

Brightlights

WE BUILD GREAT LEADERSHIP TEAMS



Finding Success
in Your First
120 Days

Finding Success in Your First 120 Days

Contents

2 INTRODUCTION

MANAGING SIDEWAYS (YOURSELF)

- 3 Where should you look for information?
- 4 Different circumstances demand different solutions

MANAGING DOWN (YOUR PEOPLE)

- 5 Create a 'blueprint' of your leadership style
- 6 Plan your first discussions with your team carefully
- 7 How should you assess your team?

MANAGING UP (YOUR BOSS)

- 8 Six key conversations to have with your boss
- 9 Building a productive relationship with your boss

CONCLUSION

- 10 Take stock of your own strengths and weaknesses

Introduction

If you've ever been thrown into a management role without any training, then welcome to the club.

I was 26 and doing very well as a sales person with a computer financing firm.

The President of the company called me in and said, "We're looking to open an office in Montreal and we'd like you to start it up for us."

Just like that. No training, no checklists, and no special knowledge of that marketplace... just a pat on the back and off I went!

Looking back, I don't remember this experience in any negative way. I liked the company, I totally admired the CEO, I had grown up in Montreal so I had some French and a deep knowledge of the city (at least the part that I had grown up in). But that was about all I had going for me. Good thing I was too young, too ambitious and too naive to be terrified.

Sadly, this is still how the vast majority of managers get thrown into their new roles. In 25 years of working with executive teams, I've seen this story play out over and over again. Unprepared managers are left on their own to sink or swim, thus putting their careers, their team members' careers, and sometimes their entire organization on the line.

That's why I've put together this primer to help executives in new roles succeed. Whether this is your first leadership role, or you're an experienced manager taking on a new challenge, I hope these insights and perspectives help you thrive.

Whichever your circumstance, enjoy the ride and remember: do what you say you're going to do, when you said you'd do it...and treat others the same way you'd want to be treated! That will get you 80% of the way.

Your friend,



Mike Fox
CEO, Brightlights



Where should you look for information?

There will be all sorts of hard data provided to you. This will include financial reports, strategic and operating plans, etc. But to really understand the soft culture within the organization you need to turn to the people under you, and around you, to understand the organization's overall strategy, culture and politics.

Here's who you should be turning to for this information:

Customers

- How do your customers perceive your organization?
- Would they recommend your company to others?
Why, or why not?
- How is your customer service perceived by your clients?
- How do you rank against your competition?

Suppliers

- How are they treated?
- How loyal are they to you?
- Have they grown too complacent in terms of best pricing and service?

Distributors

- How effective are your channel partners and how can they be improved? Is the 80 /20 rule operating? Is 80% of your business coming from 20% of your channel?
- Do you need a weed and feed strategy?
- What do they say about your product and how does it compare to others that they carry?

Outside analysts

- Where does your company sit relative to your competition?
- What do they think of the overall health of your marketplace?

Your R&D and operations group

- What are their insights on your processes?
- What do they think of your relationships with key constituents?
- How do they feel they are treated by the rest of the organization?

Sales and purchasing

- What do they think of their interactions with customers, distributors and suppliers?
- What are their thoughts on trends and imminent changes in the market?

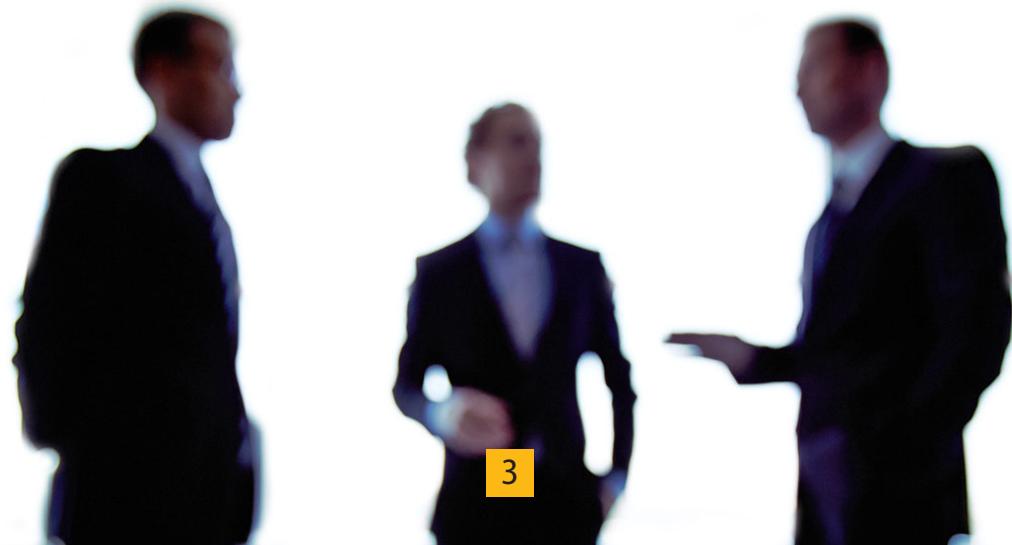
Staff

- What do the heads of finance, legal and HR think about your company and the marketplace?

Long time employees

- These people have been around the organization a long time. They can provide insights on the company's mythology, trials and challenges etc. that are at the roots of its culture and politics.

It typically takes eight months for a newly hired employee to reach full productivity. —HBR.org





Different circumstances demand different solutions

Each scenario you encounter will have its own unique set of characteristics and problems. It's important to understand what you're up against. Here are some of the challenges and opportunities you may have to deal with during your first 120 days.

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<p>A start-up You've been charged with pulling together financing, resources and infrastructure for something new.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You're starting from scratch without a clear precedent or roadmap 2. It's all on you to make sense of this new opportunity 3. You're in a world of limited resources, and you need to rationalize where you'll spend your time and energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You're working with a blank slate 2. Employees are hired by you and beholden to you. You start with no pre-existing biases, politics or dynamics to navigate 3. Your people are energized by the vision of what can be and by a 'green field' business opportunity
<p>A turnaround You're tasked with saving or turning around an existing business which is floundering.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your people need to be re-energized and re-focused on small wins 2. Time and money pressures may be ratcheted up 3. When cuts are pending, the people you need the most are the ones that are likely to jump first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You've got everyone's attention and they're all in survival mode 2. Small wins will bring big emotional results 3. You have the chance to re-negotiate with vendors who want you to survive
<p>Acceleration You're building a business with some wind in its sails.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keeping people motivated with new management in place and working to keep politics out of the workplace 2. Optimizing systems and opportunities wherever possible 3. You're integrating new employees into an already defined environment/culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People get excited about the potential for growth. This is positive energy that can be harnessed 2. Employees will stretch themselves if they see attainable goals ahead of them
<p>Realigning a listing ship You've got the job of re-energizing a previously successful business or division that is facing new challenges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You need to convince your people that change is required 2. Changes are needed but they should probably be surgical rather wholesale 3. Those that aren't on board with your plan will probably try to sabotage your success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are significant pockets of success and strength in the organization 2. Those that are on board know what success looks and feels like and will want to taste it again
<p>Continuing a successful trajectory You're arriving on the heels of a successful predecessor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You're in the shadow of the former leader 2. You need to establish your credibility before starting on new initiatives 3. You need to figure out what success looks like under your watch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There's a strong team already in place 2. People know what success looks like 3. A pipeline may already be in place

Create a 'blueprint' of your leadership style

If you're new to management, the challenges you face are dramatically different than someone coming in with loads of experience in the same (or another) company.

Regardless, your role is to let your people know what's important to you and what they can expect.

The following blueprint is a great template to use in which to describe yourself, your own strengths and weaknesses and what you expect of your people. It allows you to open your staff up to your idiosyncrasies and expectations, and will enable the relationship to build on an open and positive foundation.

A BLUEPRINT TO HOW I WORK

Mike Fox

Brightlights

Here's a 'quick start' guide for my team to know how to work most effectively with me

MY EXPECTATIONS <i>Taking responsibility is key for me. When you say you're going to do something, make sure it gets done. If not, let me know in advance and be able to explain why.</i>	MY VALUES <i>I value honesty, integrity, and respect. Always do the 'right thing' by your co-workers and your clients.</i>	MY PROCESSES e.g. HANDLING CONFLICT <i>I don't beat around the bush and play politics and mind games. You'll get lots of accolades and hugs and will know when there's a problem.</i>
MY STRENGTHS <i>I'm a creative thinker and always trying to come up with innovative ways to get work done. I'm a hard worker and totally transparent in my interactions. I'm honorable and respectful of individuals.</i>	MY WEAKNESSES <i>I can sometimes be 'short' with people and sometimes interrupt conversations. I can be argumentative if I feel strongly about a situation, but I cool down quickly.</i>	MY IDIOSYNCRASIES <i>I have wide ranging interests and sometimes ideas come out of left field. I have a bit of ADD so I'm often looking for new ways of doing things, rather than taking what works and continually doing the basics.</i>

Go to the Brightlights Resources page for your own blueprint to fill out:

<http://brightlightsinc.com/resources/>

60% of companies fail to set milestones for new hires. —O.C. Tanner

Plan your first discussions with your team carefully

When having initial conversations with your new team or new peers,

approach it as a fact-finding mission and try and maintain the same script throughout. Do this one-on-one with all your team members. You might start with brief opening remarks about your background, yourself and your approach. Then ask the person that you're speaking with the same. Find out about their background, their family and their interests. You need to demonstrate and create the conditions of openness, respect, and honesty by showing them who you are.

Ask them each the same six questions:

1. What are the biggest challenges the organization is facing now and in the near future?
2. Why are we facing these challenges?
3. What are the most promising unexploited opportunities for growth?
4. What would need to happen for us to exploit these opportunities?
5. How will you contribute to the company's success?
6. If you were me, what would you focus attention on?

How they answer is almost as important as what they answer:

- Notice who takes responsibility versus those who point fingers.
- Observe who answers directly and who is evasive or goes off on tangents.
- Observe who has a broader view and understanding of the business versus being stuck in their own smaller world.

Once you've distilled this information into a set of observations and questions, convene your direct reports as a group and feed them back your impressions while inviting discussion.

You'll learn about both substance and team dynamics and will also quickly demonstrate how quickly you have begun to identify key issues.

Try and uncover what motivates members of your team.

Everyone has different 'drivers' or motivators which push them to greater performance. There's nothing more useful than uncovering these hot buttons, and using them to get the most from your people. Here are some questions to ask about what gets people up in the morning and what shuts them down.

To uncover what gives people strength, ask them:

- What was the best day at work you've had in the last three months?
- What were you doing?
- Why did you enjoy it so much?

To uncover what weakens your people, ask them:

- What was your worst day at work in the last three months?
- What were you doing?
- Why did it grate on you so much?

To uncover what management style motivates people, ask them:

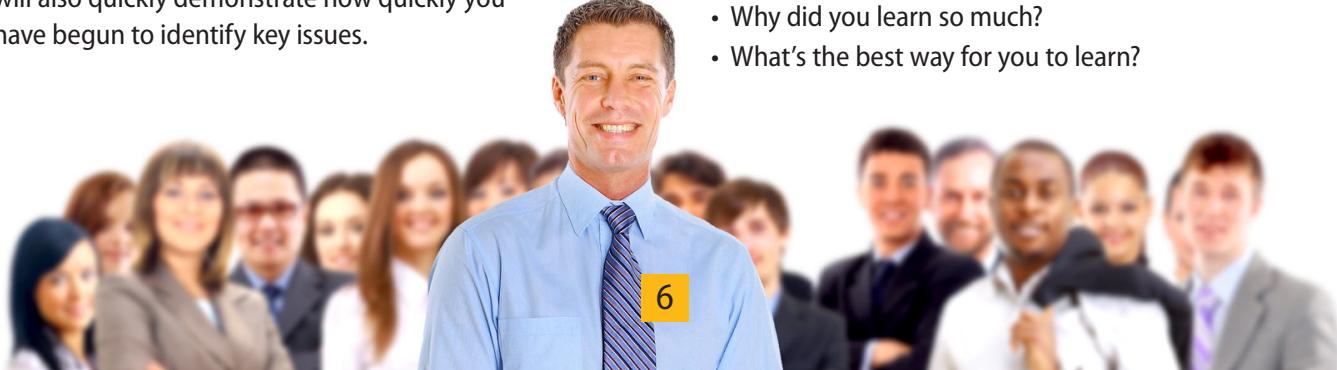
- What was the best relationship with a manager you've ever had?
- What made it work so well?

To uncover how to provide positive reinforcement for your people, ask them:

- What was the best praise or recognition you've ever received?
- What made it so good?

To try and understand people's unique style of learning, ask them:

- When in your career do you think you were learning the most?
- Why did you learn so much?
- What's the best way for you to learn?



How should you assess your team?

After your initial interviews,

you'll begin to form impressions of the various team members as you meet them and digest results and performance reviews. Make sure you take a step back and consider the following six criteria as part of the evaluation:

1. Competence

Do they have the technical competence and experience to do the job properly?

2. Judgment

Will they exercise good judgement, especially under pressure?

3. Energy

Do they bring positive energy to their role?

4. Focus

Can they set priorities and stick to them?

5. Relationships

Do they get along with others and support the group's decisions, or are they hard to get along with?

6. Trust

Can you trust this person to keep their word and follow through on commitments?

Once you've had a chance to do your evaluations, you should have reasonable idea of next steps.

Realistically this will be after your first month in the role.

By the end of your first 120 days,

you should be able to categorize every team member into one of these buckets:

1. Keep them in the same position

They're doing reasonably well in their roles

2. Keep and develop the individual

The individual needs development and you are willing to invest the time and the energy to grow them.

3. Move them to another position

They're a strong performer but not in a position that makes the most of their skills or personal qualities.

4. Replace them (but a low priority)

They should be replaced but it's not urgent.

5. Replace them (a high priority)

They should be replaced as soon as possible.

6. Observe for a while

The individual is still a question mark and more information or observation is needed to make a decision.

You should be reasonably confident about these decisions but they're not set in stone. If there continue to be uncertainties, put them in the observation group for a while.

The organizational costs of employee turnover are estimated to range between 100% and 300% of the replaced employee's salary. —HBR.org



Six key conversations to have with your boss

You're going to need lots of information as you get started in your new role. Here are some high level issues to consider and some important conversations for your first few months.

1. What's the real status of the business?

1. Is it a turnaround, a start-up, a realignment etc.? (see page 4).
2. How did the company get to this point?
3. What is your boss's perspective on things? How your boss sees the situation may not mesh with your thoughts, but it's useful to have the conversation to understand how they see the situation

2. What are expectations of me?

1. What are the short-term, mid-term and long range goals?
2. What does success versus over-achieving look like?
3. What are the obstacles in your way to meeting your goals?
4. What stopped the previous leader from meeting expectations?
5. Remember that it's better to under promise and over-deliver.

3. What resources are available to me?

1. What resources do you need to be successful? This includes budgets, mandates, team members and executive commitment?
2. What do you need your boss to do to make this happen?
3. Who else should be involved?
Do you need the CFO or CHRO onside?

4. How can I and my boss most effectively interact?

1. What kind of communication do they prefer, and how often do they want to hear from you?
2. What kind of decisions do they want to be consulted on and when can you make the call on your own?
3. How do your styles differ and what are the implications?

5. What are the quick wins to focus on?

1. Key customers to be saved
2. Employee issues solved
3. A process improved
4. Communications which can be enhanced
5. Better reporting
6. High profile wins

6. What about my own personal development?

Once you've been at the role for a few months you can begin to discuss how you're doing and what your developmental priorities should be? What are you doing well and what can you do to improve? Are there projects or assignments which you could undertake without sacrificing your focus?



Building a productive relationship with your boss

This is a new responsibility, a new environment, new people and a new boss. It's a potent combination of uncertainty and one that can go either way, depending on how you handle it. Just recognize your boss has all sorts of pressures on them, many of which you don't understand... so try to be understanding.

Here's what you should focus on:

- 1. Take things off his/her desk, don't put them on.** Leaders are hired to solve problems, not create them. The success of your first 120 days will be measured, in part, by how much less work or stress your boss has since you started.
- 2. Don't expect your boss to change.** You and your boss may have different communication styles, different ways to motivate, and different management styles, but it's up to you to adapt to their style. You need to be showing the flexibility.
- 3. Make sure there are no surprises.** For new executives, it's tempting to try to solve things on your own before your boss even knows there's a problem. A simple heads-up when you're trying to fix something means no surprises later, especially if you can't solve the issue.
- 4. Come forward with solutions to go with the problems.** Everyone can find things to complain about. Providing some thought as to how to address the problems you face is where you can stand out. You don't have to come up with the exact solution, but by showing you've thought things through and have plans on how to begin to address the issues, you're showing initiative and a 'can-do' attitude.
- 5. Don't waste your one-on-ones.** You're both busy people and one-on-one time is too precious to waste on status updates and to do lists. Take the time to prepare so you can use that time to tackle important issues, ask difficult questions and propose new ways of thinking. You can always email a status report.
- 6. Know your facts.** By the end of your first 120 days you should be fully conversant in the facts and figures in your area. Make sure you and your boss are completely aligned on your KPIs (key performance indicators) and other key metrics. Make sure you know your numbers all the time.

7. Know when and how to communicate with your boss.

Does your supervisor like one sentence e-mails or do they prefer a detailed account of what's going on? Does she want to receive an outline of where your project stands, or do you need to provide all of the details?

8. Aim for early wins in areas that are important to your boss.

Whatever your own priorities, figure out what your boss cares about most. What are his priorities and goals and how do your actions fit into the picture. Once you figure that out, aim for early wins in that area. They'll feel ownership of your success along with you.

9. Ask for feedback.

Everyone in the executive suite is busy, and it's easy to find yourself months into your new job having had almost no feedback on how you're doing. Don't count on your boss to be proactive; book time in their calendar for a check-in. Ask specifically how they think you're doing against both their expectations and the company's objectives. Ask for coaching, ask for advice, and ask for the information you need to succeed—don't limit feedback to your boss. Ask their peers how they think you're doing and ask your team for feedback too. Remember, it's your learning curve and you need to own it.

10. Let your boss know how you're spending your efforts.

If your performance doesn't match your manager's expectations, create a pie chart of how you spent time the past week. A quick look will be enough to identify if your priorities are misaligned or if you are not spending enough time on specific tasks that are higher priorities.



Conclusion

Take stock of your own strengths and weaknesses

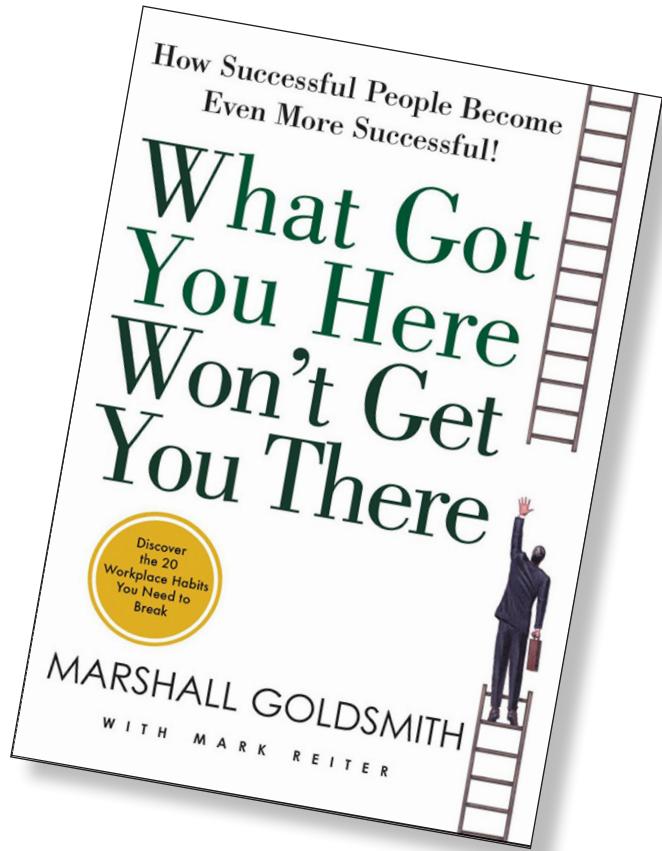
The statistics around new managers' failure rates are truly daunting... You're in a new role and in a new environment. Although diligence and a fresh and open attitude will go a long way to your future success, so will a moment of self-reflection.

Marshall Goldsmith, a world famous executive coach, wrote a seminal book called *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. In it he describes the 20 habits of leadership that hold us back from getting where we want to be:

1. Wanting to win too much
2. Trying to add too much value
3. Passing judgement on others
4. Making destructive comments
5. Starting with "no", "but" or "however" all the time
6. Telling the world how smart you are
7. Speaking when you're angry
8. Negativity or "let me explain why that won't work"
9. Withholding information
10. Failing to give proper recognition
11. Claiming credit you don't deserve
12. Making excuses
13. Clinging to the past
14. Playing favourites
15. Refusing to express regret
16. Being a lousy listener
17. Failing to express gratitude
18. Punishing the messenger
19. Passing the buck
20. An excessive need to prove how great you are

46% of new hires fail within 18 months. —Leadership IQ

Insights for this whitepaper come from a variety of sources including Leadershipiq.com, The First 90 Days by Michael Watkins and HBR.org.



Your aim is not to turn yourself into a pretzel to become the perfect you. Your goal is to take your single one or two worst habits out of the equation—the ones that are really holding you back. Goldsmith's seven-step process to find your way through your challenging traits include:

1. A 360 degree feedback on your behaviour as a leader (there are a list of 72 questions in the appendix)
2. Confronting the reality of your flaws
3. Apologizing to those you've impacted
4. Advertising your efforts to improve
5. Following up religiously on those efforts
6. Listening without prejudice
7. Showing gratitude

I highly recommend this book. It will help you on your journey and will teach you a ton about yourself.

This is your opportunity to shine.

Carpe diem!



Brightlights

WE BUILD GREAT LEADERSHIP TEAMS

Mike Fox

416.406.1777

mfox@brightlightsinc.com

www.brightlightsinc.com

Because leadership matters!

Brightlights delivers based on 25 years of experience, and a unique approach, to help technology companies discover, attract and hire top-notch leadership talent.

Our Peoplescope Framework ensures that companies like yours have the most effective and successful hiring practices possible.

For a free consultation on how we can help meet your hiring needs, give Mike a call.