Effectively onboarding employees remotely is not only possible, it may be required in our current situation, when COVID-19 quarantines are forcing organizations to quickly move to a virtual environment. At Koya, we have several offices, but have built a remote infrastructure that allows for virtual onboarding. Below we’ve collated some best practices and tips that may be helpful as you consider remote onboarding.

Begin Integration Before Their First Day
Send your new hire a welcome packet including any welcome gifts, HR documents that can be completed in advance, and thoughtful messages from the team. A personal note or card is a nice way to start building connections before work even begins. Share their onboarding schedule with them as soon as possible so they can see how their days will shape up.

Focus on Tech First
Schedule any IT-related trainings in the first few days as email, chat, and video calls will be their primary way of connecting with colleagues and getting up to speed. Make sure they are comfortable with all of the tools and platforms you use for communicating early in their onboarding process, especially online collaboration tools like Slack or Basecamp.

Set Expectations
Create time to also talk about communications norms and practices. How and when do teams communicate? When do you send an email vs. make a phone call or send a Slack? Are there norms around response time? Are there places or methods for sharing wins or celebrating birthdays? Also talk about work hours and schedules. Let your new team member know what expectations exist around online presence and activity (e.g., does anyone have flex hours, are employees expected to check emails early or late in the day, are they expected to be available on weekends, etc.).

Demonstrate Your Culture
It can be difficult to convey an organization's culture remotely. A video welcome message from your CEO and other key team members can be effective for highlighting culture, organizational values and mission, and the history of the organization. An inspirational message from a passionate leader can engage and motivate the new hire—even from afar. Share video footage or photos from a recent retreat or event, or highlights from an all-staff volunteer day to demonstrate the team's camaraderie, social responsibility, and culture.

Create a Community and Foster Connections
Make sure new employees have multiple connection points with colleagues. Pair the new team member with a mentor and a peer colleague to show them the ropes, answer their questions, and guide them through the culture. Ask the mentor or “buddy” to set up virtual lunches or coffees. Proactively schedule virtual “meet and greets” with other team members rather than assuming it will happen naturally. Be sure that there are regularly scheduled virtual town halls or team meetings so employees can gather together in one virtual place, learn together, and get to know one another.
Provide Context and Encourage Shadowing

Make sure that the flow of the training makes sense in terms of the work that they will be doing. Encourage shadowing colleagues in tandem with training so that assignments are put into context and are not too abstract. Try to give a mix of tangible tasks that the new employee can try while teaching them different things they will need to know long term.

Recognize That Everyone Has Different Learning Styles

Try to vary the mode of training and allow for sufficient “open” blocks of time for those who might need to absorb the information presented or complete early assigned tasks. Offer training materials via video call, recorded webinar/video, and in print to appeal to different styles and modes of learning. Also be sure to break up training schedules so that there are work blocks in between video meetings.

On-Going Communication Is Vital

Most important, make sure that new hires have at least two check-ins with their supervisor in the first week and at least one weekly check-in thereafter. Keep the lines of communication open and encourage the new hire to reach out if they need additional support beyond the regularly scheduled check-in calls. This kind of ongoing communication—both scheduled and impromptu—is key for successfully onboarding in a remote environment.

Additional resources to support remotely onboarding your new hire:

“How to Onboard a Remote Team Member,” My Say, Forbes.com

“Remote Employee Onboarding Check List,” Workable

“Extreme Onboarding: How to WOW Your New Hires Rather Than Numb Them,” Dr. John Sullivan, LinkedIn