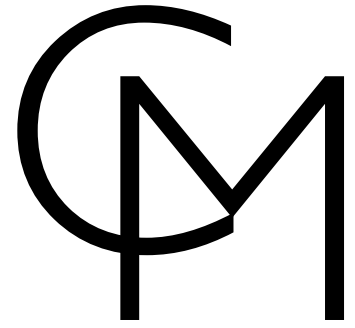


The California Merchant

News for the California Merchant Safety Association



Onboarding 101 for small teams

When a small business hires a new employee, the onboarding process plays a crucial role in helping that person succeed. Unlike larger organizations with dedicated training departments, small teams often rely on informal learning and close collaboration. A thoughtful onboarding process helps new hires feel welcome, understand expectations, and become productive members of the team more quickly.



Effective onboarding begins before the employee's first day. Providing information about work schedules, dress expectations, parking, and workplace policies can help new hires arrive prepared and confident. Ensuring that their workspace, computer access, and necessary equipment are ready in advance demonstrates organization and respect for the employee's time.

During the first few days, new employees should be introduced to the company's mission, values, and overall goals. In small businesses, each employee often has a direct impact on operations and customer experience. Helping new hires understand how their work contributes to the organization's success can foster a stronger sense of purpose and engagement.

Training should be structured in a way that supports gradual learning. Rather than overwhelming a new employee with large amounts of

information at once, supervisors can break training into smaller steps. Demonstrating tasks, allowing time for practice, and encouraging questions helps employees gain confidence and develop the skills needed for their role.

Introducing new hires to coworkers is another important aspect of onboarding. Small teams often depend on strong relationships and collaboration. Taking time to introduce colleagues, explain roles, and encourage informal conversations can help new employees feel comfortable and connected to the team.

Many businesses also find it helpful to assign a mentor or "go-to" colleague who can answer everyday questions about procedures, technology, or workplace routines. Having a friendly

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contact person helps new employees learn faster and reduces the hesitation they may feel about asking questions.

Finally, managers should schedule regular check-ins during the first several weeks or months of employment. These conversations provide an opportunity to answer questions, offer feedback, and ensure the employee is adjusting well to their responsibilities. For small businesses where each team member plays a vital role, investing time in thoughtful onboarding can lead to stronger performance, higher morale, and improved employee retention.



A Strong Start: How Thoughtful Onboarding Helped a New Hire Succeed

When a small business hires a new employee, the first few days can shape that person's entire experience with the company. A thoughtful onboarding process doesn't just teach job duties—it helps new hires feel confident, welcomed, and ready to contribute.

Consider the experience of Maya, who recently started a position at a small retail and office supply store. On her first day, Maya wasn't sure what to expect. Like many new employees, she worried about learning the systems quickly and remembering everyone's names.

However, when she arrived, she immediately noticed that the business had prepared for her arrival. Her manager greeted her at the door, introduced her to coworkers, and gave her a brief tour of the store and office area. Her workstation was ready, complete with login information, training materials, and a printed schedule for her first week.

Rather than overwhelming Maya with hours of instruction, her manager broke the training into manageable steps. The first day focused on understanding the store layout and learning basic customer service procedures. On the second day, she practiced using the point-of-sale system with a coworker nearby to answer questions. By the end of the week, she had already begun helping customers independently.

One of the most helpful parts of Maya's onboarding experience was being paired with a more experienced employee who served as a mentor during her first few weeks. Whenever Maya had a question about inventory procedures, scheduling, or customer requests, she knew exactly who to ask. This support helped her feel comfortable asking questions and learning quickly.

Regular check-ins with her manager also helped ensure that Maya stayed on track. After her first week, they met briefly to review what she had learned and identify any areas where she needed additional training. These conversations helped build trust and gave Maya

confidence that she was progressing in the right direction.

Within a month, Maya had become a valuable member of the team. Because she had received clear guidance and support from the beginning, she felt confident interacting with customers and handling daily responsibilities.

For small businesses, Maya's experience highlights an important lesson: onboarding does not need to be complicated or expensive to be effective. Simple steps—preparing the workspace, introducing coworkers, providing structured training, and offering regular support—can make a lasting difference.

When new employees feel welcomed and prepared from the start, they are more likely to succeed in their roles and remain engaged members of the team. For small businesses that rely on every employee's contributions, investing in thoughtful onboarding is one of the most valuable steps an employer can take.

Hydration and nutrition tips for busy workers

Busy workdays can make it difficult for employees to prioritize healthy eating and hydration. Retail staff may spend hours on their feet assisting customers, while office and remote workers may remain seated for long stretches and forget to take breaks. However, maintaining good hydration and balanced nutrition is essential for sustaining energy, maintaining focus, and supporting overall health.

One of the most important habits for workplace wellness is drinking enough water throughout the day. Even mild dehydration can lead to fatigue, headaches, irritability, and reduced concentration. Workers should keep a refillable water bottle nearby and make a habit of drinking small amounts regularly rather than waiting until they feel thirsty. Employers can support this habit by providing accessible water stations, filtered water pitchers, or hydration reminders in shared spaces such as break rooms.

Some employees rely heavily on caffeinated drinks like coffee, energy drinks, or soda to stay alert. While caffeine can provide a temporary boost, excessive intake may lead to dehydration or energy crashes later in the day. Balancing caffeinated beverages with water or herbal teas can help maintain hydration while still allowing workers to enjoy their morning coffee.

Balanced nutrition is equally important for maintaining steady energy levels throughout the workday. Meals and snacks that combine protein, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates provide sustained energy and help stabilize blood sugar levels. Examples include yogurt with fruit, nuts and whole-grain crackers, hummus with vegetables, or a sandwich made with whole-grain bread and lean protein.

For employees working long shifts or busy retail hours, planning ahead can make healthy choices easier. Packing lunches at home, preparing simple snacks, or keeping shelf-stable options at work can help employees avoid relying on vending machines or fast



food during hectic days. Even small steps—such as keeping a container of almonds or a piece of fruit at a desk—can make a difference.

Employers can also support healthy habits by providing comfortable break spaces and encouraging employees to step away briefly to eat and recharge. Eating meals at a desk or skipping breaks entirely may save time in the short term, but it can contribute to fatigue and reduced productivity later in the day.

Ultimately, healthy hydration and nutrition habits benefit both employees and employers. Workers who stay hydrated and nourished are more alert, more resilient during long shifts, and better able to provide excellent service to customers and coworkers.

Quick Tips: Staying Hydrated and Energized at Work

Even small changes to daily habits can make a big difference in energy and focus during the workday. Consider these practical tips for maintaining good hydration and nutrition while working in retail, office, or remote environments.

Hydration Tips

- Keep a refillable water bottle at your workstation and refill it regularly throughout the day.

- Start your day with a glass of water before coffee or tea.
- Drink small amounts of water consistently during your shift rather than waiting until you feel thirsty.
- Balance caffeinated beverages with water to help prevent dehydration.
- Add slices of lemon, cucumber, or fruit to water for flavor if plain water feels boring.
- Take a few sips of water during natural pauses in the workday, such as after helping a customer or finishing a task.

Smart Snack Ideas

- Fresh fruit such as apples, bananas, or berries
- Yogurt or cottage cheese
- Nuts or trail mix (in moderate portions)
- Whole-grain crackers with cheese or hummus
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Cut vegetables such as carrots, cucumbers, or bell peppers

Healthy Workday Habits

- Pack lunches and snacks in advance to avoid last-minute unhealthy choices.
- Avoid skipping meals, which can lead to fatigue and difficulty concentrating.
- Use break times to step away from your workstation and eat mindfully.
- Choose snacks that combine protein and complex carbohydrates for longer-lasting energy.

Signs! Visual aids improve your customer's experience

In retail stores, service offices, and other customer-facing environments, clear visual communication plays an important role in shaping the customer experience. Signs, displays, and other visual aids help customers find what they need, understand policies, and navigate the space more comfortably. When used effectively, these tools can also reduce confusion and support employees in delivering efficient service.

Effective signage begins with clarity and simplicity. Customers often make decisions quickly while moving through a space, so signs should use short phrases, clear fonts, and strong color contrast that can be read easily from a distance. Overly complex language or cluttered designs may slow customers down or cause them to overlook important information.

Placement is equally important. Signs should appear where customers naturally look for guidance, such as near entrances, checkout counters, service desks, or product aisles. Directional signs can guide customers to restrooms, fitting rooms, exits, or specific departments. When customers can easily find their way around a space, they are more likely to feel comfortable and spend more time exploring.

Visual aids can also help communicate store policies and frequently requested information. For example, clearly posted return policies, store hours, payment options, and safety guidelines can answer common questions before customers need to ask. This not only improves the customer experience but also allows employees to focus on assisting shoppers rather than repeating routine explanations.

In addition to informational signage, well-designed visual displays can highlight promotions, seasonal items, or



featured products. Strategic use of color, lighting, and placement can draw attention to special offers and encourage customers to explore new products or services.

Businesses should also review signage periodically to ensure it remains accurate, clean, and easy to read. Signs that are outdated, faded, or damaged can create confusion and leave a negative impression on customers. Updating signage regularly helps keep the environment organized and professional.

Another important consideration when designing signage is accessibility. Signs should be easy for all customers to read and understand, including individuals with vision impairments or limited English proficiency. Using large, legible fonts, strong color contrast, and simple language can make information easier to absorb quickly. Universal symbols—such as restroom icons, accessibility symbols, or directional arrows—can also help communicate information without relying entirely on text. When possible, placing signs at eye level and ensuring they are well lit can further improve visibility.

Consistency is another factor that contributes to effective visual communication. When signs throughout a business share similar fonts, colors, and design styles, customers can more

easily recognize and follow them. For example, directional signs might all use the same color scheme, while promotional signs use another. This visual consistency helps guide customers naturally through the space and reinforces a professional brand identity.

Signage can also play a role in supporting safety and compliance in customer-facing environments. Clearly marked exits, emergency instructions, occupancy limits, and safety reminders can help protect both employees and visitors. In retail spaces, signs may also be used to alert customers to potential hazards, such as wet floors or temporarily closed areas. Ensuring these signs are visible and easy to understand helps reduce the risk of accidents and demonstrates that the business takes safety seriously.

In addition to traditional printed signs, many businesses are beginning to incorporate digital signage into their customer spaces. Screens can be used to display rotating promotions, service updates, or helpful information about products and services. Digital displays allow businesses to update information quickly and keep messaging fresh without printing new materials. Even small businesses can benefit from simple digital tools, such as tablets or small monitors used for announcements or promotional messaging.

Finally, businesses should develop a routine for reviewing and maintaining their signage. Over time, signs may become faded, outdated, or damaged, which can reduce their effectiveness and create confusion for customers. Regularly checking signage for accuracy, readability, and cleanliness ensures that customers continue to receive clear information. Updating signs when store layouts, policies, or promotions change also helps maintain a professional and well-organized environment.

Building the right financial support team

For many small businesses, financial management can feel overwhelming. Owners are often focused on running day-to-day operations—serving customers, managing employees, and growing the business—while financial record-keeping and planning can fall to the side. Yet maintaining accurate financial records and receiving sound financial guidance are essential for long-term stability and growth.

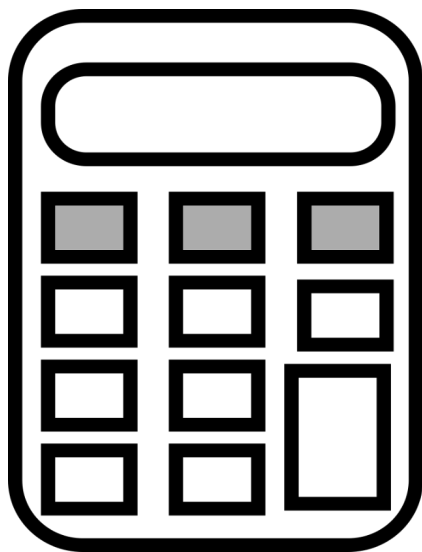
One of the most helpful steps a small business owner can take is understanding the different professionals who support business finances. Three roles are commonly involved in financial management: bookkeepers, accountants, and Certified Public Accountants (CPAs). While their work overlaps in some ways, each professional provides different services and plays a unique role in helping a business manage its finances effectively.

The Role of a Bookkeeper

A bookkeeper focuses on the day-to-day recording and organization of a business's financial transactions. Their primary responsibility is maintaining accurate and up-to-date financial records. This includes tracking income and expenses, recording sales transactions, categorizing purchases, and reconciling bank and credit card accounts.

For many small businesses, bookkeepers also help manage tasks such as preparing invoices, recording payments from customers, monitoring accounts payable, and organizing receipts or expense documentation. In retail settings, bookkeepers may work with point-of-sale systems to ensure sales data is properly recorded in the company's accounting software.

Because bookkeeping is ongoing



work, having reliable records allows business owners to understand their financial position at any given time. Accurate bookkeeping also makes tax preparation much easier and helps prevent costly errors.

Small businesses often begin working with a bookkeeper when their financial activity becomes too complex to manage alone. Even companies with only a few employees can benefit from having someone responsible for maintaining organized records and ensuring financial information is current and accurate.

The Role of an Accountant

An accountant typically works at a higher analytical level than a bookkeeper. While accountants may review or organize financial records, their primary role is to interpret financial information and provide insights that help business owners make informed decisions.

Accountants often prepare financial statements such as income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow reports. These documents help owners

understand how their business is performing, identify trends in revenue or expenses, and make strategic plans for the future.

In addition to preparing financial reports, accountants may assist with budgeting, forecasting, and financial planning. They can help a business evaluate pricing strategies, control costs, or determine whether expansion plans are financially realistic.

Many accountants also assist with tax preparation for businesses, although more complex tax matters may require the services of a Certified Public Accountant.

Small businesses often turn to an accountant when they want a deeper understanding of their financial health or when they need guidance in making financial decisions such as hiring additional staff, purchasing equipment, or opening a new location.

The Role of a Certified Public Accountant (CPA)

A Certified Public Accountant, or CPA, is an accounting professional who has passed a rigorous licensing exam and met additional education and experience requirements. CPAs are licensed by state boards of accountancy and are authorized to provide certain services that other financial professionals may not be able to perform.

CPAs often specialize in areas such as tax planning, auditing, financial consulting, and regulatory compliance. For many small businesses, a CPA's most valuable service is helping with complex tax matters. CPAs stay current

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Minimizing distractions in open office settings

Modern workplaces often include open office layouts, hybrid work schedules, and remote employees collaborating across multiple locations. While these environments can encourage teamwork and flexibility, they can also introduce distractions that make it difficult for employees to concentrate on complex tasks. Learning how to manage these distractions can help individuals and teams maintain productivity throughout the workday.

In open office environments, noise and visual activity are among the most common sources of distraction. Conversations between coworkers, ringing phones, and movement around shared spaces can interrupt concentration. While these interactions are a natural part of collaborative workplaces, they can be challenging for employees who need uninterrupted time to complete detailed work.

Several strategies can help reduce these interruptions. Employees may benefit from using noise-reducing headphones, moving to quieter areas of the office for focused tasks, or scheduling work that requires deep concentration during less busy times of day. Some workplaces also establish informal signals—such as wearing headphones or placing a small sign on a desk—to indicate when someone is focusing and prefers not to be interrupted.

Communication habits also play an important role in minimizing distractions. Instead of stopping by a coworker's desk multiple times with small questions, employees can gather questions and address them during scheduled check-ins or communicate through shared messaging platforms. This approach reduces frequent interruptions while still supporting collaboration.

Remote workers face a different set of challenges. Home environments may include family members, pets, deliveries, or household responsibilities

that compete for attention. Establishing a dedicated workspace, even if it is a small desk or corner of a room, can help create a psychological boundary between work and personal life. Maintaining consistent working hours and communicating availability with coworkers can also improve focus and coordination.

Another useful approach for both office and remote workers is structured time management. Techniques such as setting timers for focused work periods followed by short breaks can help employees maintain concentration without feeling overwhelmed. These structured intervals encourage steady progress on important tasks while providing opportunities to recharge.

By recognizing common sources of distraction and implementing thoughtful strategies to address them, employees can enjoy the benefits of flexible work environments while maintaining high levels of productivity and focus.

Reducing Distractions at Work

Distractions are a normal part of modern work environments, but a few practical strategies can help employees stay focused and productive.

Tips for Open Offices

- Use noise-reducing headphones when working on tasks that require concentration.
- Schedule complex or detail-oriented work during quieter times of the day.
- If possible, move to a conference room or quieter workspace for focused projects.
- Keep your desk organized to reduce visual clutter and mental distractions.

- Group similar tasks together to minimize constant switching between activities.

Communication Tips for Team

- Use messaging tools or shared task platforms instead of frequent desk interruptions.
- Schedule brief check-ins or meetings rather than handling issues one interruption at a time.
- Let coworkers know when you are working on a time-sensitive project and need focused time.

Tips for Remote Workers

- Create a dedicated workspace that signals it's time to focus.
- Set regular working hours and communicate availability to colleagues.
- Turn off unnecessary phone notifications or social media alerts during work periods.
- Use a task list to prioritize the most important work first.

Focus Strategies

- Work in short focused intervals followed by brief breaks to refresh your mind.
- Step away from your workspace occasionally to stretch or walk.
- Limit multitasking when possible and concentrate on completing one task at a time.
- By recognizing common distractions and adopting simple focus strategies, employees can work more efficiently and reduce stress throughout the day.

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



Fire safety for offices and retail spaces

Fire safety is a critical responsibility for any workplace. Retail stores and offices often contain electrical equipment, paper products, packaging materials, cleaning supplies, and other items that can increase fire risk if they are not handled carefully. For small businesses, preparing employees to prevent fires and respond quickly if one occurs can protect lives, property, and the long-term stability of the business.

One of the most important aspects of fire safety is preventing hazards before they start. Electrical equipment should be inspected regularly to ensure cords are not frayed, outlets are not overloaded, and extension cords are used only temporarily rather than as permanent wiring. Retail environments with decorative lighting, point-of-sale equipment, and seasonal displays should take special care to avoid plugging too many devices into a single outlet or power strip. Break rooms should also be monitored carefully, since appliances

such as microwaves, coffee makers, toasters, and space heaters can pose risks if left unattended or placed too close to flammable materials.

Maintaining good housekeeping practices can also significantly reduce fire hazards. Cluttered stockrooms, overflowing trash bins, and stacks of cardboard boxes create fuel for fires and can block access to exits or safety equipment. Businesses should establish routines for regularly removing trash and recycling materials, breaking down cardboard boxes, and keeping storage areas organized. Clear aisles and unobstructed pathways not only improve fire safety but also help employees move safely through the workplace.

Proper storage of materials is another key component of fire prevention. Flammable products such as cleaning

chemicals, aerosols, and solvents should always be stored according to manufacturer guidelines and kept away from heat sources or electrical equipment. Employees should also be trained to recognize warning labels on hazardous materials and understand how to store and handle them safely.

Every workplace should maintain working fire detection and suppression equipment. Smoke alarms should be tested regularly, and fire extinguishers should be placed in accessible locations throughout the building. Employees should know where extinguishers are located and understand the basic steps for using them in the event of a small, contained fire. In many cases, however, evacuation is the safest choice, especially if the fire spreads quickly or produces significant smoke.

Equally important is having a clear evacuation plan. Businesses should identify primary and secondary exit routes and ensure that those exits remain unlocked and unobstructed during working hours. Evacuation maps should be posted in visible areas such as near time clocks, break rooms, and hallways. When an alarm sounds or a fire is discovered, employees should leave the building immediately, assist customers if possible, and proceed to a designated meeting location outside where supervisors can account for everyone.

Regular training and fire drills help reinforce these procedures. When employees understand fire risks and know how to respond calmly and quickly, small businesses can significantly reduce the likelihood that a minor incident turns into a serious emergency.

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Finance: It's a collaborative effort

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on federal and state tax laws and can help ensure that a business files taxes accurately while taking advantage of available deductions and credits.

Some CPAs also perform financial audits or reviews, which may be required by lenders, investors, or regulatory agencies. In addition, CPAs can provide strategic advice on long-term financial planning, business structure, and risk management.



Businesses often work with a CPA when they are preparing annual tax filings, dealing with complex financial situations, or seeking expert guidance on financial decisions that could significantly impact the company's future.

When to Use Each Professional

For many small businesses, financial management is a collaborative effort that involves more than one professional. Bookkeepers, accountants, and CPAs often work together to ensure that financial information is accurate and useful.

A bookkeeper is typically the first financial professional a small business hires. Their ongoing work ensures that daily financial transactions are properly recorded and organized. Without accurate bookkeeping, it becomes difficult for accountants or CPAs to analyze financial data or prepare taxes

effectively.

An accountant may become involved as the business grows and needs more detailed financial analysis or planning. Accountants can help owners interpret their financial reports, identify opportunities for improvement, and develop budgets or forecasts.

A CPA is often consulted for tax preparation, regulatory compliance, and complex financial planning. Many businesses work with a CPA annually to prepare and file tax returns, even if their bookkeeping and accounting are handled internally or by other professionals.

Not every small business needs all three professionals at the same time. A new business with relatively simple finances may begin with basic bookkeeping and occasional

consultation with a CPA during tax season. As the business grows, owners may add an accountant to help analyze financial performance and guide strategic decisions.

Regardless of the size of the business, maintaining organized financial records and seeking expert advice when needed can make a significant difference. Good financial management helps businesses stay compliant with regulations, understand their financial position, and make informed choices about growth and investment.

For small business owners who already manage many responsibilities, working with qualified financial professionals provides valuable peace of mind. With the right support, owners can focus on running their business while knowing their financial foundation is in good hands.

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