

BEYOND SINK OR SWIM How to Make an Impact in your First 90 Days

Imagine you're in a new role, department or organization. The pressure is on, and the stress level is high to perform and add value quickly. What do you do? Many of us default to just figuring out the logistics of the organizational processes and then we start paddling for all we're worth-after all, time is money and we were hired or promoted to make that happen. We've all done it or witnessed it. We seek to make the best first impression possible, often overcompensating or over using our strengths. Within seconds we are judged by that impression, and it may haunt us for many months and possibly our entire time in that role. These first impressions greatly influence how we are treated and viewed. Once they are formed they remain stable and sadly if our floundering is too pronounced, we could be sunk. But it doesn't have to be that way. So we know a problem exists...what can we do about it?

The response to this known need is that many organizations provide solid systems and processes to orient new hires. HR professionals help individuals and leaders assimilate to the organization particularly when someone comes to us from outside the company. The research and evidence would indicate this level of support is not enough. We know there is a crucial window of opportunity to make or break a career in the first 90 days of a new hire or promotion. Michael Watkins states in his book "The First 90 Days", these first three months are essential to establishing credibility, building influential relationships, and finding early wins to ultimately ensure an immediate impact is made and a career with intention and purpose replace the image of the drowning new hire. The difference between sinking or swimming in the new role is to go beyond the orientation and become strategic in fully integrating into the role and organization.

Often we hear about leaders and individuals that "were not a fit", or left the organization before their one year anniversary. Those were the individuals that "sank", that couldn't keep their head above water because they jumped in without a metaphorical life jacket or an intentional plan to support their success. With the expense of the hiring process and the cost of turnover, there must be a way to integrate and engage our new hires, to achieve the return on investment within the first 90 days. Discovering a deliberate approach to setting yourself (and others) up for success that includes practical tips, tools and strategies to successfully transition into new and changing roles can be your competitive advantage. As an HR professional, selling this idea to your CEO and leaders should be on your objectives for the New Year. The benefits of a 90 day integration program include; improved productivity and effectiveness, increased retention and engagement, leadership development, improved and effective relationships. Is there a way HR professionals can contribute to the bottom line by

ensuring an effective program that will produce increased productivity? The answer is YES! The following three areas of focus can be your lifejacket and safeguard your return on investment while ensuring a win/win is achieved.

1. Understanding the context and situation you are entering.

Being respectful of the past and ensuring a full understanding of the dynamics of the company culture, relationships, business strategies and goals is critical to being effective in your first 90 days. Without a full appreciation of the context you are entering, you may inadvertently misjudge the water conditions and wind up sinking your career in that role. Don't be careless – be curious. Ask thoughtful questions; find out what has been done before and what is missing now so that you will be effective.

2. Building personal and leadership credibility and achieving quick wins.

Building credibility is a journey, not a destination. It is continuous throughout your role and career. One way to help build your credibility is through achieving the quick wins and successes through small milestones of a bigger project. Engage in interviews and employee surveys to discover the pain point in the organization that will lead you to the quick win and contribute to problem solving in the organization.

Kouzes and Posner's book "The Leadership Challenge" supports the notion that credibility is the foundation of leadership. Being able to listen, observe and act will support you in finding what and where opportunities to influence may lie. The top four desirable leader traits of Honest, Forward-looking, Inspiring and Competent have not changed since the first research done in 1980 (over 30 years ago). Paying attention to those traits and leveraging your strengths will support you in building credibility and achieving the quick wins.

3. Developing key relationships for your success.

Engaging, assessing and building your team to ensure that your goals and the goals of the team are aligned with the organization's goals are critical. As the experts such as Jim Collins in "Good to Great", and Lynne Taylor in "Choices" have shown us, getting the right people in the right roles so that they are playing to their strengths and contributing to the team will support your success in your role.

Taking ownership of your success and ensuring you are aligned and engaged with your boss will certainly contribute to your immediate impact. Clarify mutual

expectations with your boss early on and frequently checking in, negotiating timelines and resources for your success will indicate that you have a well thought out plan to contribute in your role in the organization.

Identify your key stakeholders, influencers, knowledge keepers, supporters and opponents and invest in building relationship capital with the people you need to help you become successful.

Building your 30-60-90 day learning plan that addresses these areas will be beneficial to your intentional plan for success. Being deliberate about what and how you are going to learn and implementing a plan for success will be the difference between sinking and swimming the challenging waters of a new role or organization. Manage your balance and engage with a certified coach to help support you in your transition to attain your best and highest level of contribution and impact.

For more information on how to build a successful integration program that goes beyond sink or swim and actually facilitates making an impact in 90 days, please visit www.StrategicTalent.ca or www.lead-on.ca for the latest workshop that will teach you the practical tools and strategies for your organization to set itself apart in how you integrate talent and ensure engagement and retention of the top talent you took the time to hire and on-board.

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