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## Starting a New Job: Dos and Don'ts

*Newly hired leaders must take charge of the job start.*

Stop! Look! Listen! Starting a new job carries both the excitement and risk of an oncoming train. We read about the first 100 days and the honeymoon period for newly hired leaders. Yet, whether 100 days, a shorter period or a longer time frame, the beginning stages are crucial for success. Long-lasting impressions are made during this time, and early decisions often become our trademark, affecting how others view us.

On-boarding, the activities organizations plan for newly employed executives, has gained attention in the field. This practice, however, may lessen the responsibility newly hired leaders feel to craft their own course of action at the start, which is critical to success.

Take charge of your beginnings by considering the following global questions: (1) Why am I here? (Why was I hired and what is expected of my leadership role? Am I to be a change agent, builder or sustainer of the organization's culture?) (2) What do I stand for? (What are my values, and how should I communicate them to others?) (3) What are people telling me about the organization and its issues? (4) How will I respect the

history of the organization while effecting change within its culture?

While establishing your general mark on the new job, you'll also need to develop your presence on a more local level. Follow these guidelines for what to do, and what not to do, during those initial critical encounters.

### The To-Do List

**Build an early support base.** In order to learn about an organization and to make changes to it, you must enlist the support of others. You can rely on others' insight to give you a sneak peak into the organization's environment and at the same time get others excited about your vision and their chance to play a role in the new team.

**Make some decisions, and achieve early wins.** Be certain people notice you have arrived, not necessarily by making a big splash but by implementing appropriate, calculated changes that improve quality or service and represent quick wins. Even at the start, you should have predetermined objectives and take some actions, however small.

**Ask key questions.** As you meet with staff members and other stakeholders, ask these four key

questions in order to successfully launch yourself.

- What have I not asked you that I should have?
- If you could change only one thing here in the next 90 days, what would it be?
- Who are the "heroes" and "outlaws" in the organization? Who gets things done?
- What can I do for you?

*Be certain people notice you have arrived, not necessarily by making a big splash but by implementing appropriate, calculated changes that improve quality or service and represent quick wins.*

**Look before you leap.** Pay close attention to detail as you adjust to your new organization; it will assist you when you need to make decisions based on the facts at hand and not simply on your past experiences. Effective leaders read through the files and records of an organization in their first weeks on the job to discover history and foundation.

**Watch your timing on decisions.** Either doing too much too quickly or putting decisions off for too long can be costly mistakes. Use your best

judgment to prioritize issues. Attend to anything urgent in a prompt manner while allowing more time to address complex, long-term problems.

**Show up early and stay late.** You will face a steep learning curve as you meet people and confront problems requiring much analysis and thought. Manage your time carefully to put in the extra hours required of a leader in this time frame.

**At the same time, maintain balance in your life.** Stay healthy, get appropriate exercise and occasionally step away from the issues to enhance your perspective. Also, attend to the needs of your family because your change in jobs will affect them whether or not you have moved to a new town.

**Look sharp and smile—show warmth.** Your personal grooming and your facial expressions send strong signals when others first meet you. A smile or a friendly greeting to others often seals their support as you start a job.

**Touch base often with the hiring authority.** The early days and weeks require that you stay closely aligned with the board or hiring senior executive to ensure that you are on the correct path.

### **The Don't-Do List**

**Do not make a misstep.** First impressions are often the most long-lasting. In the early days, consult with others and reflect carefully on each decision to help avoid this mistake.

**Do not show early favoritism.** Building consensus requires you to balance competing interests, not show bias toward one group or person.

Instead of picking favorites, make an effort to reach out to everyone.

**Do not say this phrase: "I've seen (done) this before."** Yes, you were hired for your prior experiences. But even new leaders with significant experience should be cautious in assuming that the issues they face on the new job are the same as those seen in prior jobs. Instead of making assumptions, get all the current facts and analyze each challenge as a discrete one, not as a replica of a past issue you have faced. And consider taking the action without mentioning how often you have been down that same road.

**Do not say, "At ABC Health, I did this."** Although you may have been hired because of your great success at ABC Health, most people do not want to hear about ABC Health. You may instead decide to bring up your past experiences more subtly. Consider prefacing your statements with, "I have heard that other organizations have tried this approach." Your colleagues will often be more receptive to hearing about your past history if you allow them to broach the subject first.

**Do not read too much into what others say.** Misreads and misjudgments could result if you jump to conclusions about what someone means. Listen attentively, ask follow-up questions if necessary and understand the situation fully before drawing conclusions.

**Do not miss signals.** If you do not monitor the situation around you, you will not learn the culture of your new organization. Being observant will allow you to notice

how this organization and its issues may be different from any you have previously experienced.

**Do not waste the honeymoon period.** You need to start familiarizing yourself with the organization immediately and settling into your role.

Although on-boarding may help ease your entry into the organization, you alone carry the responsibility to find your way at the start. By moving forward with full awareness and focus, you will set a positive tone for your future. ▲

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