

# THE FIRST 90 DAYS



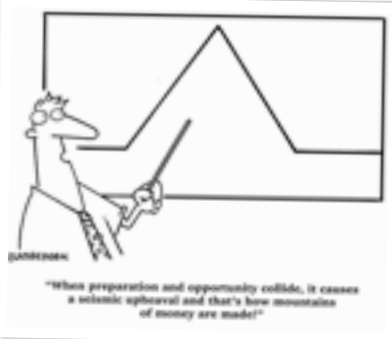
The First 90 Days, by author Michael Watkins is considered by many to be the bible of business transitions. The book offers scenarios of successes and failures, while providing strategies that will help leaders

transition into a new role. Whether you are being promoted from within a company or entering it as an outsider. The First 90 Days provides incoming leaders with the foundation to take charge quickly, diagnose

their situation and build transition strategies. Using the information in The First 90 Days as a roadmap, will help to ensure success during crucial career transition periods.

## Chapters

1. Prepare Yourself
2. Accelerate Your Learning
3. Match Strategy to Situation
4. Negotiate Success
5. Secure Early Wins



6. Achieve Alignment
7. Build Your Team
8. Create Alliances
9. Manage Yourself
10. Accelerate Your Learning

# Chapter One: Prepare Yourself

Once you have been hired to assume a leadership role, whether it's an internal promotion or you are heading to a new job or new unit, there are many things you will need to be aware of. Most importantly, don't assume what made you successful so far will continue to do so.

If you have been promoted within your company you won't need to learn about company norms, you already understand how your unit works. There may be people who

consciously do not want you to be successful. This may be former peers that you are now in charge of, or co-workers that you beat out for the job. It is essential that you are firm but fair with all of your staff, as people will be watching for signs of favoritism.

*Accepting a job at a new company, or within a new division of your existing employer can be a difficult transition. You are heading into a new environment with new norms, your first job is to figure out cultural norms.*

**DON'T ASSUME WHAT MADE YOU SUCCESSFUL SO FAR WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO**

## LEARNING THE CULTURE

**Influences** – How do people get support for crucial initiatives?

Where does support need to come from? Senior team members or peers?

**Meetings** – Is this a time to discuss difficult issues, or is it just a public form to validate agreements that were made in private?

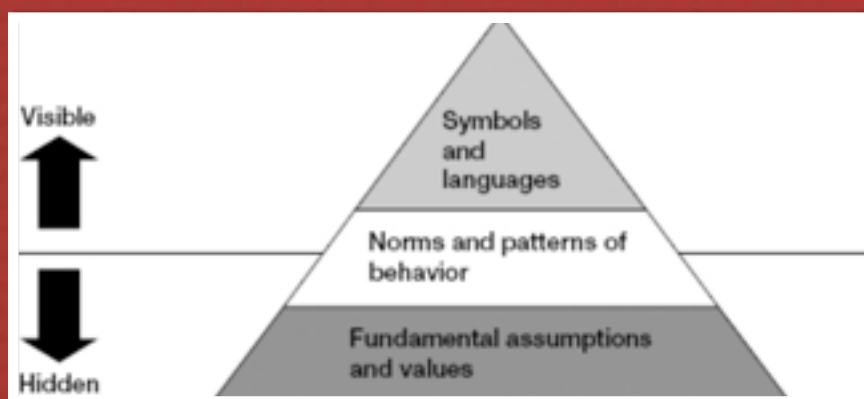
**Execution** – Is it more important to know the right people, or have a deep understanding of the companies process?

**Conflict** – Can you talk about tough issues openly, without being reprimanded? Or is any conflict just avoided?

**Recognition** – Are individuals rewarded, or does the company look for successful team players?

**Ends vs means** – What are organizations values, and are they reinforced through positive or negative incentive. Are you restricted in how you reach your goals?

Learning the culture is essential to learning your new role.  
Cultural Pyramid



## Prepare Yourself check lists

### *Onboarding checklists*

#### *Business orientation checklist*

- Find public information about financials, products and brands
- If possible ask the business for a briefing book
- Familiarize yourself with key facilities before your start date

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#### *Stakeholder connection checklist*

- Have your boss introduce you to key people that you should connect with
- Schedule early meetings with key stakeholders
- Focus on lateral relationships with peers, not just vertical ones with bosses

### *Expectations alignment checklist*

- Schedule conversations with your boss about expectations within your first week
- Communicate with your boss about working styles as early as possible

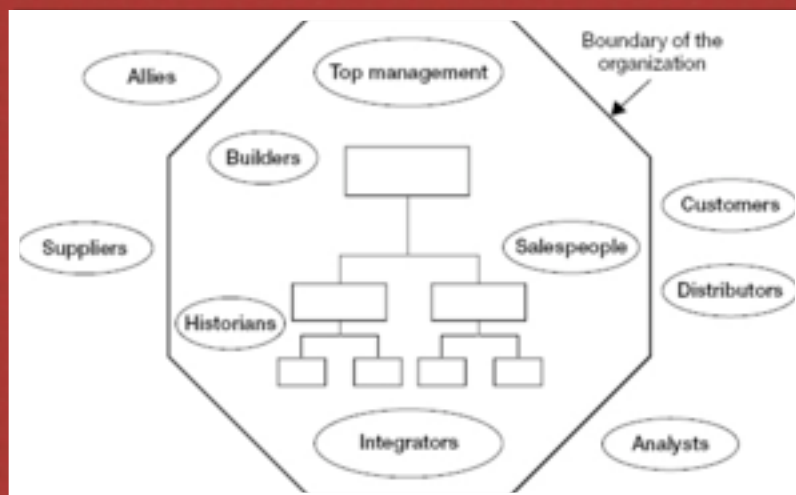
### *Cultural adaptation checklist*

- During the interview process, ask about the organization's culture
- Schedule a meeting with your boss and HR to consult on the culture
- Identify people who could be your cultural interpreters

## Chapter Two: Accelerate Your Learning

Now that you are into your new role, its time to learn all you can

Manage your learning by figuring out what you need to know, and who can teach it to you.



### **Managing your learning**

- You must figure out what you need to learn, so that you can focus your efforts
  - Identify your best sources of information, and figure out how to maximize insight in the least amount of time
- Define your learning agenda by learning about the companies past, present and future

## PAST

- How were goals set? Were benchmarks internal or external? What happened if goals were not met?
- If performance was poor, what caused that? If performance was good, why has that been the case?
- Have there been efforts to change the organization? What resulted?
- What behaviors get you rewards, what gets you punished?

## PRESENT

- What is the company's vision, and how did it come to be?
- Who is capable and who isn't? Who can you trust? Who has influence?
- What cultural or political missteps could push you off track?
- What important issues is the company now facing?

## FUTURE

- In what areas do you foresee challenges? How can we prepare for them?
- What barriers are there for making change? Are they political, cultural or technical?
- What elements of the culture should go and what should stay?

*Accelerate*  
Your Learning

## Chapter Three: Match Strategy to Situation

What situation are you inheriting as you transition into a leadership role?



# THE STARS MODEL



S - START-UP

T - TURNAROUND

A - ACCELERATED GROWTH

R - REALIGNMENT

S - SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Knowing where you are and where you need to be is essentially for building your team. You may have some strong players, but if they are not what your business needs at the time then you may need to move forward without them.



Everyone agreed that the morale and team-building session was a roaring success.

## Chapter Four: Negotiate Success

Your idea of success may be different than your bosses, it is crucial that you define success together. This way you and your boss will understand each others expectations.

### Do's

*Clarify expectations early and often.* Manage expectations from the very beginning, and keep bad news on the table. This will help ensure that realistic expectations are kept.

*Take responsibility for making relationships work.* You must not expect people to come to you, you must go out and find the supports that you need to be successful.

*Negotiate time lines.* Your diagnoses of your area will take time, don't get pressured into making essential calls before you are ready.

*Aim for early wins.* Figure out what is important to your boss. What are their priorities and goals, and how do you fit into their picture? Once you have figured this out, aim to get results in these areas. Discussions with your boss about this early wins will give him some ownership over them.

Get the support of your bosses team. Your boss has preexisting relationships with people who are now your peers. Understanding the channels that your boss gets information from is important, as is having some of these people on your side.

### Don'ts

*Don't stay away.* Stay on your bosses calendar, make him or her aware of issues that you face and show that you are understand their expectations

*Don't surprise your boss with bad news.* Keep them informed or emerging problems, and the solutions you are working on.

*Don't use meetings to go through checklists.* Meetings with your boss is not the time to run down checklists, focus on the most important things you are doing and how they can help you.

*Don't expect your boss to change.* You may have different working styles, but it is your job to adapt to your boss.

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"It's a deal. You give me 5 analysts, 3 pundits, 7 technicians and a soothsayer. I give you 6 experts, 5 professors, 4 consultants and a prognosticator."

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# Chapter Five: Secure Early Wins

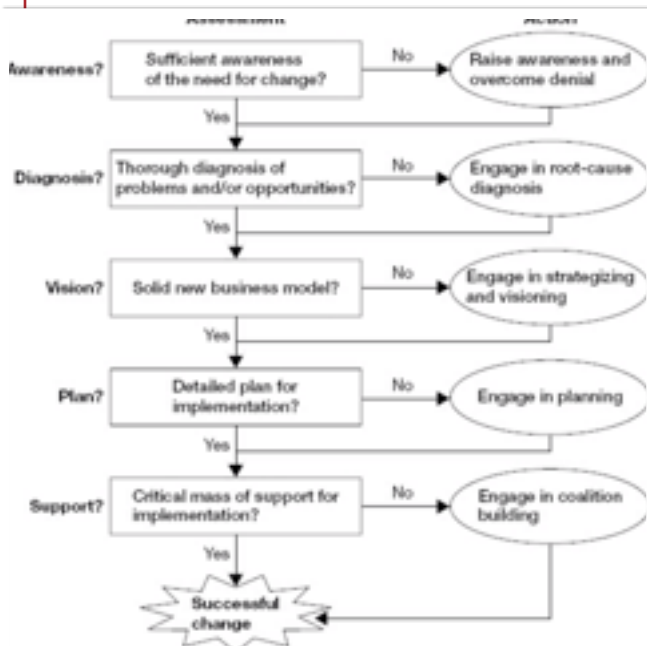
Victories will help you to build credibility and momentum in your new position, having them early reinforces your worth to the company and your team.

You must start with a goal in mind, this goal should be developed with your boss, so that you are both on the same page. Although fixing small, easy problems is great way to secure early wins. Leaders must not be spend to much energy focusing on things that don't lead to their bigger goals.

Leaders must do double duty, by building momentum in the short term and laying the foundation of long term strategic goals.



**CLOSE PERSONAL  
RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT  
COMPATIBLE WITH  
EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION**



## The key to building early wins

**Focus on a few key opportunities.** It is easy to take on too much too quickly during transitions, and the results can undermined your longterm goals. Focus on promising opportunities and work tirelessly to get wins in that area.

**Get wins that matter to your boss.** Early wins will help you to win over employees and peers, but your bosses opinions of you are essential. Learn about your bosses priorities and look for success in these areas. Getting wins in areas of interest to your boss will build your credibility.

**Get wins the right way.** Your wins must be authentic and endorsed by the culture of your new job. Wins, no matter how impressive that are seen to be manipulative, underhanded or inconsistent with the culture will work against you in the long run.

There are many challenges one must face when moving from peer to boss, these principles help with the transition.

**Relationships must change.** Personal relationships with former peers must diminish some, close personal relationships are not compatible with effective supervision.

**Rites of passage.** The first days are more about symbolism than substance, having the old boss introduce the new boss will help to establish the new role.

**Re-enlist your good former peers.** A new leader must understand that while they have got a promotion, others who applied did not.

Disappointed competitors will go through stages of adjustment, it is your job to figure out who can work for you, and who can't.

Focus on the business. Former peers and your new employees will try and figure out if you play favorites or will push your own agenda.

The easiest fix for this, is to focus solely on what is good for the business.

# Chapter Six: Achieve Alignment

The higher you climb in an organization the more you are responsible for its overall structure and success. You must ensure that its structure is well aligned with its strategies, as well you must help to identify and develop the systems and skills needed to reach the organizations goals.

When viewing the structure of an organization leaders must understand and align these areas with their goal.

1. The strategic direction - The organization's mission, vision and strategies.
2. Structure - Why are people organized the way that they are, and how is their work measured and assessed.
3. Core processes - Through what system is value added? Information or material.
4. Skill bases. The capabilities of key people and groups within the organization.

How to shape your groups structure

1. Units – How are your direct reports grouped, possibly by function, product or geographical area
2. Reporting – How will the lines of communication be used between the boss and co-workers to coordinate effort
3. Decision making – Who is empowered to make decisions and what guidelines apply to the decision
4. Performance measurement and incentives –How will you assess the performance of your unit and reward success.

Elements of organization architecture.

The system consists of distinct interacting elements.





# Chapter Seven: Build Your Team

## Traps to avoid when building up your own team

*Criticizing the previous leader* – Nothing will be gained by criticizing the people who ran the organization before you. Instead concentrate on assessing current behaviors and results so that you can make the necessary changes to support improvements.

*Keeping the existing team too long* – We all inherit a team that we must mold to reach our goals. In some cases we are able to move people out when they are unable to perform. More likely, new leaders must help the weaker team members they have inherited by offering supports.

## Tips for leaders in transition

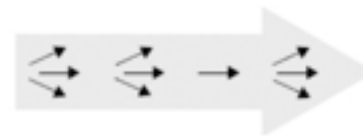
*Balance stability and change* – We must all make changes to the teams we inherit, but doing too much too quickly will lead to problems. Focus on the companies goals, and support your workers through the transition of leadership.

*Build on your good people* – Through transitions your top performers may also have trouble adjusting, to ensure they stay, look for ways to recognize and capitalize on their abilities.

## Once the team is in place

### Push tools

- Incentives
- Reporting system
- Planning processes
- Procedures
- Mission statement



### Pull tools

- Shared vision
- Teamwork

## Assessing the team

**Competence** - Does this person have the technical competence and experience to do the job effectively?

**Judgment** - Does this person exercise good judgment, especially under pressure or when faced with making sacrifices for the greater good?

**Energy** - Does this team member bring the right kind of energy to the job, or are they burned out or disengaged?

**Focus** - Is this person capable of setting priorities and sticking to them, or prone to riding off in all directions?

**Relationships** - Does this individual get along with others on the team and support collective decision making, or is he difficult to work with?

**Trust** - Can you trust this person to keep her word and follow through on commitments?

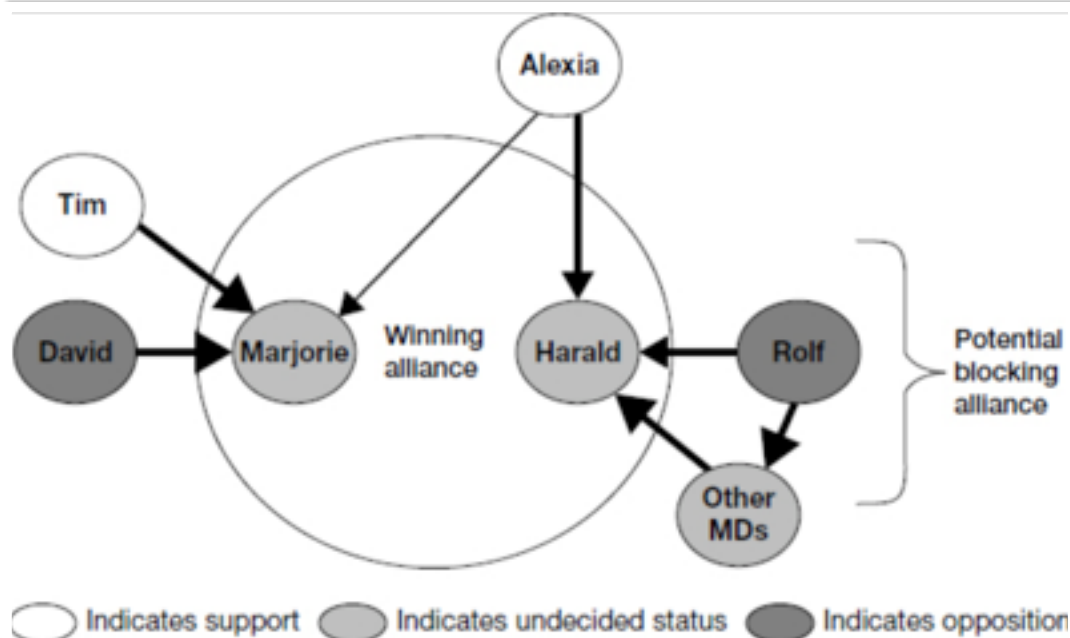
**Respect the people that you work with** -

As your team begins to evolve be sure to treat all members with respect. Even if everyone knows that a particular person needs to be replaced, your reputation will suffer if your actions are viewed as unfair.

*Define goals and measurements* – Set measurable and specific goals for your team. Use a clear and explicit measurement tool to ensure accountability.

*Align your team* – Now that you have your team and your goals define how each member of the team can contribute to reaching the goals. A push pull system works well to align and motivate a team.

## Chapter Eight: Create Alliances



WHO HAS THE  
POTENTIAL TO  
MAKE OR BREAK  
YOUR IDEAS?

What is your influence objectives – What, if any, alliances do you need to secure early wins? What initiatives will need the support of others, and how will you gain their support?

Map out your influence network – Identify supporters, opponents and the persuadables

Know the pivotal people – Engage the people that have the potential to make or break some of the ideas you bring forward. Assess their intrinsic motivators by engaging in direct dialog, and seek to understand what people are supportive of and against and why. This may lead to a valuable trade off that can get your ideas through.

## Chapter Nine: Manage Yourself

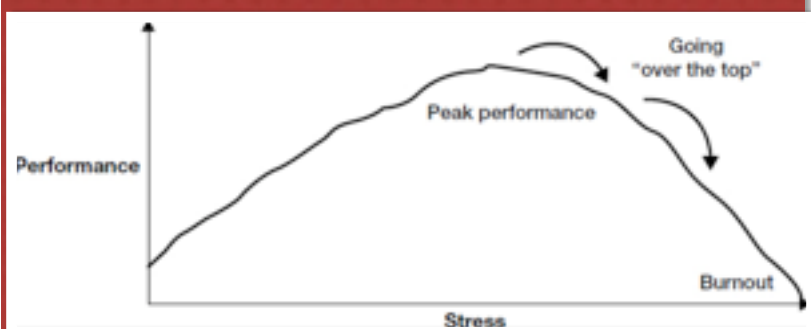
During a transitional period new leaders must take the time to look after themselves and family members.

Personal checklist – Ask why and why not questions to find out...

How do you feel? Excited, confident, in control?

What has bothered you? Have you failed to connect with people?

What do you feel has gone well and what has gone poorly



### New leaders must...

Set boundaries for yourself – Define what you will and will not do for the people around you.

Work with your group and ask for support – You must make the right connections with people, encourage people to share critical information with you.

Take the bull by the horns – Don't avoid making difficult decisions that affect the people you work with. It only leads to more problems down the road.

## Chapter Ten: Accelerate Everyone

The cost of struggling under a new leader could result in financial losses or damage to the business.

Delayed product launches and the loss of high-potential talent due to uneasy transitions can devastate a company.

### To avoid losses leaders should

Identify what transitions are taking place, and which ones have the greatest impact.

Know what existing supports are in place, and ensure that they are company wide.

Understand why people are being promoted. Is it only because they are good at their current job, or do they demonstrate potential to be great in a new area? Are leaders being brought in because they have specific abilities? Has any thought gone into how they will fit into the new culture?



### Assuring smooth Transitions

To make sure leaders are successful in their transitions, adopting a common core model can bridge many gaps.

Establishing company wide framework, language and resources allows critical conversation to happen more openly and easily.



**"That's our mission statement. If people follow that, everything else seems to fall into place."**

# Critical Evaluation

The book “The First 90 Days” by author Michael D. Watkins, is a guide for leaders going through change in their career. Michael outlines critical steps that new leaders should review and could potentially apply to their new situation. The book has also helped to spur companies and businesses into re-evaluating how they manage talent, onboard new employees and manage successions. Helping to accelerate all new hires has become increasingly important, as underperforming employees and especially leaders can have serious financial implications. “The First 90 Days” offers tools and concepts that can be adapted to fit the needs of all professionals during the crucial beginning stages of a new job. During this time new leaders establish routines that will either make or break them in their new position. Applying the ideas of Michael Watkins book will increase the likely hood of success for new leaders, and could potentially allow them to continue to climb within their organization.

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Watkins, M. D. (2003). *The first 90 days*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing.