



From the President's Desk

FIVE KEYS TO SUCCESSFULLY ON BOARDING NEW EXECUTIVES

Suzanne Miklos, Ph.D.

Bringing on new talent at the executive level has significant risks. Turnover, poor results, and change management challenges can cause significant disruption and, at times, the departure of the new executive. A classic Harvard Business School study found that outsiders often destroy value when the company is doing well. This finding fits with other studies that have shown outsiders are paid more, perform worse, and have higher exit rates.

There is a fine line between hiring someone with an external perspective that adds value and someone who disrupts the organization's effectiveness. The risks of a new hire unintentionally destroying value are mitigated with a customized onboarding program that emphasizes culture, strategic capabilities, and relationship building.

FIVE KEYS:

Soak in the Culture

Find ways to connect the executive with long-term employees from a variety of functions and levels. Allow the executive to hear stories about their connections to the mission and learn why things are the way they are. Investing in team building with the leadership team and sharing artifacts, customer stories, failures, and triumphs all help a new leader see the uniqueness of their new environment. Provide a culture carrier to mentor and coach.

Clarify Expectations

When we do calibration calls for executive assessments, we ask what a good first year looks like. Is it relationship-building or an overhaul of a function? People naturally want to prove them-

selves and add value. Shared expectations are a must as research implies that new leaders focus on change without recognizing the high risk of destroying value. There is a bias towards thinking that change will be effective.

Dive Deeply into Best Practices

Often, new leaders focus on what is unusual or not working. We recommend great curiosity to understand the origin, history, and whys of practices. An unusual organizational structure or performance process may be a clue to a competitive advantage that could just as easily be destroyed as improved. A reverse mentor with longevity and excellent technical skills can be invaluable.

Build Real Relationships

Relationships are critical to fitting in and decoding the organization's norms about how work actually gets done. Understanding where silos exist and don't exist can be accomplished by taking the time to build genuine relationships with peers and stakeholders. A common mistake is to save relationship building for after one has a handle on the business. A personal board of directors can provide ongoing consistent feedback.

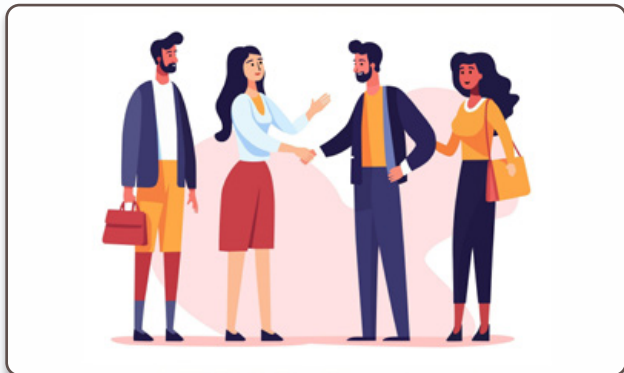
Know Why You Were Hired

Although seemingly trite or obvious, there are likely internal candidates who were not ready for the job. Understand what perspective, knowledge, or experience attracted the organization to you and intentionally build a reputation based on delivering that. Repeatedly stating this is how we did it at company Z is a mistake, but providing a clear picture about elevating an already solid data strategy can build credibility and focus.



HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR PEER'S ONBOARDING JOURNEY

Tim Jesurun, Ph.D.



When a new leader joins as your peer, it can re-shape team dynamics and bring fresh ideas to the table. But for them to truly thrive, it's essential they have a well-rounded onboarding experience, especially in understanding team culture, strategic goals, and internal networks. Here are some things you can do to help them transition smoothly:

Shape the Onboarding Experience

Reflect on your own onboarding process. What resources or insights made the most impact? What felt unnecessary? If you're able to contribute to their onboarding plan, share your insights, highlighting the high-priority meetings, relevant documents, and key stakeholders that will help them hit the ground running. Beyond the formal plan, be sure to informally share personal insights into team dynamics, company traditions, and unwritten expectations that can't be found in any manual. They'll likely appreciate the inside scoop.

Establish Regular Check-Ins

Building a collaborative relationship from the outset is key, so establish a routine for informal check-ins. Whether that's scheduling a recurring meeting or stopping by their office every Tuesday, this can create a safe space for them to ask the "small questions" they feel are not worth a whole email or phone call. Additionally, this can give you insights

into how they are adjusting. If they are quiet, spark the conversation with questions about what has been challenging, surprising, or enjoyable so far.

Provide Useful Resources

As leaders, understanding nuanced workflows, high-stakes projects, and strategic client relationships is essential. In addition to being a personal resource, share any guides, notes, or templates you have that will provide valuable context and insight into current initiatives. If they seem overwhelmed, offer these resources in stages and assure them that you'll be there to guide them as they get acclimated. Remind them that they don't have to master everything immediately- they can turn to these guides when they need them.

Facilitate Connections and Context

As a peer, you can help the new executive build their internal network by making introductions and explaining the influence and role of key players. Highlight the backgrounds, work styles, and priorities of important stakeholders, helping your new peer understand the subtleties of the organization's decision-making ecosystem. This approach not only accelerates their adjustment, but also positions them to build strong, productive relationships early on.

Onboarding a peer requires more than just showing them the ropes—it's about providing context, fostering connections, and creating a welcoming environment for collaboration. Investing time in these efforts early on strengthens your working relationship and contributes to a more cohesive and effective leadership team. By offering intentional support, you're setting the stage for a partnership that benefits both the organization and your shared vision.



MAXIMIZING SUCCESS: BEST PRACTICES FOR ONBOARDING EXTERNALLY HIRED C-SUITE EXECUTIVES

Katie Rosneck, B.S.

Hiring external C-suite executives can be a game-changer for companies, but it comes with significant challenges. While new talent brings fresh perspectives, research shows that **nearly 40-60% of external hires at the executive level fail within their first 18 months** (Chandler & Kram, 2010). Why? It often boils down to poor integration. Without a comprehensive onboarding process, even the most qualified executives can struggle to adapt to their new environment, leading to costly setbacks.

The Critical Role of Cultural Integration

A key issue is cultural assimilation. According to an Egon Zehnder survey cited in *Harvard Business Review* (HBR 2022), nearly one-third of externally hired C-suite executives received little meaningful support during their transition. Simply setting up HR and IT access and giving a job description isn't enough. Companies that stop there risk negatively impacting the executive's brand, as they may struggle to understand and adapt to the company's expectations.

This challenge is particularly problematic in larger firms, where communication across departments and specialties is essential. HBR research highlights that today's C-suite roles increasingly prioritize social and communication skills over traditional technical or financial expertise (2023). Executives are expected to bridge communication barriers and coordinate across diverse, specialized knowledge areas—tasks that require deep cultural integration.

Proven Strategies for Effective Onboarding

1. Provide Tailored Support Systems

Parasher (2017) emphasizes the need for structured support that addresses both the executive's ability to adapt and the company's efforts

to integrate them. Regular feedback, executive coaching, and mentoring can make a significant difference in their success.

2. Foster Relationship Building

New executives need to build rapport quickly. HBR suggests providing them with a list of key stakeholders, advice on how to approach each, and encouraging them to prepare an "elevator speech" to articulate their vision (2023).

3. Leverage Social Intelligence

As executives are increasingly expected to lead through influence rather than direct authority, onboarding should help them understand the company's communication norms and decision-making dynamics.

By focusing on cultural integration and offering structured support, companies can significantly increase the chances of success for their external executive hires, turning potential risks into leadership assets.

References

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NEW LEADERS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION? WE CAN HELP!

OES offers science-based approaches to integrating new leaders into their teams and organization, including new manager assimilation, executive coaching, and ongoing team-building. We seek to create common ground and a safe space for discussing both tradition as well as the need for change. We utilize assessments, such as the Harrison or Social Styles, to build data-driven self-awareness for all members of the team, as well as to identify common strengths, cultural norms, and sources of tension. Our skilled facilitators can help your leadership teams align on goals and be more productive and engaged to face new challenges. Let us know how we can help!

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UPCOMING FREE WEBINAR

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Wednesday, December 11th 12:00PM - 1:00 PM EST

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Our Halloween spirit got a major boost thanks to Mike Sliter's amazing decorations!



Happy
Halloween

GET TO KNOW OUR NEW TEAM MEMBER! Meet Cheri Widowski, M.S.



Cheri Widowski has worked in publishing, academia, and, for over a dozen years, with membership organizations. She has her Master's in Library and Information Science from Syracuse University.

What drew you to the field of leadership consulting?

I've recently relocated back to Cleveland after close to 15 years in upstate New York and Washington DC and was looking for something where I could use transferrable skills from my years working as a librarian and in general administrative aid for membership organizations.

What aspect of our work do you find most rewarding?

I recently started working on the coaching side of things and matching people with prospective coaches is fun, exchanging emails with new coachees who seem excited to find someone who can help them meet their goals.

If you could meet any historical figure, who would it be and why?

Maybe Amelia Earhart. We are supposedly related somehow but I'd love to find out what happened to her! Also, I did a thesis on her life beyond flying, including her ideas of female independence that weren't too common in her day, so I'd love to chat.

