

The First 100 Days

40% of external senior hires fail within 18 months and an even higher proportion do not live up to expectations. Usually have no more than 100 days before people make up their minds about them.

1. Do not underestimate cultural differences:

Get to understand the culture of the organization, while bearing in mind that there may be considerable differences between an organisation's external reputation, its official internal culture and what actually happens on the front line. Listen to as many people as possible, at all levels in the organization, and do not belittle their culture, as it is habit and comfort zone to many. Learn also what your own cultural biases, assumptions and blind spots are.

2. At the same time, do not overestimate cultural differences and attribute every single misunderstanding to it. In your desire to listen to everybody, do not become paralyzed into inaction.

3. Do not be all things to all people:

From the outset, make sure you clarify their expectations of you, the resources you have, the outcomes you need to provide and the timeframe you are operating in. Often, organisations will hire a new broom without any clear sense of purpose, simply because things are going badly, so make sure you achieve a mutual understanding of what needs to be done and in what order.

4. Do not try to change things too quickly:

Quick wins are important, but they need to relate to a long-term strategy and not be just change for the sake of change. Develop a diagnostic tool to determine where there is an opportunity for a quick hit (based on importance and ease of implementation).

3. Don't be too problem-focused:

It's easy to become so wrapped up in the vision of the future and in problem-solving, that employees feel you are not giving them credit for anything they have done in the past, so be sure to acknowledge past successes and to keep positive elements of the existing culture.

6. Do focus on building alliances and long-term relationships:

This is never a waste of time; you will need support at all levels. Communicate frequently, both formally and informally, and explain your leadership style to people.

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