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THE BUSINESS REVIEW FOR PROCUREMENT LEADERS

## SPECIAL FOCUS: SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS

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## TACTICS

## The 100-day campaign trail

by Sabine Dembkowski and Fiona Eldridge

Your first 100 days in a new job set the tone for the months ahead. Following a few simple steps can help you start off on the right foot

IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY WHERE speed and effectiveness have accelerated into new dimensions, getting off to a good start in a new job is critical. New board members, executives and high-potential candidates in all sectors must demonstrate that they can integrate and deliver quickly in their new positions.

The key to starting strongly is to focus on opportunities for success rather than guarding against failure. Following a seven-step action plan can help you master the first 100 days, and can also be used to coach a new manager in your team:

### 1. Preparation

Planning starts long before the first day. Any conscientious executive will prepare – intellectually, mentally and emotionally – for their arrival in a new job. There are five critical factors:

- Analysis of information concerning the organisation.
- Assessment of its key challenges.
- Development of personal credibility for the new role.
- Assessment of the capabilities of the existing team.
- Personal, mental and emotional preparation for the new role.

If you have a new manager in your team you can work with them to prepare for their new role, not only through a formal induction but also by coaching them to

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develop, for example, a plan to assess the key capabilities of their team.

### 2. Managing expectations

At the beginning it will be in everyone's interest to get to know each other. Expectations are paramount. Consciously or otherwise, behaviours are determined by expectations. What will be the expectations of your stakeholders, both internal and external?

All stakeholder groups will have their own initial expectations about who you are and what you can, and will, deliver. By anticipating their expectations, you can prepare your responses and make clear to others what you will deliver and how. You can also influence this by taking time to consider your own expectations.

The way you behave towards others will influence the way others behave towards you.

### 3. Setting the strategic agenda

At first, the focus for implementation should be on realising "quick wins". The fast pace of the stock market and pressure of investors to see financial results makes this doubly important. For the medium and long term, the focus of successful executives is on a few priority agenda items.

In our coaching practice, the biggest mistake that we see is that executives spread themselves too thinly across a wide variety of issues. The other big mistake is that executives determine the strategic agenda in an "ivory tower" or with the help of elite consultancies. It is crucial to have a broad plan that genuinely involves critical stakeholders and for you to spend time generating buy-in.

### 4. Composing the right team

Your personal success in a leadership position stands or falls on assembling and

maintaining the right team. The composition of this team needs to be addressed from two aspects: ensuring that you have the right complementary blend of competencies and expertise, and that there is a good blend of personalities.

As a newly appointed leader, you need to have, and communicate, great clarity about the specific role and contribution of each team member. The key factors in building your team are:

- **Identify the right people.** Make a checklist of the qualities, skills and experience you need and find out who is motivated and excited by the work on offer.
- **Share your vision.** The team needs to buy into this and understand the importance and relevance of achieving individual and organisational goals.
- **Take time to embed new members and find out what makes them tick.**
- **Break down barriers, real or perceived, and foster collaboration** by helping team members to get to know each other.
- **Be a visible leader.** Strengthen the team through regular, open communication and provide opportunities for open and honest feedback.
- **Send the right message.** Formal appraisals and monitoring help you to identify who is contributing most and who needs to improve, which demonstrates that you care about individuals and helps to solidify the team.

Sadly, the choice of teams is often on the basis of personal likeability, shared history and "political considerations". These have a place in the selection criteria but should not be the guiding force.

A further error can be to choose only those people who will not challenge you or who offer no competition. However, complementary experiences and capabilities are important in today's marketplace and good leaders recognise that they need to work with those who will strengthen the overall capability of the team to deliver.

### 5. Forming alliances

Any executive needs a network of partners and these alliances become even more important in procurement, where establishing and maintaining good relationships with supply partners is crucial.

## CHECKLIST

### Preparing for success

- **Create realistic expectations.** Rushing into action and overpromising sets up expectations against which you and your organisation will be measured.
- **Take considered and thought-through actions.** A period of observation and reflection allows you to prepare for considered and sharp action.
- **Accept that you cannot know everything.** Even if you are under pressure to start at peak performance, you can best be served by observing, listening and learning.
- **Create a new identity.** This is a great opportunity to throw off things that narrowed your options.
- **Seek feedback.** This will allow you to learn about the ways of behaving and acting that are more likely to achieve the desired impact with your new colleagues.
- **Be fair.** 'Do what you say and say what you do' is a good maxim to follow and will gain you respect.
- **Understand your personal responsibilities.** Know what you are responsible for, your available resources and balance your workload.
- **Understand the informal organisation.** This will provide you with the necessary support for decisions and implementing your strategic plan.
- **Focus on the right battles.** Analyse the situations and issues, involve the team, and focus on those areas that provide the greatest promise of attractive returns.
- **Honour the achievements of your predecessor.** There is always something positive to say about a person.

Good examples of developing strategic alliances can be seen in companies such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Toyota and Harley-Davidson. It is also important to remember that some of the organisation's existing networks may be outside the formal structure, for example, when a business is part of a family dynasty.

### 6. Determine the culture

Understanding both the formal and informal culture of the organisation is vital. If you rush in without recognising all of its cultural nuances, you may be perceived as an "alien" and as acting in a way that the organisation perceives as a threat.

You may have been appointed to bring about radical change, but you need to understand the existing situation first. Then you can ask yourself whether the change you are proposing fits in with the strategic plan and vision for the company or department. If yes, fine. If not, a detailed transformation process needs to be planned.

### 7. Effective communication

Success comes through careful planning of what and how you are going to communicate in order that people can understand what you are proposing to do, the rationale behind it and what it means for them personally. Senior executives who manage to create an emotional link with the strategic plan can inspire their team along with the wider organisation.

The following list covers the main stages in developing your communication plan:

- **Decide the content of your message.** What and how much are you going to communicate?
- **Be consistent.** The message must be the same, because otherwise rumour and lack of trust spread.
- **Who will you communicate it to?** Consider all your stakeholder groups and think about how they differ.
- **What is the appropriate medium for your message for each group?** Is it by letter, e-mail, intranet, personal presentation or one-to-one meetings?
- **Consider the timing of delivery.** Is it different for different groups?
- **Communication is not only words.** It is also your behaviour, your style of dress, the presentation of documents, the tone in which you deliver the message and even how you physically organise the office.
- **Call on internal expertise.** Don't be afraid to consult the PR or communications department – it's there to present information in a professional way.

Your new role presents you with great opportunities. A strong "first 100 days" programme sets the stage and builds firm foundations for sustainable career success. However, this period is by no means a guarantee for your future. The key is to listen, learn and review the situation and your behaviours from time to time. ■