

The Resilient CEO's

First 100 Days Playbook

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If you are a CEO, expect to be one, or find yourself the top officer by default, Understand your plans are only part of a larger picture. And, that picture includes many surprises. The challenges presented or incurred require you to design a vision, a playbook for a transformational transition.

It takes work to be an effective CEO and a complete shift in mindset to sustain the position. So, we have programmed a playbook to facilitate your first 100 days as CEO - and do it with resilience and a great deal of agility.

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What is the **problem**?

24/7 Wall St reported 663 CEOs left their positions in the first six months of 2020 (441 in the first quarter plus 222 in the second). Given the volatility stirring all aspects of 2020, it may not be the benchmark year; nonetheless, CEO tenure risks continue.

Chief Executives have left for any number of reasons. Since 2018, an increasing number have left following ethical breaches and related scandals. Many just do not feel up to contemporary challenges.

The evidence suggests organizations may be selecting, promoting, recruiting, and placing the wrong CEOs. One database showed “virtually all CEO candidates had made material mistakes in the past, and 45% of them had at least one major career blowup that ended a job or was extremely

costly to the business” (Botelho, Powell, & Wang, 2007). The common thread upon these appointments was their extroverted personalities.

The cost of recruiting, processing, and on-boarding a new CEO, nears 35% of the CEO’s entire first year’s compensation. So, if you do the math on a \$500,000 position, the expense is apparent. Recruiting CEOs from the outside is so expensive it encourages organizations to promote from within the company. Nonetheless, “what makes candidates look good to boards has little connection to what makes them succeed in the role” (Botelho, Powell, & Wang, 2007).

CEOs and hiring sources must be fully aligned on the expectations for the first 100 days to launch a sustainable transformation with a great deal of resilience to protect against any economic or historical catastrophe.

What is the First 100 Days playbook?

This playbook includes a collection of detailed winning strategies and tactics. In sports, a playbook illustrates options to score and various defenses against the opponent's scoring tactics. Too many people enter the CEO office without such plans. Must you implement the First 100 Days only on the First 100 Days? No. This playbook may start on any day, preferably right away. Even if it is your 1000th day, there is no time like the present to begin. In today's COVID impacted economy, I coach all of my CEO clients to create their own First 100 Days playbook approach to be prepared for the new post-COVID workplace. Because everything has changed and resilience and agility has replaced strict processes.

Appointment or promotion to the CEO office often realizes dreams. It completes the candidate's ambition and delivers the prestige and benefits of the position. Without discounting these emotional rewards, this view is limiting because it lacks a future-forward vision.

Any candidate for succession or hiring for CEO accountability needs a playbook with strategic solutions for seen and unseen challenges.

The first 100 days are arguably the most important of any CEO's tenure. The Board of Directors and investors expect the CEO to drive revenue for the business, focus on growth, and achieve its strategic outcomes. It is because of these expectations that the first 100 days can and will occur at any time. They can begin during a turnaround, a pivot, a restructure, or a realignment of culture and objectives.

A CEO must assess and align the current executive team with all stakeholder goals. The CEO's job is to cut through the noise, discern productivity from disruptive voices, and deliver and ensure customer outcomes. For example, Springfield Clinic of Illinois chose Ray Williams as CEO, but Ray would join an environment that had changed five Executive Team positions simultaneously. It can be hard to navigate such waters.

CEOs are tasked with creating a new organization, turning one around, or sustaining a successful legacy. Regardless of their mandate, CEOs must come to the office to understand what opportunity the position affords for vision implementation, creating and launching a strategy development process, and championing a resilient results-driven company. So, their best accountability practice takes the form of a playbook.

What is the challenge?

CEOs responsibilities span both internal and external boundary management. They lead both inside and outside the company. All decisions begin and end with the CEO, who are responsible and accountable for the performance of all functions and deliverables. They must serve client customers as well as their boards and investors. They must communicate and model their take on the corporate vision and manage a team that aligns outcomes.

Some of the most traditional elements of evaluating the success of the CEO have both internal and external implications to stakeholders. At the end of the first year, a CEO will be judged on 10 key elements. The playbook seeks to set the CEO up for success to achieve these 10 objectives.

1. Revenue, Cash Flow, and CAGR
2. Recruitment and Retention of Employees
3. Product/Service Sustainability and Development
4. Logistics, Maintenance, and Facilities
5. Financial Achievements including audits, length of legal cases, P&L, budget, etc.
6. Strategic Planning Execution and Measurement
7. Clarity of Vision and Mission Statement
8. Strength of Culture and Associated Employee Performance
9. Development and sustainability of collaborative working relationships with external stakeholders and collaborators.
10. Customer Retention and quality of customer service

This playbook addresses the challenges that make a more successful CEO who is best able to achieve the 10 areas most effectively. It promises to help CEOs hit the ground running, lean into decisions, and own their future.

This playbook will address the following necessary elements to successfully achieve the 10 evaluation criteria.

- Develop their own transformation team to drive their strategic vision into the front lines.
- Become a thought-leader providing inspiration and motivation for all stakeholders.
- Develop a sponsor-leadership style to empower and enable leadership capabilities across all functions and responsibilities.
- Encourage constructive listening and creative co-collaboration.
- Emphasize evidence and results-based thinking and decision making.
- Develop a strong Senior Executive Team with a sense of urgency and focus on growth.
- Reconstruct relationships with the Board members emphasizing and aligning their group and individual behaviors with corporate mission and vision.
- Immerse CEO behavior in employee and customer cultures.

Of course, they must reach these goals in a world of systems, some encouraging and others destructive. In 2020, these forces have favored some CEOs and broken others. This *CEO 100 Day Playbook* calendars the needs, behaviors, and success practices for new CEOs.

The rest of this playbook will assume it's now you, the CEO, taking action. Ready. Set. Go. CEO.

Days

1-10

Mindful Listening Sessions

The first days on the job afford opportunities to listen - and listen mindfully (Check out pages 33-35 in my book [In Great Company](#)). Create summary lists of hot issues, facts, and figures.

Categorize which concerns are:

1. Aligned with organization goals and core values.
2. Achievable by current processes and practices.
3. Doable in terms of the Executive Team's capabilities.
4. Consistent with the CEO's vision and reach.
5. Require a shift in performance and methodologies.
5. Board to understand existing processes, procedures, practices, and bylaws.
6. CFO to understand existing cash flow, CAGR, credit, and reporting requirements.
7. Human Resources to understand state of compensation, culture, performance, recruitment and retention.
8. R&D and Operations Executives to understand current state of product/service enhancements
9. CIO to determine existing state of technology and new innovations that could drive new revenue and profit for the company.
10. Marketing and PR to determine capabilities of branding your vision and strategy.
11. External Strategic Advisor to get a current state of culture, room for improvement, and areas that require more leadership development.

Understand the context enough to prioritize needs. Study compliance with government agencies, internal policies, and launch third-party due diligence to identify errors, weaknesses, and threats.

Now is the time to launch a strategic approach to initiate, follow, and complete these tactics.

Come to Understand and Begin Your Working Relationships:

1. Legal to ensure your Board policies are up to date, and the state of lawsuits or proceedings.
2. Executive Administration, Chief of Staff, and your EA to understand adherence to Board governance and an efficient flow of information, logistics, and operations for the Office of the CEO.
3. CFO and COO to create your short and long term strategic plan
4. Maintenance: To ensure a safe working environment.

Work closely with your marketing department on public relations, photo sessions, and press releases. There's no time to waste time on getting the new company car or corporate jet privileges. Your EA should handle getting these distractions for you while you assert a fresh vision and a sense of urgency.

Corporate Boards would be smart to interview CEO candidates with these issues in mind. An interview might start with the question, "What are your plans for the first ten days?" The best answer would begin with plans to listen — and listen well.

Listen actively to all stakeholders. "Listening" differs from "hearing." It is a mindful exercise. As I noted in my recent book *In Great Company*, "listening is even more critical than speaking when it comes

to enjoying the benefits of collaboration and making an emotional connection” (Carter, 2019).

Active listening shows empathy and respect for the speaker, defers judgment, and creates exciting relationships. The Board members expect you to listen, but so too do the rank and file. You need only ask three questions - repeatedly:

1

What does the organization do well?

2

What could it do better?

3

What should it stop, start, or do more or less?

Within those first ten days, frame a statement of purpose, reflecting on learnings from the listening tours. For instance, the Board members at closely-held organizations may have individual and personal agendas. On the other hand, law or medical corporations answer to professionals with ownership interests and strong egos. And, while Board members of publicly held companies may seem less directly involved, they are increasingly self-aware of shareholder demands.

A 2007 study noted, “We found that the greater the proportion of experts a team had, the more likely it was to disintegrate into unproductive conflict or stalemate” (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Every high-level team will resist collaboration and cohesive performance. They feel authorized and entitled to being heard, and they expect their input to matter.

Negotiate a statement integrating the collaborative inputs, establishing a benchmark realizing the organizational goals, and embodying its values. If you are to hit the Executive Suite or Board running, you need a plan in the works that optimizes the positive connections and resolves the negative ones.

Days

11-20

The Plan

Set up a personal brand, strategy, vision, and goals. The new arrival should be careful not to push what appears to be a personal agenda. If promoted from within, you have some advantage because you are familiar with executive personalities, politics, and practices. During this time frame, communicate a set of goals aligned with determining organizational needs.

These goals – and the strategies and tactics to achieve them – must be phrased simply and directly. When possible, illustrate successful paths that everyone can follow. Moreover, these paths should include touchpoints, where progress is measured.

Own the illustration. Illustrations should differ from the big pictures used before and the strategies and methodologies of the competition. It must emphasize your authorship as a collaboration. For instance, it should reflect inputs gathered on listening tours concluded and presented in your voice. In doing so, you take ownership and affirm the intent to lead with integration.

These steps are all part of the branding. Assign each day for a specific focus. One day to Finance. One to Marketing. Another to Operations. On each day, dive deep into the people, policies, and practices in the respective functional silo. Have a roadmap built on the results of a collaboration with all the responsible parties in the silo. Later on, you will break down siloed management through your transformation team. Create deeper relationships built on listening, trust, and painting a picture for a better future.

By the end of the period, shape an integrated vision. If each of the C-suite executives is responsible for a specific function, the CEO has accountability for bridging their needs, plans, and processes to realize the organizational purpose.

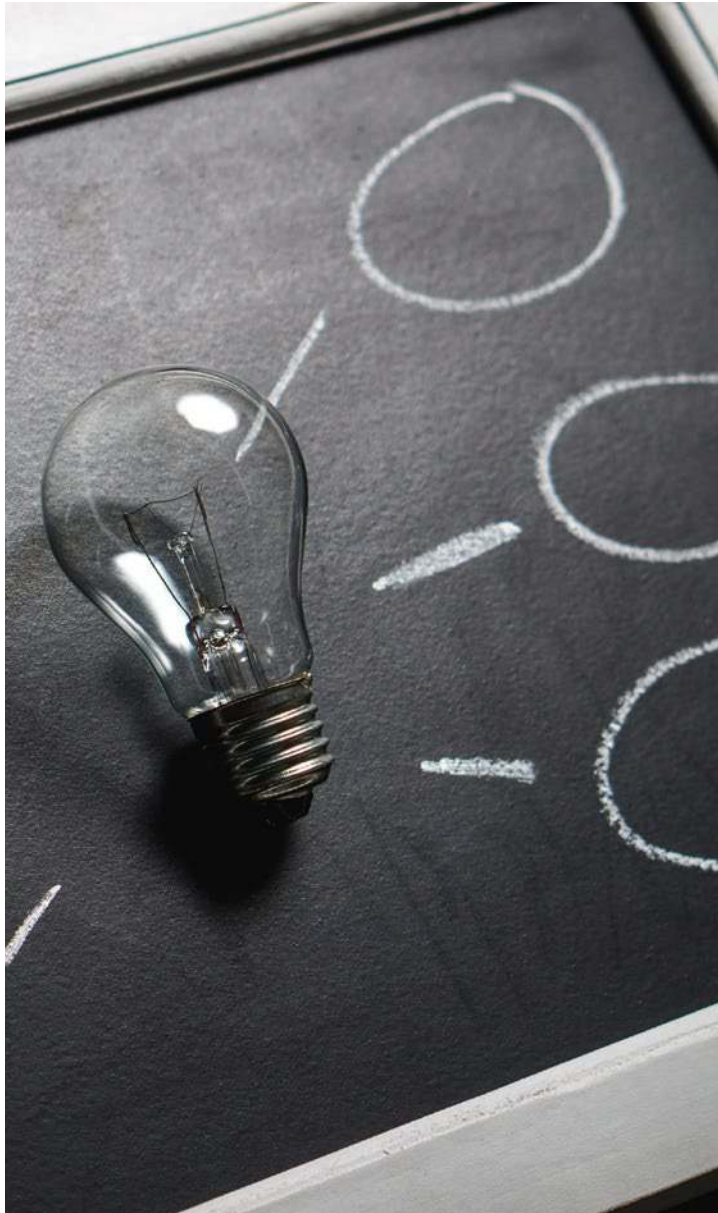
To make change happen, the CEO needs a personal brand and strategy. It would help if you had emotional brand clarity built on your vision and strategy. Your vision should speak to both your employees and customers' desires. Steve Jobs was closely aligned with his employees' desires to design beautiful code, equipment, and packaging. And, customers loved it too. You will require similar energy, passion, and optimism. Others must see their future in the model the CEO brings to the office.

Others like Hubert Joly, CEO and Chairman of Best Buy linked Vision with Business strategy by examining the weaknesses of the company, as a big box retailer. He focused on the solution to the challenges of losing customers, building a service-oriented business. All of his decisions stemmed from this one vision and strategy - of retaining customers and employees by developing a community of help for customers, so they wouldn't walk out the door with just knowledge of comparative product pricing in hand. They would leave with a purchase and a new partnership with their big box retailer - with the Geek Squad behind them.

Lead these days, delivering messages defining a new direction as necessary and achievable. These messages must avoid ego in favor of voicing creative collaboration. Develop and demonstrate a "we" identity as a personal style, a brand consistent with core values as the DNA informing strategies and futures.

Eleven or more days into the CEO role, you cannot afford to appear passive. Active listening, of its nature, demonstrates active engagement and fast response. Moreover, this should lead to the framing of your transformation team.

TOP 10 Goals for the coming year and the future stretch period:



- ☐ 1. Determine how well the organization has realized its mission and vision.
- ☐ 2. Embrace and communicate core organizational values
- ☐ 3. Identify the organization's five immediate needs and five stretch needs.
- ☐ 4. Interview and assess the potential of Executive Team members.
- ☐ 5. Identify your transformation design team - the people who will bring you the most significant dissent and agreement.
- ☐ 6. Strengthen partnering relationships with Board Members.
- ☐ 7. Explore each functional silo's performance and personnel.
- ☐ 8. Establish and empower teams by removing obstacles.
- ☐ 9. Create a psychologically, safe culture of respect.
- ☐ 10. Define your top four objectives during your tenure, along with a clear financial goal. For example, Alan Mullaly created goals, behaviors, and an actionable ultimate four plan elements. The plan later became the playbook for his transformation team, who tracked its progress.

Days

21-40

Clarity

These days offer an opportunity to show what you mean, need, and expect in action and accountability. It is time to put your future in front of the Board of Directors and Executive Team; after all, they believe they have placed a decisive and engaged mind, so you want to:

1. Invite the Board Members to review and tweak the package of plans you have to offer.
2. Seek full commitment from Executive Team members to projects that reflect their inputs.
3. Put Your transformation team into place.

If it takes some refinement or readjustment to your strategy, negotiate what it takes to secure buy-in from key stakeholders. Understand that, even after small early victories, the Executive Team and Boards revert to resistance and the status quo.

Align their buy-in with the goals built on mutual and reciprocal understanding and commitment. Make Executive Team members into “go-to” leaders instead of “go-do” operatives by asking them to present their strategies and plans to you for input. Delegating tasks may get things done; however,

your life will be miserable along the way, changing and critiquing along the way. Instead, let them show you what they will do and give the advice upfront to save you hundreds of micromanagement hours. Jack Welch got this right with his Work-Out programs. Executives presented their plans to meet Jack and GE’s goals. Similarly, at Ford, under Alan Mullaly, teams reported progress (red, yellow, green) rather than task-oriented goal achievement.

If you have made broad and narrow goals clear, if you have pictured specific paths to achievement, it is time for Executive Team members to demonstrate their commitment with individual strategic playbooks covering their strategies. There is a team playbook, and then there are special teams’ playbooks. External advisors should blend and integrate these multilateral operational visions.

Your task is to identify metrics for their respective performance, correcting them as the metrics indicate and maintaining their alignment with affirmed organizational goals and core values. Alan Mullaly’s was very easy - red, yellow, and green - and achieved 15% CAGR each year!



With the Executive Team aligned with purpose, ensure Board alignment. Sixty days into your tenure, the second Board meeting is probably on the calendar. This meeting outweighs the importance of the first. While it is an opportunity to push your agenda, prudent CEOs will leverage the new hire enthusiasm to coach the Board Members into the ownership of your intentions. You will have to sustain this interest and engagement over time, but this is the opportunity to establish a “charm offensive.”

CEOs promoted from within have some advantage here. They have been privy to individual Board Members’ style. Hopefully, they have had interactions with the Board before their appointment to anticipate the challenges. They still must strike a balance of respect for the Board and their obligation to move things forward.

Boards should engage in active listening of information presented by the CEO and Executive Team. They must advise and consent on behalf of shareholder interests. This relationship can be contentious if the Directors feel authorized to manage the organization functions directly. For instance, when Board Members are practicing partners in the firm, it invites purpose and interest conflicts. Board members who act in their own personal interests over the interests of the company and its stakeholders should be considered for removal.

CEOs must assert some mastery of the Board. We have found it productive for CEOs to manage multilateral communication with the Board.

1. **Agenda:** Set the agenda for Board meetings; that is, propose a detailed plan to the Board Chair in advance and edit it to reflect the Chair’s input. Structure the program to cover the necessary topics. However, it should also encourage and manage the expected dialogue. Decision-making processes in dyads (groups of 2) and groups of 3-4 with report outs are preferable. Only then should a roundtable vote be taken if necessary.
2. **Dialogue:** Open conversation helps define and frame decisions. Keeps the dialogue moving, creating a collaborative climate. Invite and facilitate

a full round-robin open discussion following Executive Team presentations. Listen carefully and propose action aligned with organization goals. Clear and active listening shows respect for Board contributions and maintains the core of the proposal.

3. **Communication:** Provide Board Members with detailed information on work-in-progress and progress on stretch plans. They should do so in advance and solicit feedback before the meeting. Prep and prime your Executive Team members to make effective presentations to the Board. The Executive Team is as strong as your coaching and support, but they must understand their representations must be accurate, precise, and respectful of your interests.
4. **Ownership:** This is a “must act” opportunity to assert your brand and accountability. Frame this assertion to reduce ego and frame your position as a leader who understands your allegiance to your Executive Team and the Board as a single interest focused on service to all stakeholders - internal and external.

Leave the Board meeting with the confidence you have aligned the purpose and plans. Where individual Board members require continued attention, leaders will respect their idiosyncratic demands and work steadily to resolve their issues independently of the Board.

You might routinely challenge them to speak to what you do well, what you can do better, and how they would make a change consistent with goals. Keeping their focus on goals should dispel personality issues.

It is also time to assess the talent that surrounds and supports you. You need a schedule and strategy for finding, recruiting, and placing that talent. It may mean justifying the expense of new positions and planning the respectful replacement of existing people.

Broaching the topic with your Board can be difficult. Confirm authority for hiring and firing at the executive level and the conditions under which you secure Board approval. To the extent the Board is involved, prepare detailed and well-informed presentations.

Days

61-80

Achievement and Recognition

Assuming your Top 10 Strategic Goals each have their weight (importance), those values probably vary. Deliver at least one of them early in this window. The goal need not have the highest impact, but it must have perceived value to all stakeholders. It should make a statement that you, together with your Executive Team, can deliver.

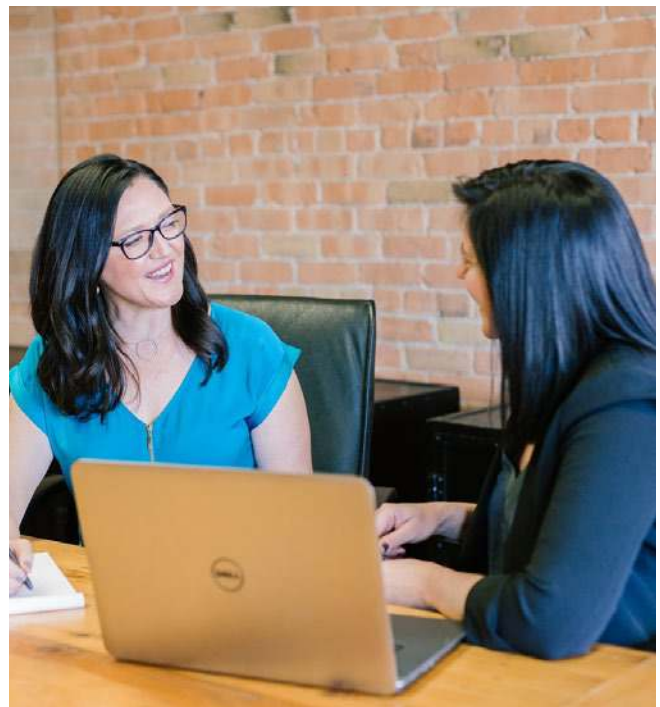
Achievement is a necessary early win to celebrate broadly. Your leadership grows as you share the credit by communicating appreciation to all those who made things happen. It is the first and best opportunity to show respect by acknowledging specific contributions.

“Your best practice is
to lead teams, not claim
the credit.”

Moreover, refrain from celebrating the win for win's sake. You want to communicate your thanks and respect for the work as it connects with organizational goals, core values, and customer needs. Your best practice is to lead teams, not claim the credit.

There is a roadmap within this first win, a model infrastructure you can apply to other aims. The creation of the roadmap is an opportunity to assess the success and analyze its functioning. It is a chance to solicit feedback and corrective action where needed to change course if necessary.

Applaud and reward the behaviors leading to the win. With attention to the desired actions, you reduce the distraction of individual personalities. Rewarding behaviors also develops and reinforces them as a successful practice inspired by your leadership.



Self-assessment and Transformation

Self-Assessment

Approaching three months into your tenure, take some time for self-assessment. Of course, you have been self-conscious throughout your stay. However, it would be best if you stepped away from the office for a day of reflection, connecting perhaps with your extended personal contacts for their 360-degree coaching.

Every CEO should have a senior personal advisor and coach independent of their employees and the existing Board. The senior advisor should have a substantial network and resources when necessary. They expect honesty from you as you do from them. And, when you need talents you do not have, reach for third-party consulting advice. By this date, know what weaknesses you can resolve and where the organization needs help.

You can map your needs in at least two ways:



1. Make a frank assessment of your relationship with Executive Team members and individual Board members. Solicit growth and partnership with those you can enlist as sponsors and champions of your transformation team.



2. Conduct personal due diligence to determine a cost/benefit analysis of your leadership effectiveness. The more open you are about the feedback and how you plan to integrate it, the more respect you will earn.



3. Begin to roll-out the transformation team within your company. The transformation team should have already been working on your vision and see the impact within the higher ranks. Now is the time to begin rolling out the change throughout your company's middle and front lines.

These are routines you can repeat periodically to show this is the desired behavior. Once you establish that input shapes your behavior, you can require all the decision-makers' same self-awareness. The message you send is "this is the way we do things" because this is the way that wins – not because you own the idea.

Chances are the Executive Team, and the Board of Directors think of themselves as distinctly different levels of the organization chart. It would help if you disrupted that perception by integrating their roles. They will become your change agents who will enable your transformation teams' success throughout your divisions, so they must work together well.

For instance, be sure that one or more key executives and board members are interested in the goal and the talent to see it through when you set goals.

When you can pair members and teams, you can identify sponsors and partners for your vision and strategies and form a leadership effectiveness atmosphere and framework. For instance, be sure that one or more key executives and board members are interested in the goal and the talent to see it through when you set goals. The executive assigned then has an influential partner, one who will champion the cause when presented to the Board. This goal management may seem manipulative. However, it is a strategic move towards achieving short-term goals and establishing long-term relationships.

For instance, you might pair a difficult Operations executive with a Board member concerned about production, resources, logistics, and so on. Perhaps, that Board member has raised objections about these issues or has demonstrated related expertise. On the other hand, you might purposefully connect that Operations chief with the Human Resources boss who has difficulty with Operations' behaviors. Pair mutual interests with contrary views.

The key to enabling and empowering these partnerships is your continuing curiosity about working well, better, and what must stop. Keep the focus on the *doing*, *action*, and *behavior* rather than the personalities.

It's essential to measure and use this data. With a focus on behaviors, you engage, enlist, and enroll the support of the Executive Team and Board members to help you move forward.

Transformation teams must follow this kind of thinking when driving inside of the company. They will use the same dialogue techniques you go within Executive Team and Board meetings with their direct reports, and with their direct reports. The transformation must drive to the janitor, customer service, sales, or any front line employee.



Days

91-100

Changing Perceptions

Approaching 100 days, you are nearly a third through the first year. Statistics on CEO terminations and failures show this is a difficult time. You cannot fix significant mistakes, but you can alter perceptions. You can master the Board of Directors by taking charge of their self-perception.

You do not want to influence the Executive Team's organization down; include the Board in your reimagining of the firm, its goals, and behaviors. Prudent CEOs stay close to the organization's goals and core values. Those are commitments that provide a benchmark for discussion, planning, and perception.

Transforming the Board means turning their monthly "Board Meetings" into *Knock-It-Out Sessions*. Repeated meetings must accomplish more than scheduling reports. The panels should reduce noise and disruptive behaviors in the way of achievement. You want to put some things before the Board:

What is the
"true and new"
of recent
events?

What behaviors
must the team
knock out of its
system?

What must be done
or changed to knock
new achievements
out of the park?

What successes
have we achieved
that have a
measurable
financial impact?

It makes sense to challenge the Board Members to explain the core values and your achievements.

The advantage of starting with the core values is that the values and achievements already have buy-in. If *full transparency* is a core value, know where each Board Member stands on reaching full transparency. They become accountable partners when they can identify the behaviors (how) that ensure complete transparency (what).

Board Members and shareholders tend to focus on *measurement*, so you cannot ignore the metrics. It helps if you negotiate the measures. You want to shift their focus to practice. “This is the place where change occurs through ongoing everyday practice” (Carter, 2019, p. 190).

Things will follow. The behaviors will structure your brand; they will show your engagement. They will create an environment where a strong culture and effective leader enable and empower personal and organizational success.

Weave simple terms into everyday communication with all stakeholders: systemic collaboration, positive future, alignment of values, mutual respect, and killer achievement. If these ideas have your buy-in, you can work them into conversations, meetings, emails, assessments, websites, and so on. It is against an understanding of these behaviors that you can measure what is going well, what needs improvement, and what must stop.

Things will follow. The behaviors will structure your brand; they will show your engagement. They will create an environment where a strong culture and effective leader enable and empower personal and organizational success.

However, your behavior also sets up a pattern of accountability with supporter-focused leadership. Legacy approaches have been directive and task-oriented. *Like* Tim Cook, Sheryl Sandberg, Bill Gates, and others, task-oriented leaders provide steps to follow and deliver an organizational goal. Your leadership style must not forget the task achievement needs.

Supporter-focused leadership does more – even if it does it differently. It builds performance by sponsoring and mentoring Executive Team members and other accountable officers and managers. Under Supporter-Focused Leadership, delegation means more than assigning tasks or passing the buck. You retain ownership of the activities because you make your accountability clear.

Remain available to delegate, ready to provide resources, collect information on your environment, remove obstructions, and coach on success practices. When you spend less time giving orders and micro-managing details, you instead have improved the manager’s skills and honed their talents until they can handle assignments with minimal supervision. It is then that you have created a climate of trust, mutual respect, and personal connectedness.

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