

## 3 steps to a successful graduate onboarding strategy

South Africa's youth unemployment rate continues to rise significantly, with the unemployment rate of those aged between 15 and 24 at 58.2% in Q3 2019, according to Trading Economics. To combat this, many local businesses have introduced graduate programmes within their organisations, in order to promote skills development and employment among the country's youth; however, ManpowerGroup South Africa's managing director, Lyndy van den Barselaar, notes that these programmes are often unsuccessful due to poor implementation and planning of onboarding strategies.



Image source: Getty Images

“Parents and students spend thousands of Rands obtaining a good education and employers spend thousands of Rands and many hours on their recruitment processes, but if graduate onboarding and training strategies are not implemented effectively, the consequences can be dire for both the business and the individual in question,” she explains.

One of the most effective ways for organisations to address the growing skills gap and other talent management issues is to build a strong career development culture within the business; and graduate students often need a higher level of expert support to navigate the complex next steps of career advancement given that they usually have little experience in a corporate environment. So, how best can your organisation on-board graduates for future success?

### Start simple

While career development support strategies should offer services like mentorship and coaching, counselling, career action planning, creating meaningful and strategic connections and actively shaping the future for these learners, organisations could start off with lessons as simple as ‘what to expect’ or ‘how to talk to your manager or mentor’. “Most graduates will be entering a full-time corporate environment for the first time, and these lessons that might seem simple can often have the largest impact – especially in helping to build confidence in the new recruits, which they can utilise for the rest of the programme,” says van den Barselaar.

Overall, the programme should look to assist graduates to gain clarity on their greatest value proposition and strongest skills, and how they align with the needs of companies in the modern workforce.

### Plan for the long term

Depending on how long the graduate programme runs for, van den Barselaar suggests putting a plan in place based on a

realistic time line – such as a 30-60-90 day programme, which details what to expect in the first 30, 60 and 90 days of your new role and how best to take advantage of each stage.

“Not only will this give the graduates a realistic view of the kinds of goals they should be looking to achieve, it will also give those involved in the programme (like leaders, mentors and coaches) a guideline for planning purposes. The more prepared the graduates and the organisation are, the better the chance of success for all,” explains van den Barselaar.

## **Focus on wellbeing**

Additionally, van den Barselaar notes that onboarding strategies should take into account factors like emotional and mental health. As the world of work evolves, employee wellbeing and mental health have come into the spotlight, and should be a focus for employers. “Starting a new job, or your first job, can be a scary and overwhelming experience. Organisations would do well to include information for graduates on the kinds of emotions and thoughts they might be feeling, and how best to handle these,” she says.

By rolling out a graduate onboarding strategy in a focused and tailored way, organisations can accelerate the integration of the graduates into the business, more quickly realise the intended benefits of possible acquisitions, and improve the engagement and productivity of the newly acquired employees.

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