

5 tips for executives in new leadership roles

Practical advice for new leaders to quickly create key alliances, devise an effective communication plan and overcome resistance to change.

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When executives take on new leadership positions, their ability to be effective is assumed. That is why they are appointed in the first place. But competence alone is not enough for optimal results. Thriving in a new managerial role requires setting the stage for success, winning over key colleagues, communicating according to a plan and listening to those affected by the change.

This is advice from IESE Prof. [Guido Stein](#) and consultant David García, authors of the technical note, "[Practical Guide to Settling Into a New Executive Position](#)." The note offers the following tips for taking on a new professional responsibility.

1. Make your presence felt

First, it is important to set the stage and announce your arrival in a new role. A good way to mark that there is already a change afoot is to customize your new office with photos, books or paintings.

It is also vital to get to know colleagues and subordinates. Say hello and use chance encounters to chat briefly and casually with those affected by the change in management.

Furthermore, don't hesitate to set the agenda for the first week. This allows you to show what is going to get done and how. Organize meetings within and outside the office and visits to clients, suppliers and other key stakeholders.

2. Plan your communication

Most likely, the people you work with will be largely unaware of your plans at the outset, so they will be grateful if you inform them. With that in mind, analyze the structure of your organization and develop a communication plan with tailor-made messages for each audience, to be delivered through the most appropriate channel for each case.

One common mistake is to focus communication efforts only on your inner circle of colleagues while informing the rest of the organization with an official memo. While the blanket memo might seem like a quick and easy method to communicate, there is no guarantee that your message will be received or assimilated by all those affected.

According to Stein and García, one of the best strategies for reaching those most resistant to change is to send them concise and persuasive messages explaining a change's motives and benefits.

3. Listen to people

Paying attention to others will allow you to stay abreast of what's happening, how colleagues are adapting to the change and if they are accepting it.

Listening will give you a sense of the general sentiment that pervades the company as well as specific experiences, expectations and criticisms of your changes. You want to hear from those affected by your arrival and gauge what they believe you intend to do and how they perceive what you are doing.

Gauging criticisms, both explicit and implicit ones, can even help you reassess your communication plan if any blind spots are detected.

To collect this information, it is important to develop a network of contacts and alliances with people from the different interest groups in the company. Is advisable to have at least two contacts in each interest group to be able to corroborate the information you receive.

4. Be a team player

By this point in your career, you know you can't go it alone. To make needed changes, recruit different points of view and more hands on deck.

Finding reliable collaborators will help you tackle your new role and make changes. Seek out

those who will help you execute your strategy and help you discern what works and what doesn't so you can adapt as appropriate.

Don't make the mistake of changing things for the sake of change. Figure out what needs fixing and try to make the appropriate changes without interrupting the flow of the organization. The authors of this technical note also warn that replacing key people may have a negative impact in the medium term, since their knowledge of the business and its organizational structure is lost. "Transformations are never neutral: they either add or take away," they write.

5. Overcome resistance

Once the process of change is underway, it will be necessary to deal with those who do not meet the established objectives. To do this, keep in mind the following recommendations:

- **Face problems head-on and be resolute.** Avoid threats and try to understand what is blocking someone from performing up to your standards. Remember that the longer it takes to solve problems, the harder it will be for you.
- **Spare no effort in managing unease.** Repeatedly explain why things must change, be sensitive to what is causing unease among those affected by the change and help them find alternatives to address their problems.
- **Look for support from above.** Your superiors can help reinforce your message, since they chose to appoint you precisely because they expect certain results from your office. However, be sure not to overdo it with your requests; this recourse is limited in supply.

While no two processes of settling into a position are ever precisely the same, just as no two people ever are, the recommendations of Stein and García can help executives confront the common problems encountered in a new role to optimize their effectiveness.

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