new council members should be oriented to your nation's financial state. Orientation should include finance 101, an examination of the council's financial packet, Tribal history as it relates to finance, an outline of policies and procedures, an introduction to key factors affecting the nation, and an overview of financial strategy.

To ensure alignment with decision making, all team members should be working with the same knowledge, understanding, and training. An intentional onboarding process will lead to a more productive team.

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