



## **TIPS FOR NEW LEADERS**

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One of the toughest things for a senior executive to do is break in to an existing system of operation. At first there is an exhilarating air of difference. Everything is new and there is so much to figure out and to absorb. The opportunity to have a major impact induces what seems to be an endless rush of euphoric excitement. All too soon the feelings devolve into isolation and loneliness along with the realization that no matter what happens, everyone watching will wonder why there wasn't more.

The following steps, based on personal experience entering as a senior leader in eight separate ventures and studying those who have done well in similar circumstances at many others, increase the odds of a successful entry.

### **Open channels with management team members**

The successful new leader meets offline, at least twice, with each member of their new team, one-on-one for a couple of hours, in order to begin to develop a relationship and build trust. Meet off of the work-site and in low-stakes venues such as a leisurely meal, a golf outing, or a long walk in the woods with the objective to:

- Cultivate the sense that it is okay for each to be vulnerable (as described in Lencione's Five Dysfunctions of a Team) in front of the other
- Get clear about why each thinks they are here and to
- Get clear on what they want to accomplish individually and together, at work and in life.

A successful leader develops a unique relationship with each member of their top team. Quality relationships take a long time to gel but they are hard to start once work pressures raise the stakes.

### **Engage in critical business activity**

A new leader must learn what is going on, how things work, and who does what, all while also earning the respect of each team member. Correspondingly, each team member needs to establish their own sense of individual strength and prowess in the eyes of the new leader. Each needs to know that the new leader understands and appreciates them for who they are, what they have accomplished, and for what they are good at doing.

The successful new leader surveys the landscape to select a high-stakes activity to become integrally involved with, such as a key sale or a difficult delivery or product development challenge, in order to both move the business forward and, at the same time, provide a foil for everyone to establish themselves.

The new leader makes a specific contribution to the firm's success and starts to earn a reputation for leadership while collecting valuable input towards a well-grounded picture of the way things work currently and a starting outline of how things need to work in the future.

### **Determine roles, goals, and rewards**

The new leader meets with whoever is in charge of key delivery engagements, sales initiatives, strategic initiatives, and support functions to get clear on what each is trying to do and on how it is going and on how each describes what the organization as a whole is trying to do and how it is going. This provides a way to learn what is going on, who is doing what, and to develop or verify the unifying message that describes what the organization does, and how it does it. It also provides the foundation for determining key roles, goals, and rewards. From these steps the current state-of-play becomes clear and the new leader develops a view about how they would like things to be and what needs to be done by whom in order to achieve a specific future state at a specific point in time.

### **Form core leadership team**

No one does much alone. The new leader needs to build a core team of two to six other strong players who seek to accomplish the same thing overall and who have immense desire, drive, capacity, and competence to help accomplish it. With complementary skills, compatible orientations, and an innate drive to work with each other to accomplish their joint goal, anything is possible. Core leadership team members may not be from the next level down on the organization chart and not everyone at that level may end up in the group. Core leaders can be anywhere in the organization and it takes time to find them and to bring them into the inner circle.

### **Set up leadership community**

Define and schedule individual and group meeting forums and agendas to create consistent platforms for addressing strategic, operational, policy, and performance matters with a broad leadership community of 15 to 30 top players.

### **Set targets**

Develop target financial, cash, resources, and labor utilization business models consistent with the organization's mission, vision, strategy, and in-line with industry benchmarks. Identify key performance measures, set target values for each measure, and develop a plan to achieve them over time. Build dashboards to track progress and tie incentive compensation and recognition directly to achieving, and even more for exceeding, targeted results.

### **Tap into outsiders**

The wise new leader systematically finds, cultivates, and opens channels with people who have been successful at what the firm is trying to do in order to secure their expert counsel, engages a personal effectiveness coach to give feedback on how they behave in order to improve effectiveness, and convenes a forum of leaders in similar circumstances to their own in order to regularly share experiences and lessons learned in a safe and supportive environment.

### **Open channels with board members**

Board members and others in their authorizing environment (e.g., bankers, lawyers, accountants, and fund managers) are in position to have an extremely positive or negative impact on a leader's success. It is critical, therefore, to open, cultivate, manage, and use channels to board members and key investors. The best plan is to identify those who are critical to success and bring them

into the active working set of key players. Draw on their strengths, treat them as team members and proactively engage them to contribute their great strengths to advance the whole.

### **Meet weekly one-on-one with each direct report**

Set up a regularly scheduled weekly one-on-one session with each direct report to review their top 3-5 priorities in the coming week, how things progressed on last week's priorities, and to review the dashboard of key items you both use to track their performance. Keep a conversational, problem-solving mindset, and work with them to understand what they are dealing with and how it is going. Look for and take advantage of opportunities to come along side them to push up their thinking, clarify priorities, eliminate roadblocks, and encourage peak performance. The best leaders also turn the tables to allow the direct report to play the same role with them as they cover the same topics for themselves. Doing so also allows the new leader to model the target behavior.

### **Communicate**

Virtually every employee survey reveals the need for more communication. Leaders take this to mean that they need to communicate more about what is going on to their troops. While more communication from the top is almost always welcome, usually what is meant is that employees have things to say to management and management is not listening. Set up an anonymous channel for employee communication to the top leader and actively promote its use.

Communicate broadly to the staff in a series of All Hands Update Bulletins that report on key activities, insights, progress, and plans. Hold small informal cross-functional, cross-level lunches with the leader and one or two others from the management team to create and institutionalize a forum for connecting the top-of-the house with the front line. Schedule reviews of top projects, sales efforts, functions to provide a forum for leaders to show what they do, cross share information, and to provide critical guidance and direction in a safe and constructive forum. Hold All Hands sessions where all employees gather in a room or attend electronically from any where in the world for the entire firm to occasionally get together for a shared experience in which management briefs everyone on goals, progress, and plans; rewards targeted behaviors to encourage others to follow suit; and gives a forum for emerging stars to be spotlighted in front of their peers.