

- The 1st Hundred Days -

HOW TO MANAGE THE FIRST HUNDRED DAYS OF A NEW ASSIGNMENT

Failure to get that clear road map in the first ten days of your new assignment means that you will eventually discover the three dimensions of change.....by getting your fingers slapped as your interventions fail!

There is nothing wrong with getting your fingers slapped. It is part of being a senior executive.

But.....

Failed interventions in the first hundred days of a new assignment don't build that framework that allows you to have credibility.

Avoidable failure also wastes precious time.

THE GOING IN MANDATE

Our next concept is called The Going in Mandate.

We stress the programmatic, structured importance of negotiating AND then re-negotiating the Going-In Mandate.

During day 2-5 of the new assignment, the boss/subordinate team should meet to jointly complete the Going-In Mandate. The going in mandate comes from Harvard Business School Professor Jack Gabarro's seminal work on CEO entry.

The Going-In mandate should include the following:

- What needs to be changed and what is the time frame?
- What needs to be preserved?
- What needs to be avoided at all costs?
- What things can I unilaterally change without consulting my boss?
- What things should I consult my boss on before making changes?
- What things should I let my boss make the final decision?

These ideas are intuitively obvious but seldom part of a structured management procedure for insuring similar perspective between the new boss/subordinate team.

We are simply recommending that these obvious ideas be formalized.

THE LONE RANGER

Professor Gabarro stresses the importance of building subordinates into a cohesive team. Failure to value a team approach to decision-making leads to a management style characterized by Gabarro as the "Lone Ranger Syndrome." And the Lone Ranger Syndrome was associated with management failure:

"Compared to the successful managers, (Lone Rangers) involved others to a much lesser degree in the work of assessing and diagnosing organization problems. As a result, their diagnoses of situations tended to be much more narrowly focused and incomplete. Finally, they made changes that were perceived as inappropriate or ineffective, either because the changes were based on partial or incorrect diagnoses of problems or because the changes were badly implemented by a management group that did not support them."

In other words, your first 1-15 days, you should be walking around the organization and asking many questions. Avoid summoning people to your office, as it creates a powerful first impression that you are here to tell and not to listen. People may feel more comfortable talking with you in their office and not yours.

Avoid all reference to "Let me tell you how we used to do it at my old company." It suggests you are seeking to force-mold your new company into the image of your old one.

DON'T TACKLE THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS FIRST.

Gabarro studied seventeen management successions over time. Regardless of industry, size, or country, there was a tendency for management changes to come in waves of three, with the second change being the most dramatic. The last change was often a refinement of the major changes that took place in the second wave. Indeed, this three-wave cycle took place even among managers in the study who (at the time) believed that their first wave of action would take care of most of the major changes.

Gabarro believes the three-wave effect is a natural consequence of how new managers learn.

Given that there are at least three waves of change for any new manager, it is NOT necessary for the first intervention to strike at the most "important" problem.

Important problems are what newly hired executives are most often urged to fix first.

We would argue, however, that the most important problems tend to be the most difficult to resolve.

It is best to begin your new assignment with an intervention where you can win. Use the first win to build on later success. In handling a major intervention, consider breaking it down to waves of three. For example:

For example, instead of force-feeding a system wide benefits change, why not first announce the change as an R&D project and try it out with the functional area where the change will most likely produce the most positive results? By calling it an R&D project, you can later change the program without suffering loss of political face. By testing it out in the area most likely to be receptive, you have a safer platform for extension.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

Reserve the most important problems for the second cycle of change. The critical second cycle should build on the success of the first. We recommend first cycle interventions focus on issues where there is a high probability of success. For example:

President Clinton did the right thing when he made allowing gays in the military his first major intervention: he had campaigned on this issue, he had courted the support of gays, and he was Commander-in-Chief. The firestorm of protest from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Conservative Democrats made him back down. Big mistake. By making gays in the military his first intervention and then loosing on the issue, he set an initial framework for his Adversaries. That framework was successfully duplicated when he introduced his comprehensive health care program.

On the other hand, by the time President George W. Bush came to power, both Democrats and Republications were embracing the concept of tax reduction. The only squabbling was over the amount of the reduction. Bush made this issue his first intervention and it became his first success. His goal was to build on bi-partisan success for next intervention----educational reform.

RE-NEGOTIATE THE GOING-IN MANDATE

As mentioned earlier, The Going-In Mandate should focus on timeframes and specific goals for Change/Preserve/Avoid. Once it is written, however, the Going-In Mandate will likely need to be re negotiated once the new executive has a better appreciation of what is realistic in the organization. In managing a subordinate, you might want to ask the subordinate to re-write the Going-In Mandate based on what has been learned about the organization in the last 1-15 days.

Try to meet with your boss 16-20 days after the first day of employment to begin this renegotiation process.

You want your performance to be evaluated based on realistic goals.

You don't want to risk being Framed to Fail.

SUMMARY

The retained search industry, the outplacement industry, and the corporate clients both industries serve have a clear, simple, and inaccurate view of the talent acquisition and talent removal process.

They view these issues as discrete transactions.

We believe there is evidence to suggest that there is such a thing as the Senior Executive Assignment Cycle.

We believe that there can be competitive value by managing the Senior Executive Assignment Cycle rather than managing separate transactions.

Specifically, the success of the new executive is dependent on the message the organization sent in its removal of the predecessor. Forced exit of a predecessor combined with the entrance of an outside executive sends a symmetrical signal. Natural exit of a predecessor combined with entrance of an outside executive sends an asymmetrical signal.

Spend time learning the conditions under which your predecessor left. Beware of asymmetrical assignment cycles.

Spend the first 1-15 days learning what needs to be changed, avoided, and preserved by getting out of your office and walking around or flying around. Avoid summoning people to your office.

Once you have learned what needs to be changed, avoided, and preserved re-negotiate the Going-In Mandate so that your performance can be evaluated on a realistic basis. We have provided a structure for designing the going-in mandate.

Avoid tackling the most important problems first during the critical first hundred days. Tackle the problems where you can win.

And if you find you misjudged the level of resistance, go to the mats and do what needs to be done to win the first conflict. You can compromise on later conflicts. Don't compromise on the first. This was the mistake Bill Clinton made with homosexuals in the military.

If your subordinate mis-judged the level of resistance on the first intervention, back that subordinate to the hilt on the first intervention. Don't compromise on the first intervention.

Change comes in waves of three. Try to break your intervention into three parts and use the first part to test the level of resistance within the organization. Your second intervention will be that much more informed and realistic.

Finally, an assignment cycle perspective to employment means that senior level jobs tend to be

driven by the company exit strategy. Exit strategies can be to have a lifestyle business, to grow so that we can acquire others, grow so that we can be acquired, or grow to have an IPO.

Have a crisp understanding of what that exit strategy and its time frame will be a powerful factor in influencing the quality of the assignment cycle.

Negotiate hard for a decent severance package at the time you are hired. You will never be in a better bargaining position to negotiate a good end to the cycle than at the beginning of the cycle.



Dr. Laurence J. Stybel and Maryanne Peabody are co-founders of Stybel Peabody Lincolnshire of Boston. Founded in 1979, the firm assists companies in managing the Senior Executive Assignment Cycle™. Core services include retained search of CEOs and Board members, coaching, and helping senior executives craft new chapters in their professional lives.

