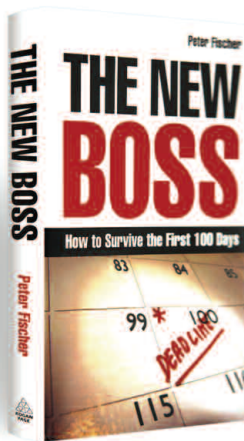




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by Peter Fischer

How to Survive the First 100 Days

THE NEW BOSS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Innovation, consistently high standards and speed are necessities in the competitive environment of today's business world. New executives are expected to move forward with their own agendas and make their mark within as little as 18 months. However, it is often forgotten that these agendas need the support of key people, and as a new manager, you will have to gain and retain this support in order to achieve success.

In the fast-paced business world, there is little room for error or experiment. In large organizations, the pressure for success is huge. The ability to become the new leader of a department or organization and transition seamlessly is what separates great leaders from good leaders. The smoothness with which this change happens is crucial to a manager's success, and it makes starting a new job even more of a challenge. The window of opportunity for achieving a seamless transition is the first 100 days — that's all the time a new manager typically has to ensure that he or she will be effective in the long run and that employees stay motivated.

There are seven building blocks to creating a successful leadership change. According to author Peter Fischer, these building blocks help leaders understand why they shouldn't just "jump in"; they show leaders the *why* and *how* of assessing critical situations, how to know what everyone expects and how to introduce change mindfully. Fischer also provides case studies that shed more light on the pressures and opportunities for new managers in specific and all-too-common circumstances such as dealing with being promoted and surviving a cumbersome predecessor.

This summary will give new leaders the necessary tools for making a smooth transition into their new role within the first 100 days, and will make them aware of some of the common pitfalls to be avoided.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to define and manage expectations — from your boss, your employees, your colleagues and yourself — well.
- How to prove yourself to disappointed rivals, hidden competitors and other skeptics.
- How to figure out what problems are important and which to tackle first.
- What common obstacles to avoid to ensure a successful transition.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE NEW BOSS

by Peter Fischer

The Dos and Don'ts of Successful Leadership

It is the rule rather than the exception for successful executives to move on to new responsibilities every two to three years. It is a further rule that as soon as a change in leadership is imminent, there are certain questions from all directions in the organization.

People who successfully assume new leadership roles also have a number of other competencies that set them apart from less successful counterparts. They are able to organize and communicate the many topics, issues and expectations as a clear, manageable concept.

Another characteristic that differentiates successful from less-than-successful executives is their stamina, particularly in a crisis. These characteristics are not innate; they are competencies acquired through practical experience. ■

PART I: BUILDING BLOCKS

Managing Expectations Proactively

Expectations are the surest thing about a change in leadership, which has an almost magical attraction and seems to bring every wish and hope for change to the surface. Sometimes they coalesce into expectations that are almost impossible to meet. Skill at handling expectations is thus one of the first competencies that a person must have in order to manage a transition successfully.

The expectations of superiors are a rather problematic matter for new managers. If anything at all is explained, the executives focus on the usual quantitative objectives, mentioning more sales, better variable gross margin and lower costs as important expectations. Preeminent expectations such as supporting a superior's own work or ensuring loyalty are rarely voiced. Many managers fail to ask about the simplest things, such as important milestones and the criteria for success in the new position.

The expectations of the employees seem much clearer

at first glance, and those that tend to be formulated clearly are those pertaining to the solution of old problems. Not until the newcomer patiently asks the employees what they hope their manager can do for them will they articulate the otherwise unstated expectations of personal job security and advancement.

In contrast, colleagues expect a newcomer to ask about their rules of the game, not to present new ideas too quickly and to avoid forging too close an alliance with the powers that be. They assume the newcomer will come to them, not the other way around.

Develop Expectations Actively

Expectations don't go away by being ignored. At best they turn into support for the changes to come; at worst they harbor the potential for resistance to the new executive's plans.

- Expectations are *desires, ideas, hopes, suggested solutions to problems and recommendations*.
- Expectations are *not* logical.
- Expectations stand for a basic attitude — waiting. "Let's see if he succeeds at it" is a sentence frequently heard in changes of leadership. Lurking behind it is the passivity of wait-and-see. That is why expectations have to be translated into tasks. *You therefore have to ask which expectations can be turned into shared tasks*. This will help to create a balance. ■

The author: Peter Fischer is an industrial psychologist and psychotherapist. He is the founder of fgi Fischer Group International. For more than 20 years, Fischer has supported senior executives in personal transitions, in taking over new assignments and in change processes.

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Developing Key Relationships

In many instances, relations with shareholders, superiors, employees, clients and colleagues decide the success of a change in leadership. Misunderstandings and lack of clarity in important relationships are liable to lead to tensions that are difficult, if not impossible, to compensate for in the difficult phase of assuming a new position.

On Dealing With the Disappointed Rivals and Hidden Competitors

Key relationships in a change of leadership are those that are important to taking over a position successfully. The problem is that it is usually easier to determine after the fact which relationships were key and which were not.

One primary player, of course, is the person who managed things while the position was vacant. It would be a mistake to give a hidden rival the cold shoulder during a change in leadership. He or she wants to be talked to and asked for advice.

At this point, people often make mistakes in dealing with a disappointed rival. They make promises, try to find soothing words and raise hopes for future prospects. Instead the new manager needs to approach the disappointed rival with understanding. It is the rival's job to work through his or her disappointment; your contribution lies in making that person a fair offer and thereby bridging the gap between the two of you.

The Predecessor — the Hidden Competition

The relationship to a predecessor is a special topic in the subject of leadership transition. The matter goes beyond relations between the newcomer and the predecessor to include those with the employees as well, because they will always compare the two bosses with each other. Don't make the mistake of accepting the invitation to complain about your predecessor's possible weaknesses, for then you will experience fully the double nature of the situation.

Things are usually easier if the former manager has been promoted. But if the employees feel that their former boss got a raw deal from top management, then your predecessor will continue to enjoy the loyalty of the employees and you will not have an easy time of it. Absolutely clear signals are needed so everyone recognizes the authority of the new manager.

Invitations Better Refused

Invitations are more or less overtly formulated recommendations that, if accepted by the newcomer, will lead to serious trouble. The moment you buy into the view-

point lurking behind these invitations, you meet the negative expectations. The risk is particularly high when a team has been working very effectively, perhaps even for a long period, without formal leadership.

Seasoned managers practice patience in such instances. They know that employees need some time to accept that they are no longer alone and must relinquish some of the authority they had previously exercised on their own. Meanwhile, they confine themselves to gathering information, making contacts and performing typical managerial duties.

If a team has been waiting for the newcomer's highly praised management talent, accepting the invitation to show it off is one of the biggest mistakes that the manager can make. Experience shows that such an approach cements the actors in their roles of the savior and the weak. ■

Constructively Analyzing the Initial Situation

A characteristic of leadership transitions is that the newcomer must not only come to grips with a host of issues and problems, but also make decisions without being thoroughly informed. There are five perspectives that have proved particularly useful for analyzing the types of situations that you, the new manager, will face at the outset of the transition process:

Perspective 1: the rules and assumptions guiding the people involved. Surprisingly, as any seasoned manager will confirm, the purportedly hard realities are easier and quicker to change than the so-called soft corporate culture. You, too, should therefore begin your analysis of the initial situation by exploring the rules, assumptions and values that underpin the way people think and work in your new department. Slowly but surely, an initial picture of the new organization forms.

Perspective 2: the issues occupying the organization. It is important not to regard the list of problems as anything other than a description of the situation from various perspectives. Gather as much information as possible.

Perspective 3: the facts that determine action. An interesting contradiction between the descriptions of the soft problems and the hard facts usually emerges after you gather information. It is not a matter of using the facts to wipe the complaints off the table. It is simply a matter of making the tension between soft and hard factors apparent.

Perspective 4: the available potential for innovation. If important changes are called for when you take over

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Constructively Analyzing the Initial Situation

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your new position, you must find out how open to innovation your company or area is. In doing so, however, you should not confine yourself to assessing the current situation. You should instead focus above all on discovering the existing potential.

Perspective 5: the resources on which you can build. Whether the company's strengths lie in the corporate culture, the products, the motivation of the employees or the strategies, you have to know the strengths on which you can build. This point is especially important if you are swamped with problems and difficulties. ■

Establishing a Set of Motivating Goals

What do employees look for in a change of leadership? If you ask employees what they expect of their new boss, you will hear vastly different answers. They look for information that will enable them to size up the kind of human being their new boss is and what personal interests he or she brings to the new position. They want to know whether it will be worth adapting to the new person.

But even when the unit has a reputation for having delivered solid work so far, one of the first questions that employees put to their new boss is whether he or she already has a plan and where their ideas will fit into it. If those changes divest the employees of authority or tasks of which they are especially proud, immediate and substantial resistance is likely.

On the other hand, employees also want, and need, a plan. A program capable of motivating employees to strive for ambitious goals must:

- Make clear that the new boss does not intend to impose some preconceived plan on the employees without recognizing the special features of their situation.
- Show the employees that it takes into account both their boss's legitimate interest in success and their own long-term interests.
- Be characterized by a balance between stability and change and demonstrate respect for significant achievements of the team.
- Be easy to communicate tangibly and inspiringly within the company and to the outside world.

Designing a Communicable Set of Goals

Most managers initiate changes near the end of the quarter, that is, around the end of the famous "first 100 days" in the job. Successful managers are able not only

Avoiding Pitfalls When Formulating Goals

Better results, lower costs, a better climate and more initiative are typical goals challenging managers today. If goals are to be met, they have to be spelled out, and certain pitfalls must be avoided.

Mistake No. 1: Working with general goals. The general goals have to be dissected into their component parts before you can realistically assess the effort it will mean to make them part of your strategy.

Mistake No. 2: Working on urgent problems rather than on the really important ones. New managers all too often fail to correctly assess the significance of the goals.

Mistake No. 3: Considering the goals in isolation. You will find that some goals grow out of others. Furthermore, by comparing goals on your list, you will see that some of them are marginal or less critical than others. Linear thinking is a trap in these situations.

to look at the multitude of issues facing them but to choose the right ones as well.

That certainly doesn't mean they do what the employees want. But they should examine desired goals for their effects on employees. Experience shows that new managers should always be sure to formulate at least one stability-related goal for every three goals related to change. It is the only way to generate a positive climate. ■

Fostering a Positive Climate for Change

An important factor is that managers who are successful at making transitions in leadership ask questions differently. Question by question, with great respect for what was done in the past, they systematically piece together a picture of the initial situation. These are called "reflective questions" because they get people to think.

Successful managers in new positions use a second group of questions as well. These are called "resourceful questions," meaning that they are questions intended to help systematically identify strengths. Therefore, ask your employees about the departmental projects they are proud of, how they managed to get through last year despite the tight personnel situation, what strengths they have honed in the last two years, what strengths they used to have and what would be needed to regain them.

What you should not do under any circumstances if you

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Fostering a Positive Climate for Change

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are interested in establishing a positive climate for change is ask about the cause of problems. It is considerably more helpful to assume that the employees have so far undertaken everything they could to solve the problems at hand.

Deal Positively With Skepticism

No matter how appreciative your interview strategies are, in many instances you will encounter a sizeable degree of skepticism among the employees. What should the newcomer do to succeed?

- **Meet the skepticism positively.** Welcome employee skepticism. It protects against exaggerated expectations and often contains a number of clues to possible obstacles that are liable to be overlooked.

- **Differentiate the skepticism.** A useful activity is to ask employees to write down on a card all the points that could block the successful implementation of a proposed strategy. What is found is that stated and unstated skepticism are not the same thing.

When people have to formulate their skepticism, many different points emerge. Also, when the skepticism is made visible to everyone in the room, a second effect occurs. The group almost always starts reacting against the skepticism and instead begins to experience seeds of optimism.

- **Beware of coming across as an optimistic prophet.** Dealing successfully with skepticism thus means keeping your own positive attitude in balance with respect for any well-founded skepticism found among employees.

Climate — the Basis of All Change

Every experienced manager knows that all the solid arguments for changes that are awaiting decisions will be of little use if the requisite climate does not exist among the employees. The image of the heroic new boss who acts quickly and assertively still exists in many companies, but these leadership strategies seldom work without the trust and support of the employees. Therefore, in your new position you will find it helpful to ask yourself these questions:

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

For additional information on examples of reflective, resourceful or future-oriented questions, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Initiating Changes Effectively

Initiating changes effectively means sending strong, clear signals for change. In signaling change, it is important to communicate at an objective as well as an emotional level, especially when time is of the essence. Employees must sense that matters are being taken seriously, and they need an indication of the many changes that will occur.

Remember, however, that the first steps need to be taken immediately after the strong signals for change are communicated. Otherwise, this experience will quickly fizzle out or degenerate into a one-off event like so many others.

Timing in Leadership Transition

Identifying the right time to initiate change is a key skill in handling a change in leadership successfully. First, you need to be sure that the organization is ready to undertake change. You should begin with such projects if: (1) discussions and meetings that you've held have prepared employees for change; (2) important key relationships that you need for a successful change process have at least begun to develop; and (3) a clear concept exists for the first steps. Experience has shown that this stage is reached after two to four months, depending on the magnitude of the tasks and the changes that are being considered.

The proverbial "100 days" is a well-known adage

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Some Obstacles to the Management of Change

The art of managers who are successful at leadership transition lies in keeping the change process going despite all the obstacles. Most problems in the management of change, however, are of your own making:

- One of the **first** and most frequent mistakes is starting without sufficient preparation.
- The **second** most common mistake made in the management of change is the formulation of vague goals.
- The **third** mistake is the adoption of an unrealistic timeline for change.
- The **fourth** mistake is made when change managers experience obstacles as disruptions or annoyances rather than as stimuli or indications of possible risks. This creates unnecessary problems for them.
- The **fifth** crucial mistake made in the course of managing change is using inadequate communication.

Initiating Changes Effectively

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expresses of a widely shared expectation: Employees want to know what is going to change. If you, as a new boss, exceed this time frame without apparent reason, you must be aware that the delay will entail a number of disadvantages:

- Expectations rise.
- You lose momentum.
- You increasingly lose the newcomer's license to challenge habits and traditions.
- You tend to become a part of the system yourself and lose your objective distance. ■

Using Symbols and Rituals

During a change in leadership, an important part of the new manager's challenge is to establish contact with a large number of employees in a relatively short period of time. After showing deference to the predecessor's symbols and rituals, however, the important thing is to make your own presence unmistakably clear. This message can be conveyed with words, of course, but better yet is to emphasize it with signs.

Symbolic management is the skillful and consistent combination of symbols and rituals into a convincing message. This is why it is important to ensure that what you say is consistent with how you behave. It is a symbolic expression of a different management style.

Changes of leadership entail a wide range of situations in which the language of symbols can be put to particularly effective use, as when the incoming manager wants to:

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

Rituals of Transition and Change

During a change in leadership, the question that inevitably occupies the employees is: What will change? In this phase even the slightest changes are noted and interpreted. Often it is not a matter of creating new symbols and rituals but rather only of questioning one's own habits and purposely changing them.

When you have answered the following questions,

you should go through them again and think about how you can support each of your statements.

1. How would I describe the ideal manager-employee relationship to strive for in this organization?
2. How do I think that decisions are best prepared for?
3. How should decisions be made around here?
4. How should people treat each other in this organization?
5. What do I believe are the most important values in the company?
6. What attitude do I expect from my employees?

It is helpful to think about how to support the desired changes by introducing new rituals, especially when you are asking your employees to let go of their deeply ingrained habits and attitudes at work. ■

PART II: CASE STUDIES

The Internal Promotion

Kristian is a mechanical engineer by training and has been a well-paid technical expert in a major trading company for 20 years. Rumors started to surface that a structural change was pending. In a departure from the old structure, the new strategy was to be linked to decentralization. The experts in the region were perplexed by this move, and the regional director encouraged them to apply for the newly created position. When none of them did, she approached Kristian and succeeded in persuading him that it would be logical for his career development to take over as head of his region.

The first difficulty arose when Kristian had to convey unwelcome news from headquarters. The technical experts were supposed to be equipped with BlackBerry devices so that they could be reached more easily and could answer questions 24/7. To Kristian's amazement, his colleagues refused. He was no longer "one of us" with the technical experts; he had become "one of them" because he had come to understand the arguments given by headquarters.

The Initial Situation

This example brings to light the situation in which managers often find themselves when they rise to a position of leadership from the ranks. The employees know their new boss, and for all the ambivalence they may experience upon his or her designation, they are usually happy that their colleague has received the posi-

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The Internal Promotion

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tion and not someone else. They tend to forget that a new role also entails new perspectives.

Typical Problems of Internal Promotions

New leaders who have been promoted internally grapple with four typical problems:

- Clear and visible assumption of the leadership role
- Delegation of tasks
- Close connection to the department
- Too much background knowledge.

What Can You Do?

- Speak with your former colleagues frankly about your new duties, and delegate tasks.
- If other employees in your department also applied for your new job, speak openly with them about the situation.
- Speak with your boss and people in other departments about issues they think need to be considered and about what is expected of you.
- State within a reasonable period of time what will remain the same as before and what will change.
- Prepare yourself for the possibility that your employees will be disappointed after an initial phase of going along with you. ■

Entrepreneur Wanted: The External Candidate

Agile, entrepreneurial self-starters and risk takers — these are the kind of people sought by companies today. Ricarda is precisely this kind of person. She therefore chose to go into production management at a consumer goods manufacturer. After four years, Ricarda was recruited to build a new line of business for a major tourism company.

The problem is her colleagues. They do not understand her business and tend to obstruct her. Because she is being advised to pay attention to corporate rules, she wonders whether this company really wants an entrepreneurial manager with drive and initiative.

The Initial Situation

Most companies justifiably pursue a human resource policy that gives preference to internal candidates for motivational reasons. They usually resort to outsiders when the necessary know-how is not available internally. The problem is that the employees feel threatened by the competition of external professionals and especially

by the fact that these outsiders often take high-profile positions in the company.

Typical Problems of the External Manager

The description of the initial situation suggests where the typical problems lie for people brought into a company from the outside:

- The discrepancy between what top management expects and what the employees experience
- Time pressure and the need to get to know the organization
- The lack of an internal network of relationships
- The pressure of the external manager's own expectations.

What Can You Do?

- Treat the performance of technical tasks and the building of a viable network of relationships as two equally important responsibilities from the very beginning.
- Ask your boss whom you need to include and keep informed as you build your part of the business.
- In all your discussions, remember the necessity of getting to know the organization. ■

The Big Predecessor and the Little Successor

David had been the director of customer service for 18 years. It is no easy job for his successor, a 48-year-old engineer. The employees respect his work, but he has always been overshadowed by David. Top management chose David's deputy to succeed him because they simply wanted things to keep on running as smoothly as they had in the past.

The Initial Situation

If the predecessor retires, and the successor steps up from within the department, the new boss will generally enjoy the acceptance of the employees and find the initial situation favorable on the whole. The problem, however, is that this successor still stands in the shadow of the predecessor, and it takes time to emerge from it.

Things look very different if the "great" predecessor has suddenly left the company. The situation is different yet again when the change in leadership is accompanied by major structural changes. The successor is expected to make up for lost time and implement changes quickly. In this kind of context, the manager coming from outside the company has a better chance than the in-house candidate.

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The Big Predecessor and the Little Successor

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Typical Problems of the Successor

The successor must understand and accept that the emotional ties between the employees and the predecessor will take a long time to dissolve and that criticism of the former manager's achievements will be hard to accept. Typical problems to handle are:

- Being forever branded as No. 2
- The expectations of the employees
- The position in the circle of colleagues
- The constant comparison to the predecessor
- The weaknesses of the great predecessor.

What Can You Do?

- Plan a clean and clear transition, and see to it that your predecessor is given an appropriate farewell.
- Do not accept the invitation to follow in your predecessor's footsteps.
- Be sure to establish yourself clearly in your new position.
- Show through your actions that you appreciate your predecessor's work, while also showing interest in the work that has led to success in the past.
- Treat criticism of your predecessor very carefully.
- The new leader — whether he or she served as the former second-in-command or came in from a different company — must formulate a clear and, above all, balanced set of goals. ■

The Assignment Abroad

Philip has been promoted to head of the marketing department in an Italian subsidiary. For Philip, this new task area is a meaningful step in his career development. However, Philip can sense that the Italian employees are asking themselves whether a U.S. manager really is able to run marketing campaigns in their country.

Almost all the suggestions and ideas from the United States are immediately rejected by his Italian colleagues. Two of his key team members have already received attractive offers from other companies and have indicated they are likely to change jobs soon.

The Initial Situation

Every expatriate needs to be aware that adaptation to the host country's conventions of communication is important for developing positive working relations. Many behaviors that seem simple to change are deeply anchored in national character, so it is very problematic

to expect people to adopt behaviors that contradict their traditions and values.

The most important aspects to pay attention to are communication style and conflict behavior, especially how colleagues interact with one another, how they deal with differences in status and how they share information.

Typical Problems for the Expatriate

Philip's case illustrates a few basic issues that can await an expatriate:

- Increased importance of the need to clarify the assignment
- Increased importance of the orientation phase and leadership transition rituals
- The response to cultural differences
- Increased importance of the situation to the family, spouse or partner.

What Can You Do?

- Thoroughly prepare for the new assignment, the country and the new culture.
- When you start the new position, devote the necessary attention not only to relationships but also to your cultural adaptation.
- Pay particular attention to the orientation phase.
- After two or three months, reflect on your experience. ■

For additional information about other leadership transition case studies, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Conclusion

The act of transitioning is never an easy one, especially when it is a transition into a new leadership position. Nonetheless, after mastering the seven building blocks, and assessing what specific type of transition you will make into your new role, things will gradually fall into place. Strive to know the ins and outs of your organization, whether you are an insider or outsider, and forge solid working relationships with your employees. That leaves you the next steps of setting and implementing your goals, all the while making an impact within the first 100 days as the new leader. ■



If you liked *The New Boss*, you'll also like:

1. **Know-How** by Ram Charan. Charan has developed an integrated, holistic approach to what executives and managers must do and be to become successful.
2. **True North** by Bill George with Peter Sims. Just as a compass points toward a magnetic field, your True North pulls you toward the purpose of your leadership.
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