

The Onboarding Playbook

Coaching with Krista · Jenn · From hire to fully-in · July 2026

The moment you say "you're hired," this doc takes over. Six phases — pre-start, day one, week one, week two, first 30 days, first 90 days. Krista's version, adapted for you. Everything in here is designed to protect two things: **your time** and **your ability to walk away in week one if it's not a fit**.

PHASE 1 · BETWEEN OFFER AND START DATE

The "pre-work" she does before day one.

Usually 1-3 weeks. Give her homework so she walks in prepared, and so you find out fast if she's the kind of person who does the pre-work.

SHE SIGNS · SHE READS · SHE WATCHES

Before her first shift, she needs to have done **ALL** of this.

- **Handbook — read and signed.** This is the standards/culture doc your NC lawyer has reviewed. If she can't sign the handbook, she can't start. Full stop.
- **SOP — read through end to end.** Not memorized. Just read. So on day one she isn't hearing anything for the first time.
- **Krista's Assistant Blueprint videos — watched.** If she wants a shortcut to what the first 90 days will feel like, that's it.
- **NOT SIGNED YET:** the employment agreement and the assistant agreement. Those come **AFTER** week one. You want the week to prove she's real before you paper her in.

Why she signs the handbook now but not the agreements: the handbook is culture — you want her buying into the vibe on day one. The employment + assistant agreements are legal contracts that create paperwork if you have to unwind them fast. Wait a week.

PHASE 2 · DAY ONE AND WEEK ONE

Off-payroll. Cash. Watching hard.

You are NOT putting her on payroll yet. You're paying her cash at the agreed hourly rate. If she doesn't work out, you part ways at end of week without a Gusto entry to unwind. Krista's rule, learned the hard way.

DAY ONE

Just get through the door together.

- **Walk the space with her.** Even if she shadowed. The SOP starts at the parking lot — walk it with her.
- **Show, don't quiz.** Day one isn't a test. It's orientation. Where things live, how you speak to clients, the rhythm.
- **Watch her energy.** The interview questions were about what she SAYS. Day one is about what she DOES. Phone away? Asks the right questions? Fills silence with tasks?
- **Assign her ONE thing to own by end of day.** A shampoo, a blow-dry, a station reset. Small. See how she handles ownership.

WEEK ONE

The trial. Cash paid at day's end or end of week.

- **No Gusto entry.** No payroll. No 1099. Cash at your agreed rate (\$20/hr to start). She logs her hours in her Notes app; you cross-check.
- **Start double-booking immediately.** Krista's rule: no easing in. Lexi had a week and got thrown in. Stephanie had a couple shadow days and got thrown in. Deep-end training is the ONLY training that works — and it tells you fast if she can hang.
- **Track three things:** can she take a correction and apply it right then? Does she come back tomorrow having remembered? Does she ask before she assumes?
- **Decision point: end of week one.** Yes or no. If yes: phase 3. If no: pay her the week in cash, part ways warmly, no paper trail.

The graceful "no" script if week one didn't work: *"I really appreciate you giving this a real shot. I'm not sure this is the right fit for either of us. Here's your week — thank you for the effort. Wishing you the best."* Pay her, hug her, don't over-explain. Move on.

PHASE 3 · WEEK TWO — SHE'S STAYING

Paperwork week. Payroll starts.

ADMIN SETUP

This is the week you formalize everything.

- **Add her to Gusto.** Ask your bookkeeper to help set it up if you haven't done payroll yourself before. Backdate her start to day one if you want week one to be legit W-2 (talk to your bookkeeper about the tradeoff — Krista's take is: don't stress the small unemployment tax ding).
- **Send the employment agreement via DocuSign.** Signed and returned before she works another day. This is the one your NC lawyer has reviewed.
- **Send the assistant agreement via DocuSign.** Same. This is the "she doesn't take your knowledge and run with it" protection.
- **Set up her Vagaro time-tracking access.** She logs her own hours, you review weekly, you approve in Gusto.

DocuSign: get a yearly subscription. It's the single easiest legal upgrade you'll make in the whole business. Every future hire and every legal signature runs through it.

PHASE 4 · THE FIRST 30 DAYS

Training in the deep end.

SKILL RAMP

The SOP is her Bible. You are her editor.

- **Double-book from day one.** Not "eventually." Now.
- **Toner + finish work is her lane.** Every service, every client. Repetition is the teacher.
- **Blow-dry every client — yours and eventually hers.** If she can't blow out extension hair by day 30, that's a signal.
- **Ask her to check the SOP BEFORE she asks you.** "Did you check the SOP?" is a full sentence.
- **Double-check her formulas out loud before you apply.** "5 and 7, right?" — every time. It teaches her, it protects the client, and it models the culture of double-checking.
- **Voice-record any hard conversation.** If you have to correct something twice, or address showing up late, or address her not doing the SOP — hit record. Announce the recording at the top ("I'm recording this for documentation purposes"). Then follow up with an email documenting the conversation. Every time.

If you're ever thinking "probation": Krista's rule — fire instead. She has never seen probation turn into a star employee. Every time she skipped that instinct, she paid for it later. Trust the gut.

PHASE 5 · THE FIRST 90 DAYS

She's part of the studio now.

MOVING FROM ASSISTANT TO SECOND CHAIR

This is where she stops being new.

- **By day 30-45: she's smooth on toner + finish for every client.** If she's not, the SOP either isn't clear enough or she's not the right fit.
- **By day 60: she owns pre-service prep completely.** You walk in, station is ready, formulas are checked, client is greeted.
- **By day 90: she's starting to run parts of the day.** Full blow-outs, extension prep, some independent client interactions.
- **Weekly one-on-one — 15 minutes, no phone.** What worked, what didn't, what she wants to learn next. Set the standard early.
- **Introduce the six-month plan around day 60.** When she starts training on foiling and color application. Frame it as a milestone, not a promotion.

WHAT YOU PROVIDE VS WHAT SHE BRINGS

The line that prevents resentment later.

YOU provide (for your clients + her assisting on your clients):

Color, foils, back bar, developer, toners, extension supplies, capes, towels, the space itself, the products she uses during service.

SHE brings (when she has her own clients down the line):

Her own scissors, curling irons, flat irons, blow-dryers if she prefers a specific one, combs, brushes for her personal use, tripod for her own content.

Krista's hard-earned rule: if you don't set this line now, she'll use your \$600 shears on her own client, drop them, break them, and neither of you will feel great about it. Put it in the handbook. Say it out loud on day one.

TOOLS YOU NEED IN PLACE BEFORE DAY ONE

The stack.

- **DocuSign** — yearly subscription. For handbook, employment agreement, assistant agreement, and every future signature.
- **Gusto** — payroll. You (or your bookkeeper) run it. She self-tracks hours, you approve weekly.
- **Vagaro** — you already have it. Give her a login for the time-tracking module.
- **Your Claude project** — she gets access if she'll be helping with content, otherwise it stays yours.
- **NC employment attorney** — you find one before you send any agreement out. This is the one-time expense that saves you legal exposure for years.

The whole playbook in one line: *Protect week one. Formalize week two. Train hard for 90 days. Every rule in here traces back to a moment Krista wished she'd done it differently — take her scars as your shortcut.*