

ii. The First 90 Days

The First 90 Days – Critical Success Strategies For New Leaders At All Levels

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Multiple articles from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and other sources have been written on the topic of Executive Orientation and Acclimation. Senior executives have reported that they are not well integrated into their new jobs. The process of learning a new executive level position takes up to 18 months, yet only 30% of executives said they were satisfied with company integration efforts (recent HR Magazine article). 32% said their executive orientation was below average or poor.

The First 90 Days is written based on 5 propositions which form the author's basis for transition acceleration:

1. The root causes of transition failure always lie in a harmful interaction between the situation, with its opportunities and pitfalls, and the individual, with his or her strengths and vulnerabilities.
2. There are systematic methods that leaders can employ to both lessen the likelihood of failure and reach the breakeven point faster.
3. The overriding goal in a transition is to build momentum by creating virtuous cycles that build credibility and by avoiding getting caught in vicious cycles that damage credibility.
4. Transitions are a crucible for leadership development and should be managed accordingly.
5. Adoption of a standard framework for accelerating transitions can yield big returns for organizations.

The author points out that the challenges in a transition vary depending on the business situation and environment encountered. He presents a basic framework describing 4 broad types of business situations that new leaders must diagnose. He calls his model the **STaRS** model, representing the 4 scenarios:

1. **Start-Up** – the challenge of assembling the people, funding and technology to get a new business, product or project started.
2. **Turnaround** – you are taking on a unit that is recognized to be in trouble.
3. **Realignment** – you are challenged to revitalize a unit, product, process or product.
4. **Sustaining Success** – you are shouldering the responsibility of preserving the vitality of a successful operation.

There are very different implications from each of the 4 scenarios. The author points out the critical nature of taking the time to make the appropriate diagnosis. There are different challenges and opportunities that each presents. Developing a plan that balances learning with action and offense with defense is critical.

Regardless of the scenario, good advice from this author and others emphasizes the importance of securing early wins. While there will be more than a few issues and opportunities to address, the importance of focus is emphasized. The author points out that it is "essential to identify promising opportunities and then focus relentlessly on translating them into wins." He also mentions that a leader can not get results in more than a couple of areas during the early transition stages.

The first 90 days are also a critical time to create momentum. Long-term goals should be established that are consistent with the direction achieved from the early wins and that introduce and reward new patterns of behavior.

Relationships with your new leader (your boss) are a critical aspect of success in any new position and organization. The author gives fundamental advice for building a productive relationship:

- Don't trash the past.
- Don't stay away. (It may feel good to be given a great deal of latitude, but taking it without guidance may be problematic.) Get on your manager's calendar early and often.
- Don't surprise your boss.
- Don't approach your boss only with problems.
- Don't run down your checklist. (Your new manager knows you are busy; talk with him/her about your challenges and plans to address them.)
- Don't try to change your boss.

The book ends with a restatement of the original 5 propositions and what it takes to be effective in addressing them. The key imperatives are to take the time to diagnose your situation and to find ways to create value through early wins and a long-term plan – and that the early and long-term plans need to be correlated. Effective leaders leverage themselves and their team to create new patterns of behavior.

A summary checklist for a successful 90 days should include the following:

- Promote yourself
- Accelerate your learning
- Match strategy to situation
- Secure early wins
- Negotiate success
- Achieve alignment
- Build your team
- Create coalitions
- Keep your balance
- Expedite everyone

