



## YOU'RE IN CHARGE-NOW WHAT? The 8 Point Plan

Book Summary by Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, Ph.D.

**Authors:** Thomas J. Neff & James M. Citrin

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### Authors' Bio:

**Thomas J. Neff** is chairman of Spencer Stuart US and has led its CEO and Board of Directors Practice. He is the coauthor of *Lessons from the Top*.

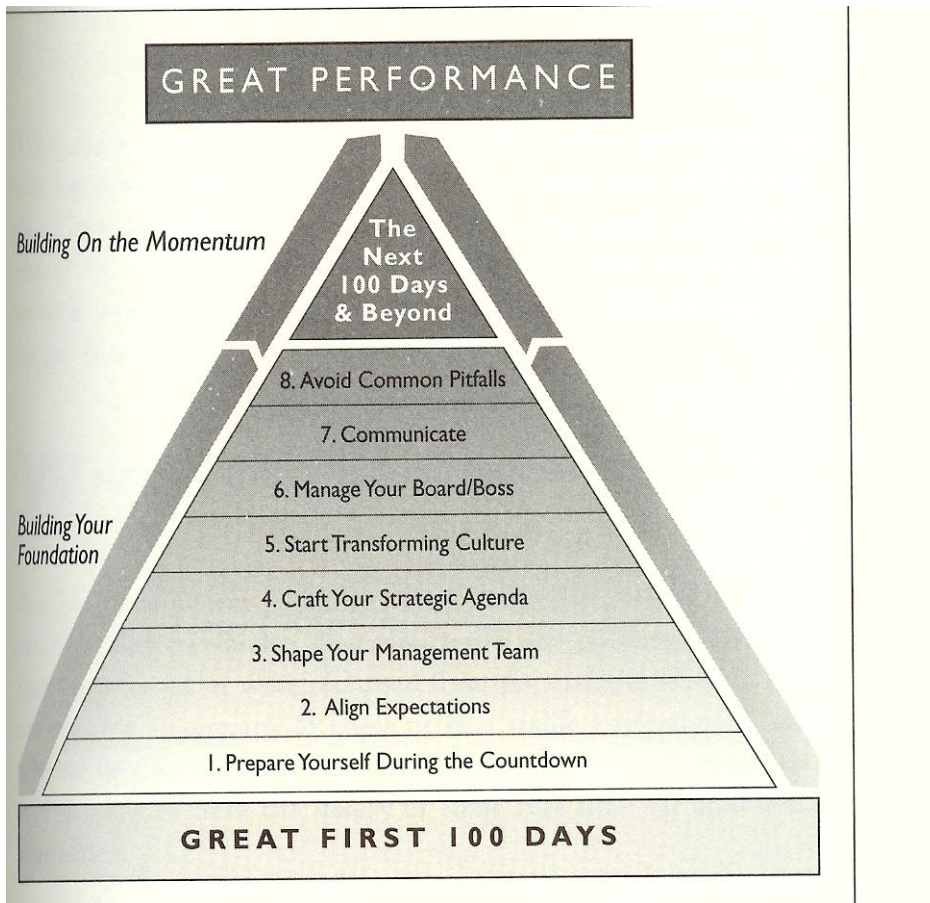
**James M. Citrin** leads Spenser Stuart's Global Technology, Communications, and Media Practice. He is the author of *Zoom* and the coauthor of the *Five Patterns of Extraordinary Careers* and *Lessons from the Top*.

### Author's big thought:

Getting a new job or a big promotion is like building a new house: You need to get the foundation right for both. With a job, the quick-drying cement is how well you do in your first hundred days, since they establish the foundation for long term momentum and great performance. The goal of this book is to provide you and those you work with all that you need to build your own agenda and plan.

### Introduction

- To put your first hundred days into their proper context, the authors developed the framework in the image of a pyramid to house their 8 Point Plan for getting off to the right start.
- Follow their 8 Point Plan in a new leadership position and create the momentum to help you achieve long-term performance and enduring success.
- There are a series of key actions that you can follow, building layer upon layer of the pyramid, to achieve a great first hundred days. Doing so will then maximize your opportunity to achieve successful long-term performance.
- Use the pyramid model as your guide for the major activities you should accomplish during the first hundred days.
- Flexibility is critical during this period, so make sure you tailor your plan to the situation.



## Chapter One - The Countdown: Preparing for the Race Before You Reach the Starting Line

- Everyone's countdown period to a new leadership position is different, depending on whether they come into a new position from the inside their organization or were recruited from the outside, whether they are entering a company in crisis or in a stable environment, and whether they are jumping right into a new job from an already demanding one or have the luxury of some free time for additional preparation.
- All countdown periods share a common goal: to learn as much as possible about the new world you're about to enter so that you can figure out how best to explore and navigate your way through it.
- You should walk in preparing to lead a strategic process. This is a process of multiple dimensions. You're clearing and focusing your thoughts so that you can diagnose the challenges and opportunities of a new situation. You're identifying key constituencies and starting to forge alliances and build new relationships. You're attempting to flush out biases while distilling valuable information from people who have key insights into the company. You're thinking of all that needs to be done in the context of your own skills and experience. You're considering the strength of the managers who will soon make up your team, and you're hypothesizing about where the holes are likely to be. Simultaneously you are preparing yourself emotionally for a major life transition and taking steps to get your family and support infrastructure ready to run without you for a period of time.

- Establishing and maintaining the right priorities is one of the greatest challenges a new leader faces. One of your goals during the countdown period is to try and shape events before they shape you.
- The authors' research rated the following 5 priorities for getting off to the right start;
  1. Absorb information.
  2. Define the company's challenges.
  3. Establish credibility and win employee's trust.
  4. Assess the senior management team.
  5. Prepare yourself emotionally.

Based on these five priorities for the countdown period the authors extrapolated ten guidelines to optimize your countdown period.

#### TEN GUIDELINES FOR OPTIMIZING THE COUNTDOWN PERIOD

1. Effective planning will help you spend the scarce time available (about twelve hundred hours) in your first hundred days wisely.
2. Get set to learn. Perform an assessment of the company's strategy, competitive positioning, and financials using public information and available internal plans and documents.
3. Meet with the smartest observers you can find-employees, alumni, customers, suppliers, and analysts-to garner their insights.
4. Do not feel compelled to walk into your new role with a strategy already developed-it will be wrong, incomplete, and/or lack buy in. Instead, integrate all the information into four or five issue areas or themes to discuss and focus on.
5. When you are a candidate for a top position, put together a draft hundred-day plan. Doing so well will help you win the job, and it will also begin to align expectations and allow you to hit the ground running. (See the Appendix for two such plans.)
6. Determine what "listening" questions you would like to ask key managers or employees and to whom you would like to ask them and in what time frame; keep the questions to five or six and plan to ask the same ones of everyone you meet with; doing so will build trust and accelerate the identification of key themes and issues.
7. Assess your own knowledge, skill, or experience gaps in terms of specialized training or functional expertise.
8. Use the countdown period to lay the groundwork for establishing strong relationships with your boss, board, and future colleagues; be open and receptive.
9. Prepare your family for the intense ride ahead. If you are relocating, seriously consider leaving the family at home for several weeks or even months; this will enable you to immerse yourself in your new role and minimize their disruption and angst.
10. Get in physical shape for the intense period ahead; do not defer or neglect your conditioning and fitness.

#### **Chapter Two - The First Steps: Aligning Expectations**

- Setting proper expectations is one of the most important things a new leader has to do to get off to the right start. It is also one of the most easily overlooked and mishandled.

- Whether you are coming into a company from the outside or being promoted from within, when you embark on a new leadership role you will develop expectations about all the things you are about to face: your priorities, the management team, the organizational culture, the quality of the company's products and services, its competitive positioning, its brand, its operating processes, and its decision making style. These expectations will help shape your agenda, guide your thinking, and articulate your definition of success in your first hundred days.
- Everyone impacted by your arrival will have a view, either explicit or subconscious, of what you should achieve in your early weeks and how you should go about doing it.
- If these different perspectives don't align, you will be setting off on a path marked by misunderstanding, tension, and all too often, failure.
- Many leadership transitions are made more turbulent than necessary because of misconstrued or misaligned expectations. The authors could not stress enough how crucial aligning expectations is to getting off to the right start. Making sure everyone agrees on the important issues and priorities is literally the foundation to building the first hundred days pyramid – and your future success.
- You have to work hard to set appropriate expectations for yourself and the people who work with you and link those expectations to the underlying reality of the business: the company's products, people, and process; and the way they all affect the financial situation.

#### TEN GUIDELINES FOR ALIGNING EXPECTATIONS

1. Ask the board or hiring manager, "What is the underlying objective of this appointment?" Make sure to find common ground about key goals.
2. When you introduce yourself to the management team for the first time, prepare to answer these questions: Who am I? What's my background? Why did I join? What do I hope to accomplish? How do I hope to work together?  
As you prepare your own introduction, be mindful that you will be laying the foundation for all your future exchanges and interactions. While you find a way to cover the five key questions, remember several guidelines to make the very best first impression.
  - a. You don't have to have all the answers
  - b. Address doubts and fears
  - c. Neutralize lingering resentments – ask a series of straightforward questions like - What's on your mind? What would you like the new CEO to be doing?
  - d. Don't disrespect your predecessor
3. Recognize that in that first meeting and other early gatherings, most employees will be listening through the lens of their own self-interest: "Is the new boss going to be good or bad for me?"
4. Use your early management team meetings to do more than meet and greet; this is the moment to establish what you expect of them, to communicate your management philosophy, and to set the tone for weeks to follow.
5. You do not have to have all the answers, on day one or throughout the first hundred days. Ask a lot of questions, too. When you are posed with a good question, make sure to pause, and when you don't have the answer, promise to get back to them, and then do so.
6. Be a receiver as much as a broadcaster-listen and learn. People genuinely like to be listened to

and heard.

7. Even if you are taking over in a crisis, take whatever time you can to listen, question, and consider before pronouncing.
8. Create an agenda for active listening. Engage in one-on-one meetings to pose key questions on the market, the company, the product, the financials, the people, and the management process. All of this will accelerate your diagnosis and help you solidify relationships with key constituents.

The authors came up with five strategic areas to stimulate your thinking about the right questions to ask:

- 1) The Market
  - 2) The product
  - 3) The finances
  - 4) The people
  - 5) The processes
9. Don't necessarily restrict your one-on-one meetings to company insiders. When possible and appropriate, reach out for customers, suppliers, analysts, and alumni for their views.
  10. Synthesize your learning and provide feedback to the organization and those with whom you've met, whether through memos, presentations, intranets, videos, and the like. By giving feedback to the organization, you help create a new shared reality and improve your chances for broad-based buy-in. This is the beginning (which is the subject of Chapter 1) of the process to develop your strategic agenda.

*Here are the essential elements of a new leader assimilation process:*

- When a new leader is hired, convene a meeting with that person's new team members during the first week. With the leader in the room, give all the team members the chance to introduce themselves and say a little bit about whom they are and what they do.
- Then, with the leader out of the room, have the team answer these questions:
  - What do we expect of this new person?
  - What do we want the new leader to know about us? What do we do well? Where do we need improvement?
  - What do we want to know about the new leader? What are our concerns about him or her?
  - What are the burning issues in our department?
  - What are the major obstacles the new leader will face?
- Put the answers on a flip chart making sure they are anonymous.
- After a break, reconvene the team with the leader and go over the items on the flip chart.
- This discussion is a great way for the entire team to discover with the leader some of the unspoken issues, misunderstandings, and disconnects. The anonymity of this exercise can bring to the surface more issues in one day than weeks of one-on-one meetings.
  
- The overall goal of aligning expectations is to create the conditions for positive change. Chief among those winning conditions are:
- Correct diagnosis of the change challenge

- Early establishment of a shared understanding of the change challenge among the leadership team – a sense of vision, success measures, and key programs and projects, and of the change process itself
- Multiple and ongoing opportunities to enrich this shared understanding through frequent progress reviews and action plan updates
- A sense of urgency, emphasizing speed when building an awareness and understanding of the need for change, and an insistence on early tangible deliverables
- A limited and focused agenda for change, identifying two, three or four major priorities, at a maximum, and driving them hard and fast
- A human flywheel of commitment
- Identifying the sources of resistance and dealing with them ruthlessly.
- In other words, assess your expectations. Measure them against reality, and then find the common ground that will create the conditions that nurture success.

### **Chapter Three - No One Can Do It Alone: Shaping Your Management Team**

- Each new manager whether promoted from the inside or recruited from the outside, inherits a legacy of an exiting team - their ambitions and aspirations, their hidden agendas, their possible mistrust and questionable loyalty, as well as their history of relations among them and between each of them and the rest of the organization. Sorting out these dynamics early on is never easy, but it is essential.
- Beyond assessing each person's competence and credibility, you need to evaluate the personal contribution and impact each person makes both on the team and on the rest of the organization.
- As you begin assessing the team, keep in mind the environment in which people have gotten used to operating and how it may have shaped their past decisions and actions.
- Do not automatically rule out people who disagree with your views. Someone who pushes back may be a creative thinker. His willingness to challenge the status quo – even if he comes across as more of a devil's advocate – can be a valuable asset to the group, forcing it to question assumptions and circumvent conventional wisdom.
- Evaluate the team as a whole. The composition of the team has to be able to match the company's constantly changing challenges. It should also reflect the values and standards that you want to prevail throughout the enterprise.
- While many believe that new leaders typically come in and clean house, the fact is that a clean sweep seldom happens right off the bat. First, it's not realistic: the right new people may not be available. Second, starting with a clean slate comes with its own set of difficulties, primarily that there will be a drawn-out transition before any traction is gained. Last, and most important, it ignores the opportunities created by establishing new expectations and instituting your new management style. The change in leadership and operating environment can cause people whose careers were previously unremarkable to bloom.
- Every manager has his or her own approach to making judgments about their legacy teams. One popular approach is to classify people into three categories: keepers, goners, and watchers. Watchers are people who could become major assets if they could address one or two deficiencies within a reasonable time, say twelve to eighteen months; it's worth telling them they are on probation and what they have to work on and by when.

- As important as making the tough people choices surely is, the decision about when and how to communicate these choices is equally important in the first hundred days of your leadership tenure, when all eyes are on you. Leadership changes present new managers with an opportunity to reexamine the status quo and obtain new insights into the old ways of doing business, and it's natural to want to hit the ground running. But unless the company is in a crisis, most experienced manager caution against making personnel moves right off the bat.
- Whom you choose and the process you use to make those choices send substantive signals about your standards, expectations, and management style. The signals are especially strong when you look outside the company for candidates.
- Thinking long and hard before making your first hiring decisions maximizes their chances of success. Firings are an opportunity to send a signal that's often stronger than those sent by hiring. Sometimes the question is about attitude more than ability.
- While it can make sense to bring in outsiders who can help change the culture and create a sense of urgency, experienced managers house the company's intellectual capital – the memory of the company, years of experience, and significant relationships with customers and their outside constituents – and they are certain to have deep understanding about who does what from within the trenches and how well they do it. The hard part is to balance the two.
- Whether you are coming in as CEO to rescue a fallen icon, or are the internal successor carefully groomed by your predecessor, or are a manager moving to take charge of a new department, the most important lesson to remember is that no one can do it alone.. Even entrepreneurs, who were born to be individualistic and go against the tide, need to heed the lesson. In their research, they found that the ability to forge a great management team is the single most common trait among those rare and special entrepreneurs who make the transition from startup manager to enduring greatness.

#### TEN GUIDELINES FOR SHAPING YOUR MANAGEMENT TEAM

1. Establishing a strong team is the best first step a manager can take toward executing vision and implementing his or her strategic agenda. Simply stated by Guru Jim Collins, "First who, then what." Taking steps to do so in your first hundred days is an essential objective of getting off to the right start in your new leadership position.
2. Avoid surrounding yourself with people of similar backgrounds. Focus on building a team of people with similar values and passions but *complementary* skills. An effective team is the greatest source of leverage for implementing your agenda. Your team should become an extension of your personal leadership, a force that projects your vision, values, objectives, and requirements. Before you even think about introducing a strategic agenda, you need to assess whether you have the people who can hone it, own it, and implement it.
3. Recognize that everyone is endowed with certain aptitudes and areas of natural strengths and weaknesses. Create a team in which everyone is playing to their greatest strength such that the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts.
4. Determine whether you have a strong enough management team to reach your aspirations. Gain a sense of each member of the team individually and how they contribute to the overall team dynamics. The composition of the team should match the company's challenges, enable you to do your best job, and also reflect the values and standards that you want to prevail throughout the enterprise.

5. To assess legacy managers, talk to them about their business and dive deep via operational reviews and Socratic questioning. If they are not in control and don't have command over their numbers, it may require a change.
6. Unless the company is in utter crisis, try to avoid making critical personnel moves immediately. "Think quickly, but act thoughtfully" to avoid the natural inclination to make key people decisions too quickly. Recognize that people have enormous capacity if you give them a chance, set clear expectations, and hold them accountable.
7. Call it partner or confidant, you need someone trustworthy, discreet, and possessed of superior judgment with whom to brainstorm, discuss sensitive personnel decisions, test waters, and gather opinions, especially in situations when people might not otherwise be completely honest and forthcoming.
8. Your early team meetings will set the tone for the meetings to follow; they should model the kind of team process you want to instill. The messages sent by your words, energy, and conduct will set the example for how topics are raised, worked on, and addressed. Articulate the objectives and desired outcomes, select important but unaddressed issues that have to be resolved, and encourage a frank and open conversation about them.
9. Recognize the power of your predecessor, whose presence is everywhere, whether or not that person is still in the company. While it may be tempting to push out or vilify him or her for the challenges you've inherited, doing so will likely create unnecessary ill will. Acknowledging and in some cases embracing your predecessor can sustain a sense of continuity within the organization and instill a sense of connectivity with employees' shared past.
10. As you forge your team, seek awareness of how each individual is motivated. Great leaders tailor their management styles to the recipient rather than approaching the top team from a one-size-fits all perspective.

#### **Chapter Four - Crafting Your Strategic Agenda**

- Finding the right balance between creating a compelling picture of where you plan to lead the organization and not becoming prematurely locked into a plan of action is one of the most important ways to make the most of your first hundred days. Think not about developing your strategic plan but about crafting your strategic agenda.
- One of the key talents of any leader is the ability to identify the truly critical issues and establish a short list of top priorities to keep people focused. It is important to make the complex simple.
- A well grounded view of what your organization stands for, its reason for being, is the foundation on which to build your strategic agenda.
- An identity crisis knocks a company's compass off kilter. It clouds its people's ability to make clear decisions, to choose which route to take, and to allocate the proper resources.
- Almost every leader will say that their lodestar is defining their business focus, which comes down to what you can do to build long-term value. If you want to get the company tracking toward long-term value, consider what conditions pertain that will help or hinder. The answers will shape your short-term agenda.
- So as your agenda coalesces, the critical questions are how to balance long-term planning with near-term demands, and when to turn a directional agenda into a more formalized strategic plan. In contrast to the direction-setting role of your long-term view, your short-term agenda is all about allocating your time, setting priorities, and letting the organization know exactly what

- you want to do right away.
- Short-term agendas have to be solidly rooted in the current reality. Assessing and understanding your organization's competitive positioning, capabilities, resources, and culture as they exist to day as an essential first step. This comes first from effective listening and also comes from carefully assessing the management team.
  - Make sure your short-term agenda is based on a foundation principle of under-promising and over-delivering.
  - Most likely you have more time than you think to develop your strategic agenda. While people expect a fresh perspective from a new leader, a new style, and probably a new energy level, most do not expect a wholesale new direction, at least early on.
  - Vision for vision's sake is counterproductive. Determining a course for the organization is a process that usually requires more time than most people foresee. It should be iterative, building off your strategic agenda, sharpening and clarifying the path based on experimentation and feedback.
  - Focus only on the things you can get your mind around at one time. Self-awareness and simplicity are the best guides to help you get your bearings and navigate the maelstrom.
  - It is not just your own bandwidth that has limits. Your team cannot absorb and adapt to too many changes at once, either. But when they are given a couple of concrete priorities wrapped around a clear and simple theme, they can move ahead with purpose, leaving room for individual imagination and experience to fill in the details.
  - A number of themes actually liberates rather than hamstrings an organization. A good theme is specific enough to provide focus but general enough for different parts of the organization to be able to adapt and interpret.
  - When creating your own short-term agenda, you should take the following issues into account. The short-term agenda should:
    - Link to your business assessment, so that people understand the rationale
    - Identify the core initiatives you intend to launch and explain why they are important
    - Address short-term issues while not detracting from the long-term direction for the organization
    - Be built as a joint effort with your team
    - Incorporate an explicit plan to address cultural issues and barriers to change.

#### TEN GUIDELINES FOR CRAFTING YOUR STRATEGIC AGENDA

1. You have more time than you think. You don't have to deliver a fully baked strategic plan on day one. . . or even in the first hundred days. Find the right balance between creating a compelling picture of where you want the organization to go and not becoming prematurely locked into a plan.
2. In developing your agenda, diagnose the company's (or department's) problems starting with the customer perspective and continuing with a grounded view of what the company stands for.
3. Strictly limit the number of themes and priorities so that they can be easily remembered by the organization.
4. When crafting your short-term agenda, always endeavor to under-promise and over-deliver.
5. Build the strategic agenda in a joint effort with your team versus in a silo.

6. Incorporate an explicit plan to address cultural issues and barriers to change.
7. Define the operating mechanism/process-the meetings, documents, and report formats to conduct the day-to-day business.
8. Secure some early wins; look for obvious flaws in the organization and fix them quickly to establish your credibility as a leader. Streamlining the operating process yields immediate benefits.
9. Expect pushback on your agenda, but rather than resist, coalesce that input in a positive way to maximize buy-in.
10. Don't be a perfectionist; your strategic agenda is by definition a work in progress. Use it to help you and the organization make decisions, see how they work, and make adjustments as necessary.

### **Chapter Five - Culture Is *the* Game: Starting to Transform the Corporate Culture**

- Lou Gerstner, CEO of IBM said "Culture isn't just one aspect of the game – it *is* the game. In the end, an organization is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value. Vision, strategy, marketing, financial management can set you on the right path and carry you for a while. But no enterprise – whether in business, education, health care, or any area of human endeavor – will succeed over the long haul if those elements aren't part of its DNA."
- One of the imperatives for any new leader is both understanding the organization's culture and determining whether change is needed. Most managers, however, receive little or no training in how to define an organization's culture let alone how to change it.

#### TEN GUIDELINES FOR TRANSFORMING THE CORPORATE CULTURE

1. As a new leader, work to understand the culture of the organization, diagnose how great a change is required, and take the right steps to start making the transformation.
2. Recognize that many new leaders fail because they cannot make headway against an intransigent culture, pushing too hard in the wrong ways, resulting in the proverbial "body rejecting the organ."
3. The way to start assessing a culture is to listen and observe. How do people really describe the place? Words are powerful clues-within most generalizations there lies an inner core of truth. Look for physical evidence-how people dress, how they communicate, how happy they look, and the kind of furniture and artwork that fill the offices.
4. Next, identify how "things work around here." Hunt for the knowledge networks, key influencers, decision-making protocols, and unwritten and unspoken conventions that are the nervous system of any organization.
5. Be sensitive to the fact that even having a change mandate from your board or boss may not be enough. Understand where other sources of power lie, and make sure you gain the support from that power source.
6. With a truly obstinate culture, you may need to make structural and people changes, but do so with the bought-in support of the key power center and also establish a concerted program to address the cultural legacies of the organization.
7. Create the conditions for cultural transformation: Adopt new measures of success; institute new operating processes; choose a new management team; set new expectations; identify change leaders; and lead by example.

8. Make your first moves count. In your early days, when people are most open to change, you can have a magnified impact by implementing carefully considered, concrete changes to long-established organizational and cultural structures.
9. Experiment with ways to convince employees to pledge their hearts and minds to change. Be aware of what is working and what is not and refine your approach.
10. Remember that too much change can break the culture-or more likely the change-maker. Pace yourself, continually assess the tolerance of the organization, get feedback, and adapt along the way.

## **Chapter Six - Answering to a Higher Authority: Establishing a Productive Working Relationship with Your Boss (or Board)**

### TEN GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BOSS OR BOARD

1. Understand the stated and unstated motivations of your boss or board. It's not just about meeting your objectives and building shareholder value; it's also about making them successful and protecting their reputations.
2. If you are a new CEO, initiate an "on-boarding" process with the board similar to what can be done with new managers. Sit down with each board member and interview them to determine what they are looking for; ask questions about their experience on the board, and the areas and disciplines they are most passionate about and expert in. Gather their input about how the board should ideally work in terms of the committee structure, what issues go where, and board mechanics such as meeting frequency and information flow.
3. If you are not a CEO, meet with your new boss and discuss how he or she really likes to work, establish priorities, and communicate. For example, is he more comfortable with formal written updates or more fluid progress reports? Does she prefer e-mail or voicemail?
4. Try to explicitly assess which members of the board or the department are strongest and most experienced-and on which issues; look at which directors are less engaged, and which are truly independent in their thinking.
5. Diagnose the culture of the board, and tailor your communication and management styles accordingly. Is the board formal and relatively distant or more informal and hands-on? As you increase your credibility with the board, migrate the culture to what you believe is most constructive and what you are most comfortable with.
6. If you are a CEO, develop one or more confidants on the board, whether a non-executive chairman or a presiding director. Look to them to serve as a sounding board to bounce ideas off of, to help set board agendas, and in the early days even to help manage the board process while you are getting up to speed on the business.
7. Establish your credibility by having a sound strategic agenda, being on top of the details of the business, listening and learning from your boss or board members, building a strong and committed management team, establishing a sound management process, and maintaining humility.
8. Establish an effective communication protocol with your boss or board, including formal information flows such as monthly management letters, as well as an informal communication protocol, such as phone calls before each meeting and informal meetings or meals with your

boss or individual directors.

9. Establish the discipline of regular feedback with your board or boss. In the case of the board, encourage an "executive session" as a part of each meeting, where the board discusses your performance in your absence, which can then be delivered in a synthesized and constructive way.
10. Involve the board members in the business so they become more knowledgeable and effective. Create forums for directors to interact with managers, visit customers and facilities, and dive deeply into key businesses. This will increase their ability to help assess and support strategy and perform their most important function, ensuring optimal succession.

### **Chapter Seven- Communication: The Key to Implementing Your Agenda**

- Communication skills are one of the most important attributes of effective leadership. Vision and strategy largely reside in a vacuum until they are applied. Consequently, your strategy agenda account for scarcely a thing until it is communicated to others and becomes operative for them.
- Communicating is much more than promulgating a message. It is just as much the gathering of disparate thoughts and information that will help shape the message. That's why interactive forms of communication have become so popular. Town hall meetings with an open microphone for questions and answers, brown bag lunches with smaller groups, and regular round tables all offer opportunities to have dialogue and talk about what's on people's minds. All of these are especially important during your first hundred days.
- Many leaders agree that employees should be told as much as possible about the state of the business, both its problems and its opportunities. If everyone looks at the business with the same facts, they are much more likely to pull in the same direction – operate with the same perspective – which is essential in making the business a success. This is especially true for employees, but it also applies to shareholders, the board of directors, the customers, and the suppliers.
- Communication is a central aspect of leadership and indeed all human activity. It has a magnified effect during your first hundred days. Take care to do it well and do it often, which requires both active listening, tailoring communication approaches both to your natural strengths and to the situation, and giving and getting direct feedback. It will help support your strategic and cultural agenda; it will also help you avoid many of the most common pitfalls that threaten new leaders as they try to get off to the right start.

### **TEN GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS**

1. Know your audience so you can tailor your message and your style to their readiness and to what *they* care about. How well *you* communicate is determined not by how well you say things but by how well you are *understood*.
2. Tell stories to establish an emotional connection to your point.
3. Effective communication is more than promulgating a message, it is a continuous give and take

in which ideas are explored, assimilated, and adapted before being locked in.

4. Use and reuse your communication in various forums and formats both to reinforce your message and to leverage your time.
5. Communicating is intimately intertwined with corporate culture; adapting an organization's language and shorthand-or introducing a new and agreed-upon language-will help transform that culture.
6. Know the communication settings that you are most comfortable in- be it stirring a large crowd to action or working in small groups-and play to your natural strengths.
7. In a crisis, get the information out as quickly as possible. Acknowledge the challenges of the situation to establish credibility, and then act as a "shock absorber" between the uncertainty of the situation and the employees' deep-seated desire for stability. There are two predominant schools of thought about communicating with the media during a crisis. One holds that you should not talk to the press, the other holds that you shouldn't hide from the press. When you talk to the press you have an opportunity to tell your story. Stories will be written regardless of what you do. Reporters have a job to do, and they will do it whether you like it or not. Treating them forthrightly, consistently, and with facts is considered best practice in crisis situations.
8. Be conscious of the signals you are sending. In the early days, every move you make is being closely watched, and communication, both explicit messages and implicit signals such as your manner of dress, your allocation of time, your mode of communication, and even your organizational structure, plays direct role in the cultural transformation.
9. Having all the answers is usually the wrong answer. People need to see you listening and assimilating their information. If you don't pause to ask questions and circle back when you have more data, you will lose credibility and trust.
10. Get direct input from the field; while this requires making a significant time investment, it will pay back multiple-fold in enhanced credibility, trust, and stakeholder engagement.

### **Resisting Temptation: Avoiding the Top Ten Traps for New Leaders**

- Many seeds of destruction for new leaders are sown in the first hundred days. The goal of this chapter is to identify and help you avoid the most common pitfalls that seduce and trip up new leaders so that you can not only establish the right foundation in the first hundred days, but build on the momentum in your next hundred days, all the way to achieving your ultimate goal: enduring great performance.
- The goal in a new leadership role is to be aware of the long-term problem areas and to be vigilant in preventing the seeds of destruction from getting planted in the fertile soil of the first hundred days.
- Sydney Finkelstein completed the largest research project ever on leadership failure for his ground breaking book, *Why Smart Executives Fail*. According to Fimklstein, true failure – “spectacular failure” – is the result of seven destructive behaviors that executives in failing companies exhibit:
  1. They see themselves and their companies as dominating thir competitive environemnets, even idf this view is out of step with reality.
  2. They identify so completely with the company that there is no clear boundary between their own self-image and interests and the company’s image and interests.
  3. They think they have all the answers, oftem impressing others with the speed and

- decisiveness with which they deal with significant issues.
4. They make sure that everyone is 100 percent behind them, ruthlessly eliminating anyone who disagrees with their views.
  5. They are the consummate company spokespersons, obsessed with managing the image of their company and themselves, often devoting the argest portion of their time to image management.
  6. They underestimate fundamental major obstacles, treating them instead as temporary impediments to be simply removed or circumvented.
  7. They stubbornly rely on what worked for them in the past, clinging to the strategies and tactics that made them successful in the first place.

#### THE TOP TEN TRAPS FOR NEW LEADERS

1. *Setting unrealistic expectations.*
  - Real pressures lead to this, such as the all-too-human need to impress your higher authority – the board or your boss- or the media, to demonstrate that you are in charge.
  - If you set stretch goals, be careful not to allow them to turn into expectations, because then they become the baseline against which you and the organization will be measured. Serious problems arise when these targets are not rooted in the underlying realities of the market and the company's position. In the end you will be judged by your results.
2. *Either making rash decisions or suffering from analysis paralysis.*
  - One dimension of your clout in the first hundred days is your permission to – more often the expectation that you will – take bold action. This is fine if you make the right moves but if you act just to act, to make premature pronouncements, you can set yourself back.
  - The flip side of acting too quickly is succumbing to analysis paralysis. The current environment certainly encourages prudence, but the major problems with overcautious behavior are that it eats up time and sets the example of risk aversion. By the time you find the perfect answer, the problem may have spiraled out of control or the opportunity may have been missed.
  - Leaders who settle issues too quickly limit their opportunity to grasp the ramifications. Trust your own judgment while soliciting input and feedback. That will maximize your chances of making the right decisions in the right time frame – neither rashly nor indecisively.
3. *Being a know-it-all.*
  - Another serious pitfall in the early days is believing that you have all the answers. The reality is that know-it-alls typically don't know what they don't know. By not recognizing or admitting that you don't have – and can't possibly have all the answers, you shut out new perspectives, as well as the possibility of getting the valuable information and input that may lead you to new discoveries and answers.
  - Being a know-it-all also invariably leads to quickly alienating your colleagues and

- employees.
- Jumping to conclusions can set you up for a vicious cycle of overpromising and underdelivering – the serious number one trap already described.
  - The key takeaway: Spend a large portion of your first hundred days listening rather than talking, learning rather than preaching, observing rather than jumping to conclusions, and inviting input rather than promulgating the gospel according to you.
4. *Failing to let go of your past identity.*
- Leaders who have been trained and have made their reputations by ascending the ranks of market-leading companies often cling to the mores of those institutions. Sometimes without realizing it, they simply talk about it too frequently. In so doing they disenfranchise their new organization or simply annoy people, undermining their ability to be effective in the first hundred days.
  - The failure to let go of a past identity manifests itself in a variety of ways, none of them positive. Some leaders bring all the accoutrements of their prior office to their new one. More important is how you take the experience of your prior company and tailor them to the unique circumstances, culture, language, and ways of doing business at your new one. A sure way to blow out of your new position is to inflexibly apply the processes and jargon of your previous organization now.
  - Another way to get stuck in the past is to get stuck in your predecessor's history.
  - Still another way is to accept a legacy financial plan or strategy without being able to get out of it quickly enough. Financial legacies are the most damaging. Don't get trapped into adopting someone else's budget. You need several months to assess assumptions, and budgets are products of assumptions thoughtfully drafted.
5. *Sporting "the Emperor's new clothes".*
- This can happen in any enterprise and to any leader. The fact is that the higher up you go in an organization, the less likely other people are to give you the straight scoop. Insulation at the top can prevent leaders from obtaining a clear reflection in the mirror. Worse, it prevents them from getting honest feedback.
  - If you don't get accurate feedback and honest advice, you will not be able to develop the best strategy.
6. *Stifling dissent.*
- A "benevolent leader" is as focused on the success of those around him as on their own success. The authors' research showed that 90 percent of extraordinary executives are benevolent leaders, compared with only four percent who put themselves first.
  - One of the greatest pitfalls of all is creating a work environment that stifles dissent. Executives who smother dissent cut themselves off from the chance to see and correct problems as they arise. They create an environment of fear and control that turns off the most talented employees and eventually drives them out the door.
7. *Succumbing to the Savior Syndrome.*

- Nowadays leaders are under so much pressure that they often fall prey to feeling that they are carrying the weight of the business on their shoulders. If these responsibilities are not kept in context, a new leader can wander into the morass of the Savior Syndrome. A savior believes that he or she is the embodiment of the institution and is personally responsible for its success. At the extreme, the line between their identity and the identity of the business blurs. And in some cases they come to believe that they are above the rules – or even laws – that bind everyone else. While this affliction is not likely to occur in the first hundred days, one of its early causes – believing it’s all about you – can lead to ruinous results.
  - If you operate as a lone wolf who refuses to ask for help or involve others, you will cut yourself off from valuable input and feedback. You will invariably burn out and you will only make your managers feel disenfranchised, alienated and impotent.
8. *Misreading the true sources of power.*
- One common attribute of most successful business leaders is a sensitivity to the unwritten rules of an organization. An essential aspect of this skill is the ability to accurately diagnose where the true source of power lies. Gauging the true source of power is critical in the early days, but it is also important to keep refreshing your assessments as you go forth.
9. *Picking the wrong battles.*
- One of the major traps for new leaders is to select the wrong priorities. New leaders tend to want to focus on the problem areas and figure out how to solve them. That’s commendable, but not if it comes at the expense of sustaining your success in existing areas of strength.
  - The same warning applies to people. It’s natural to concentrate on getting your bottom people up or out, but you must remember to focus on retaining, motivating, and developing your top people too.
  - A corollary is concentrating on the big things at the expense of the little ones, which may not be so little after all.
10. *“Dissing” your predecessor.*
- Under all circumstances, the authors’ advice is to be respectful and sensitive of their position and tenure, regardless of how you feel.

### **Next Step to Enduring Success-The Next Hundred Days**

- The first hundred days is just a start. After all, barely three months – just one quarter – is not much time to assess and make changes to your management team; to learn enough about the business, customer base, and competitive reality to articulate a strategic agenda; or to fully evaluate, much less change, the culture; let alone accomplish all these things.
- While there is no single playbook to follow that will generate success, there are common principles, strategies, and actions to follow that will enable a new leader to capitalize on the unique window of opportunity that makes up the first hundred days.
- For some leaders, the focus of their early days is all about maintaining momentum. For other leaders, the focus of the first hundred days is on setting standards and establishing

expectations. For still others, it's about having enough of a handle on the organization to be able to make commitments and boldly sign your name.

- It all comes down to the fact that there are so many possible things to focus on and so little time. The essence of leadership is finding a way to take all the strands of possible activity and be an integrator, prioritizer, synthesizer, direction-setter, motivator, and executor. Doing so well necessitates that you accurately assess your situations from all dimensions and tailor your plan accordingly.
- What you do will vary greatly depending on the situation. What you do during the first hundred days has the potential to establish your foundation as a true leader. Even if you have the time to take only the early steps of what you believe you will ultimately achieve, people will make judgments about whether they choose to follow you. This period is just a step.
- Every CEO, and every manager, is going to have many first hundred days, simply because of the world we now live in. Like fine steel, each tempering will make you stronger and more flexible and better able to handle the challenge of the first hundred days, and the hundred days after that.

**Recommendation:** For those of you beginning a new leadership position or starting a second term in an already established leadership position, this is an incredibly valuable book. Please remember that these summaries are meant to whet your appetite – you may want to buy the book.

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Contact Frumi at 949-729-1577  
[ceoconfidante@frumi.com](mailto:ceoconfidante@frumi.com)  
[www.frumi.com](http://www.frumi.com)  
[www.100mustreads.com](http://www.100mustreads.com)

**About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD**

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

To schedule a free ***Break From the Pack to Success*** consultation email [ceoconfidante@frumi.com](mailto:ceoconfidante@frumi.com) or call 949-729-1577