
THE EXECUTIVE'S FIRST 100 DAYS:

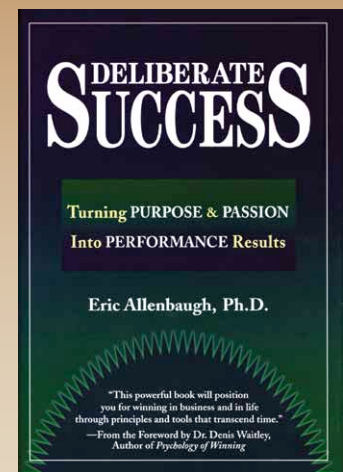
Loading Your Initial Efforts For Success®

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THE EXECUTIVE’S FIRST 100 DAYS:

Loading Your Initial Efforts For Success®

The actions of a newly appointed top executive – whether by intention or default – communicate a mindset of expectations within the organization that may well follow that new leader throughout the duration of his or her tenure. This limited window of opportunity can have a profound impact on positioning key stakeholders to co-create an even brighter future for the organization – or this same time period can cause people to go into resistance and rejection. How the new leader navigates through The First 100 Days will likely make a permanent imprint in the minds of stakeholders – an imprint that will either contribute to or detract from the executive’s long-term effectiveness.

Stakeholders carefully observe and listen to the new leader as they tune into WIIFM – “What’s in it for me?” In some cases, people seek stability and continuity from the new leader. In others, associates are looking for a fresh perspective and bold actions to confront unresolved issues and prepare the organization for a brighter future. People simultaneously experience a sense of excitement and anxiety about how the leadership change will impact them, their direction, their way of doing business, and their priorities. Some fear change while others fear there won’t be enough

change. The new leader needs to wisely and boldly sort through these challenges.

*“It is not the strongest species
that survive, nor the most intelligent,
but the ones most responsive
to change.”*

Charles Darwin

Wise leaders listen, learn, absorb, and synthesize a great deal of tangible and intangible information during this critical period about the culture, the history, the politics, the priorities, and the values. They also learn about what works and what doesn’t, who works and who doesn’t, what’s important and what’s not. Wise leaders pause before acting – especially in a new environment. This thoughtful, systematic process builds confidence and trust in the new leader. Being too cautious during the First 100 Days, however, may communicate a lack of courage and turn the hopeful into skeptics.

Courageous leaders also look for opportunities to clarify direction, inspire people, build bridges, and create a sense of movement. Even during the First 100 Days, bold leaders take conscious, deliberate action in addressing symbolic issues that reinforce principles, clarify direction, and mobilize the positive spirit of people. A new executive is essentially “bullet-proof.” If the new executive makes a mistake, most people are willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, forgive, and move on. When the executive promptly resolves a high-profile issue requiring attention, stakeholders notice and are more likely to come on board – or at least be more open to the new leader’s influence. If nothing happens during the First 100 Days, however, people may conclude that the new executive is just “another bureaucrat” who will merely shuffle papers and avoid dealing with the issues.

*“Change is not a force to be feared,
but an opportunity to be seized.
The choice is ours.”*

Sam Weiss

Effective leaders both assimilate and act during this initial window of opportunity. Knowing what to address and how to go about doing that during the First 100 Days distinguishes the good from the great leaders. In the depth of The Depression, for example, newly elected President F.D. Roosevelt immediately reopened the banks and pumped money back into the system. That bold move lifted spirits, gave people hope, and began the important process of restoring confidence in the economy. Lee Iacocca, during his First 100 Days as CEO of Chrysler, initiated several bold, swift

moves that both challenged and mobilized people to act in ways they once thought inconceivable. On what priorities might you focus to positively engage stakeholders while building their hope for future possibilities?

*“I believe the real difference
between success and failure in a corporation
can very often be traced to the question
of how well the organization brings out
the great energies and talents
of its people.”*

Thomas J. Watson, Jr.
Former IBM Chief Executive

10 SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS

The First 100 Days provides a timely and significant opportunity to clarify the strategic direction, strengthen teamwork, enhance communication, and build confidence in leadership. The First 100 Days requires a unique blend of courage and caution to set the stage for great long-term results. Wise leaders effectively address the following **10 Success Strategies** during their First 100 Days:

STRATEGY 1 - CULTURE: Every organization has a unique culture that the new leader must understand and appreciate. The culture, norms, history, and values have a profound impact on the climate and productivity. Understanding the culture facilitates rapid integration into the organization and significantly impacts the long-term success of the executive.

With various stakeholder groups, explore what they value, how this organization distinguishes itself from competitors, what contributes to and detracts from our effectiveness, what gets rewarded, why people elect to work here, why people might want to leave, what they are proud about, how customers feel about our services, and what kind of person gets promoted.

STRATEGY 2 - CONNECTION: Key stakeholders often look to the new executive with both hopes and fears. The ability of the executive to build rapport with the formal and informal leadership will determine if these key people will ultimately become ambassadors or adversaries. During the First 100 Days, make yourself highly visible and accessible to a wide variety of stakeholders – including those very important front-line employees. Listen to their hopes, their apprehensions, their dreams, their frustrations, and their ideas to create an even more effective company. Look for ways to honor how they have already contributed to the success of the company and how important they are in positioning the company for its next phase of development.

STRATEGY 3 - COMMUNICATION: Communication – both listening and speaking – is the vehicle for connecting with key stakeholders. The First 100 Days provides an opportunity to build trust and open communication with key stakeholder groups. Set up a series of face-to-face sessions with board members, leadership groups, employees, community leaders, and key customers. Listen to what they are encouraged by and possibly concerned about regarding the change of leadership and the current state of your new company. Listen with the intent of understanding their issues and their hopes.

Make it safe for people to share their views and ideas by actively listening, asking them to “tell you more,” and thanking them for having the courage to speak openly. People typically feel respected when you seek to understand their views – even if you don’t necessarily agree with them.

STRATEGY 4 - COURAGE: In a new leadership role, you will likely be confronted with the reality of having to make a tough decision early on. You might not even know, at that early point in your new leadership role, who you can count on to provide sound counsel. Yet, you will have to trust your intuition to call on several key stakeholders to engage them in the process of providing you with their best counsel, exploring options for handling issues, and identifying what they consider to be the risk factors. Don’t allow yourself to be pressured into making a decision – make the decision based on sound principles that exemplify your leadership philosophy. Demonstrate your commitment to being “tough on issues and tender on people” in addressing the issues – and make the decision.

Your willingness to make a key, symbolic decision will likely send a powerful signal to stakeholders during The First 100 Days that you have the courage to take action and get results. When newly inaugurated, President Obama demonstrated courage by making several symbolic decisions within his first week in office. Likewise, you will score an organizational “home run” by making the right decision at the right time. Punching through the log-jam that previously stalled action can inspire and encourage people. Dealing effectively with a tough issue early on mobilizes the spirit of people and encourages them to take action on their issues as well.

STRATEGY 5 - CAUTION: The wise leader also exercises caution regarding words and actions that may send the wrong message or create unnecessary fear. Some tough decisions require significant confidence building before they can be acted upon. Some “sacred cows,” however, need to be made into hamburger – but not necessarily within The First 100 Days! Knowing when to act and when to hold off often separates the good leaders from the great leaders.

STRATEGY 6 - COMMITMENT: Top leaders have two primary functions: 1) creating a compelling vision, and 2) converting that vision into reality. The First 100 Days provides a great opportunity to engage people in the process of recommitting to a shared vision and a common mission. Tapping into the hearts and souls of people will assist in moving from compliance to commitment while lifting spirits. The new leader can honor current strengths and talents while stimulating possibility thinking and building commitment to the next phase of development.

STRATEGY 7 - CONFIDENCE: A change of leadership can often feed into the fears of people. If the organization has experienced a stormy past, confidence in leaders might well be strained. A new leader can take positive, decisive steps in building rapport and confidence during The First 100 Days, especially by being highly visible and accessible to a broad range of key stakeholders.

STRATEGY 8 - CARING: The wise leader knows that linking the bottom line with the human element enables an organization to prosper in the long-run. Being firm, yet fair, tough, yet tender, trusting, yet trustworthy, committed,

yet compassionate go a long way in building a team that cares enough to do great work. Role modeling these principled behaviors converts concepts into reality.

STRATEGY 9 - CAPACITY: Results count, and leaders are expected to achieve and sustain great results through talented people. Increasing individual, team, and organizational capacity can be effectively demonstrated during The First 100 Days. Identifying and utilizing talent, regardless of the “stars or stripes” they have on their sleeves, demonstrates your commitment to excellence and sends a signal that performance counts and that you seek to match talent with organizational targets and goals.

STRATEGY 10 - CUSTOMERS: Effective leaders focus on two key customers: internal and external. A new leader can send a powerful message to the entire organization that both customers count – and that all actions will lead to creating a highly productive culture that delights its customers and engages its employees.

The First 100 days provides a timely and uniquely significant opportunity to build a spirit of partnership, provide clarity of direction, facilitate open communication, and build confidence in leadership. To load your First 100 Days for success, you will likely benefit by working with an executive coach to assist in:

- Developing a First 100 Days action plan,
- Building a spirit of partnership, trust, and open communication with key stakeholder groups, including board members, executive staff, employees, corporate office, community groups, and key customers,

- Identifying symbolic issues that can be resolved or actions to take in the short run that will create a highly visible “home run” to both inspire confidence and create a positive mindset that “we are on the move.”
- Taking care of yourself during the high demands of The First 100 Days – getting the job done while still maintaining a personal life,
- Building long-term strategies for development of the organization, teams, and individuals, and
- Creating a results-oriented culture that effectively addresses bottom-line and human element needs.

*“Profit is the applause you get
for taking care of your customers and
creating a motivating environment for staff.”*

Ken Blanchard

As you enter into this next chapter of your career, I encourage you to create “deliberate success” through careful planning and implementation of those highly influential First 100 Days. The strategies explored in this article will assist in shaping positive outcomes – both initially and in the long run.

*“The best way to predict your future
is to create it.”*

Stephen Covey

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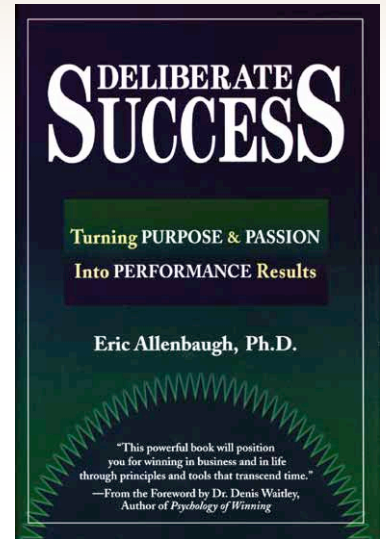
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