

The New Boss

How to Survive the First 100 Days

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ISBN 0-7494-4764-8

Today successful executives move to new responsibilities every two to three years. People assuming successfully new leadership roles are able to organize and communicate the many topics, issues and expectations as a clear, manageable concept. They have stamina particularly in crisis. Both competencies are acquired through practical experience.

Managing Expectations Proactively.

Expectations bring wishes for change to the surface in organizations. But sometimes those expectations are almost impossible to meet. Managing expectations is a competency that a leader must have in order to manage transition.

Expectations of superiors are (if explained at all) focused on quantitative objectives. We rarely hear loyalty, supporting superior and staff, milestones and criteria for overall success mentioned as expectations.

Expectations of employees seem much clearer: a lot of them relate to the solution of old problems, job security and advancement. Other expectations will only be voiced if the new boss patiently asks for them.

Employees expect the new boss to come to them, not the other way around.

Ignoring expectations doesn't mean that they will go away. Ignoring can lead to resistance to new plans.

Expectations are:

- Desires, ideas, hopes, suggested solutions and recommendations.
- Not logical.
- Stand for a basic attitude: waiting. So we have to translate expectations into shared tasks.



Developing Key Relationships.

Relations decide the success of a change in leadership.

We have to define which relationships are key or not. This is easy after the facts.

An important player is the individual who managed the position while vacant. Talk to this potential hidden rival and ask for advice. Don't make promises and don't raise hope for the future. Approach him with understanding; make him a fair offer and bridge the gap between the two of you.

Another important person is your predecessor. Employees will always compare the two bosses with each other. Don't accept complaints about your predecessor's weaknesses. Don't underestimate the loyalty towards their former boss (when he is promoted) and send clear signals to make them recognize your authority.

Be careful in accepting invitations.

Constructively Analyzing the Initial Situation.

Challenge of a newcomer: making decisions without being thoroughly informed.

Five perspectives help you analyze the type of situation that you will face:

1. The rules and assumptions guiding the people involved.

Hard realities are easier to change than the so-called soft corporate culture. Explore the rules, assumptions and values that underpin the way people think and work.

2. The issues occupying the organization.

Gather as much information as possible to have various perspectives.

3. The facts that determine action.

Often a contradiction between description of soft problems and hard facts will emerge.

4. The available potential for innovation.

5. The resources on which you can build.

Establishing a Set of Motivating Goals.

Each employee has different expectations from a new boss. They also will try to discover what kind of human being the new boss is and what personal interests he brings to his new job.

But one of their first questions will be: do you have a plan and ideas on how?
If your answer brings changes to their authority or tasks you will face immediate resistance.

So a program for motivating employees for ambitious goals must:

- Not giving the feeling that you impose a preconceived plan without recognizing their situation.
- Take into account your legitimate interest and their own long-term interest.
- Be balanced between stability and change and show respect for achievements of the team.
- Be easy to communicate and inspire people.

Examine always your desired goals for their effect on your employees. Formulate at least one stability-related goal for every three goals related to change. This will generate a positive climate.

Pitfalls when formulating goals:

1. Working with general goals.
2. Working on urgent problems rather than on important problems.
3. Considering goals in isolation.

Fostering a Positive Climate for Change.

Ask questions with great respect for what was done in the past. These are 'reflective questions'.

Ask 'resourceful questions': questions helping to identify strengths. Ask what they are proud of, how they managed to get through a special situation, what strengths they have. Don't ask about causes of problems if you want to establish a positive climate for change.

But you will always encounter a degree of skepticism.

Some tips to deal with skepticism:

- Meet the skepticism positively.
- Differentiate skepticism: stated and unstated. Ask them to write down the blocking points. When skepticism is made visible, people start to react against it and begin to experience some optimism.
- Don't become an optimistic prophet. A balance between your own positive attitude and the respect of any well-founded skepticism.

Creating a climate of trust and support is crucial.

Therefore ask yourself these questions:

1. How much trust do employees have in my abilities?
2. What do I know about their strengths?
3. What strengths have to be developed?
4. What projects can develop strengths?

Initiating Strengths Effectively.

Send strong signals for change. Communicate objectives also at an emotional level so that employees sense that matters are taken seriously. Be clear on the first steps.

Identifying the right time to initiate change is a key skill. Be sure that the organization is ready for change.

You can start change projects if:

- Employees are prepared through discussions and meetings.
- You developed some key relationships needed for successful change.
- You have a clear concept for the first step.

Employees want to know what is going to change. Failing to make this clear will make:

- Expectations rise
- Losing momentum
- Losing the power to challenge habits and traditions
- You to become a part of the existing system yourself.

Experience learns that you need two to four months for this.

Using symbols and rituals.

Combining symbols and rituals into a convincing message is called symbolic management. Consistency is what you say and how you behave is important. This is a symbolic expression of your different management style.

The language of symbols is very effective if you want to:

- Establish a strong presence and clarify the nature of relationship to the predecessor.
- Demonstrate new values and style with a cooperative approach.
- Communicate security and acceptance.
- Develop a new message.
- Facilitate the transition to a new style and culture.

During a transition period, employees will notice the slightest change and they will interpret them.

Ask yourself following questions:

1. What is my ideal manager-employee relationship?
2. How do we prepare best decisions?
3. How do we make decisions?
4. How do we treat each other in this organization?
5. What are the most important values in the company?
6. What attitude do I expect from employees?

Depending on the answers you can introduce new rituals.

Internal Promotion.

Structural change is pending in a company: decentralization. A mechanical engineer expert becomes the new head of his region.

His first task is to convey unwelcome news from HQ. At once he was no longer 'one of us' but he became 'one of them'.

This example shows the challenge for someone who rises from the ranks. Colleagues are happy that one of them has received this position but forget that the new role also entails new perspectives.

Typical in this situation is that these new leaders have difficulties with:

- A clear and visible assumption of their leadership role.
- Delegation
- Closing connections to department.
- Their amount of background knowledge.

Tips for these new leaders:

- Speak with former colleagues about new duties and delegate immediately.
- Speak with you boss and ask about issues they think need to be considered and their concrete expectations.
- State what will remain the same and what will change.
- Be prepared that employees will be disappointed after an initial phase.

Entrepreneur wanted: the External Candidate.

Companies are looking for agile, entrepreneurial self-starters.
But colleagues of this type of leaders do not understand the approach and tend to obstruct.
The leader starts to wonder whether the company really wants an entrepreneurial manager.

In most companies employees feel threatened by the competition of external professionals because they very often take high-profile positions in the company.

Typical problems for people from the outside brought into a company:

- Discrepancy between what top management expects and the employees' experience.
- Time pressure and need to know the organization.
- Lack of internal network.
- Own expectations.

Tips:

- Two equally important responsibilities from the beginning:
 - o Performance of your technical task
 - o Building a network of relationships
- Ask who you need to include and keep informed.
- Remember: necessity of getting to know the organization.

The Big Predecessor and the Little Successor.

Succeeding someone after being someone's deputy is a big challenge.

Even if you enjoy automatic acceptance, the problem is the shadow of the predecessor.
If you as successor are supposed to make up for lost time and implement changes quickly you are handicapped compared with a manager coming from outside the company.

Typical problems an internal successor has to handle:

- Being forever the n° 2.
- Expectations of employees.
- Position in the circle of colleagues.
- Constant comparison to predecessor.
- The weaknesses of the great predecessor.

Tips:

- Plan a clean and clear transition; give your predecessor an appropriate farewell.
- Don't try to follow your predecessor's footsteps.
- Establish yourself clearly in your new position.
- Show appreciation for your predecessor's work.
- Treat criticism on your predecessor carefully.
- Formulate clear and balanced goals.

The Assignment Abroad.

When a manager is assigned abroad employees will automatically ask themselves if a manager from country X is able to run operations and business in their country.

Adapting yourself to the host country's conventions of communication and conflict behavior is important for positive working relations.

Typical problems:

- The need to clarify the assignment.
- Orientation phase and leadership transition rituals.
- Cultural differences.
- Situation of family.

Tips:

- Prepare for the assignment, country and culture.
- Devote time to building relationships and cultural adaptation.
- Reflect regularly on your experience.