Helping a new hire optimize their first 100 days in position

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How you can help a new hire better approach their first 100 days

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Introduction

You hired them. Now your reputation is at stake!

The first 100 days of employment within any business represents a golden opportunity for a new recruit to make a positive impact, and cement their place in the organization and build a platform for ongoing success. By day 101, they could be sitting on top of the world.

Alternatively, in those first 100 days, they could relegate their future career with the organization to 'catch-up' mode. Even worse, some people will manage to kill their future prospects with an organization even before they get their seats warm.
And if you were responsible for the hire and you got it wrong or made a bad choice, your career will nosedive as a result.

It's in your own interest to ensure your new recruit has every opportunity and the best advice on how to make the most of his or her new role.

Some things in a new hire's overall to-do list will be more important than others, but by the end of the first week, they should have a plan in place for the first 100 days that either captures all of the following elements or allows them to cross any of them off for a well-founded reason.

In this article, we outline what's considered best practice – derived from the original research sourced from business leaders, management & leadership trainers and performance & career coaches.

In addition, we have included an addendum for those new hires assuming sales leadership and senior sales roles in which performance can be more clearly identified – and some additional insight to maximise the chances of getting off to a successful start and avoid placing themselves at early risk.

This white paper is a comprehensive guide to the opportunities and pitfalls they will face and how to cope with them. It will be beneficial both to the new hire themselves as well as person into whom they report.

Presenting themselves - first impressions count

You are about to be introduced to more people than you can possibly remember The new recruit is about to be introduced to more people than they can possibly remember the names of — colleagues (higher, lower and peers within the structure), team members, subordinates, internal customers, potential friends, future allies, possible critics and opponents, competition for promotion, supporters, external partners and clients.

The first impression a new recruit makes will pass around the building and from one office to another a lot quicker than they will. Accurate or inaccurate, positive and negative, their picture can be painted oh so many times, and embedded into people's minds before they have had a chance to eyeball them and shake hands. It may only be personal perspective rather than the reality but perception counts!

They can then make the critical decisions around, who they want or need as an ally, who is useful, who isn't, who is important in the chains of which they are a part, whose word counts, and who are the key decision makers, etc.

The new recruit must consider how others perceive them. At senior exec levels they need to be aware of their personal branding — "brand you". They must dress to impress: they need to look the part. Do they know what the acceptable dress code is? What observations can they draw from people they saw whilst interviewing with the company? If they don't know, they should play it safe and be conventional (neutral), they can move style-wise when they are familiar.

The recruit should prepare for meeting and greeting. They need to fit in, they need to belong apart from being a trait of our personal make-up to seek affiliation and to feel wanted, they can only successfully build that all important internal network when they are really inside the organization.

Personal branding is more than dress code. So best prepare some messages in advance which may help best position you.....

"Prepare an elevator pitch about your new role and previous experience. What skills and experience do you bring to the company?

This can help with creating the right impression. But keep it brief, no waffle and should be less than 30 seconds"

Building a network

The people who are responsible for a new recruit's appointment are likely to be closely involved with them in the first few days. They will naturally be looking for confirmation that they have made the right choice. The more a recruit can say and do that meets senior execs expectations, and gives them confidence in having made the right appointment, the more relaxed they will be in their dealings with that recruit.

The more the recruit knows about the organization before they go in, the more they will be able to engage with their new colleagues. Being introduced to a new colleague and saying, "Ah Sam, am I right to assume that you will be doing the procurement for XYZ project?" is a far better ice-breaker than asking how long Sam has been with the Company.

Plan introductions! A recruit should be smart about how they engage conversations with key stakeholders.

When leading key initiatives, you should invest time becoming familiar with each stakeholder and their issues. Each person will have a different starting point, may have their own roadmaps to consider – uncovering their thoughts and situation will help make sure they are more fully engaged.

If a new colleague is going to be crucial to your team, getting them on-side with a comment such as, "Ali, I am looking forward to sitting down with you to talk about your ideas for the new budgeting process", or "Ali, I would be really interested in seeing your evaluation of the ABC proposal", is much more engaging than some banal generality. It also sets a tone for the working attitude — "let's get things done". The person walking a recruit round for introductions, probably their own manager, is also more likely to be impressed. It's all in the preparation.

Over the first few weeks, there will be people internally that a recruit needs to engage fully with, whether they be their boss / superiors, team members / peer groups, internal customers, sources of important information or key operational interfaces.

As they build their understanding of their own role and objectives, the significance to their successful achievement should become evident, so they should make tactical decisions about how to win stakeholders over to provide the core of their network.

Like the recruit, they are driven by their personality traits, values, motivation, competencies, etc. and will perform to their strengths.

If managerial accountability sits with the recruit, the extent they will succeed with their agenda can be hugely impacted by the team.

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Investing in some analysis of these people and trying to get a level of understanding will inform the recruit's judgements and decision making.

All the while others will be doing their own assessment of the recruit. Their level of self-awareness will be crucial in getting things right, because, whether they like it or not, they are under a microscope.

Externally there will be a broader eco-system with which they will have to interact, such as partnering organizations and clients who they will need to engage with early in the game. However, they need to be in a position of knowledge before they engage with them. The recruit needs to be clear about the nature of the business relationship – insofar as they can establish what these contacts need from them and what they will need from the recruit.

When the recruit knows what he or she needs to achieve, they can then have a conversation with external stakeholders where any move beyond passing pleasantries would see them in an informed position, rather than caught flat-footed.

For those people whose role on behalf of the organization will have a significant external perspective, such as sales, getting to grips with their territory must feature high on the recruit's 100 day plan. For the Project Manager in a Joint Venture or partnering arrangement, understanding the commercial and contractual arrangements in place is as vital as appreciating the informal workings of the joint organization.

It is very easy for a recruit to go on a whirlwind tour of everyone that they will be dealing with but it is far better to have the introductory conversation when they are at least fundamentally equipped with an understanding of the key nature of the business relationship and any issues that exist.
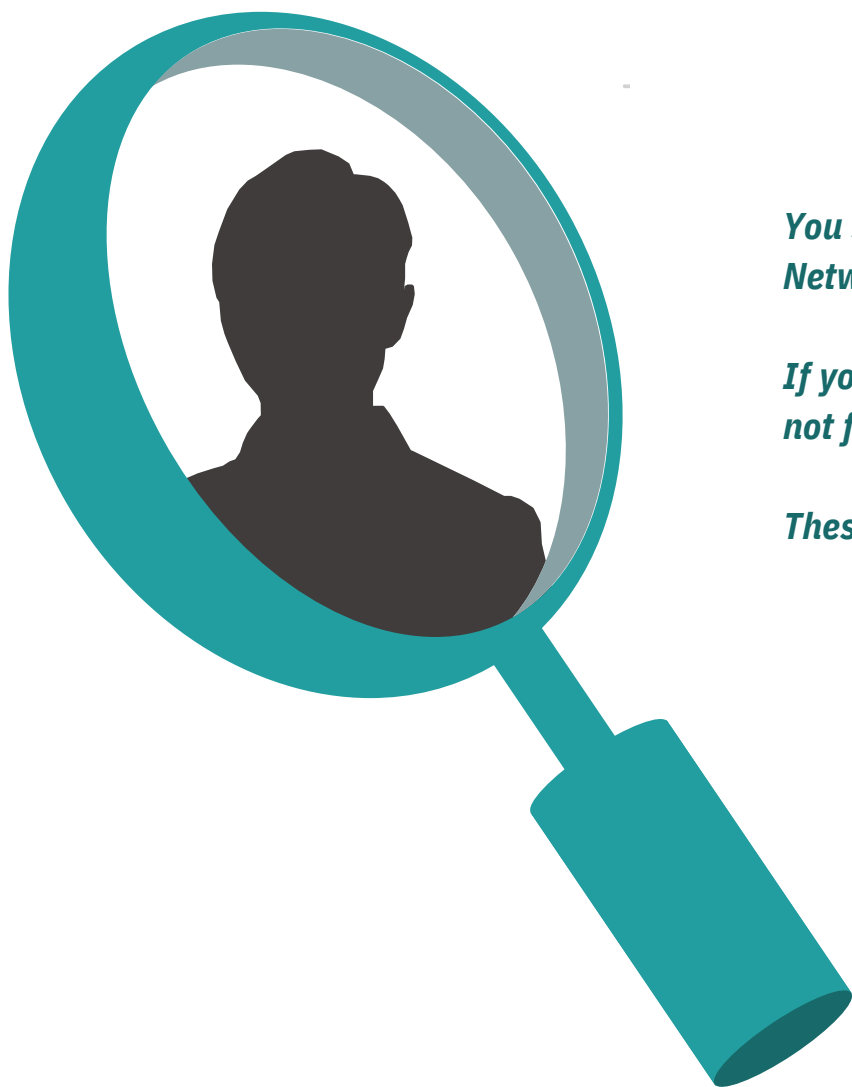
You should make networking a priority. It should be an ongoing activity. Networking done properly will empower you to succeed.

If you fail to network or be properly aligned – you are likely to be seen as not fitting in, and you will be exposed to being exited from the business.

These points are key, for people in senior roles, and people in BIG firms.

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Presenting yourself – your social media brand

Expect people to check you out on-line before meeting you and on an ongoing basis – this may even be on an unplanned basis i.e. they are browsing someone else's profile and see yours.

Your digital footprint will be determined by your presence on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Google Search and others. And while a professional profile which presents you in a positive light represents a huge advantage, the opposite is also true.

Who's going to be inclined to browse at your digital footprint? Your superiors, subordinates, customers, suppliers, shareholders and stakeholders in your business, not forgetting head-hunters, HR / recruitment professionals or investors who may offer a life-changing opening or a lifeline.

Depending on your employers' line of business, your seniority and role type, the following may apply to you to a greater or lesser extent:

Don't forget to properly update social network profiles and remove any traces of previous employer's messaging. Consider starting a new Twitter account or delete the old messaging.

If the company has specific guidelines, you should get acquainted with them and operate within them.

Most important is your LinkedIn profile – does it properly represent them and your company?

Does your Facebook or other social media present anything which may restrict your success or compromise you?

Google yourself – play around with a few keyword searches, using your name, employer, occupation and see what is presented to you.

Don't compromise your personal brand on other social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Take care of the photos and comments you post – you don't want to be irresponsible. A professional, friendly and responsible Facebook can help position you well alternatively of course you may wish to make your Facebook a private rather than public one.

Meeting expectations

At interview, it is most likely that a recruit will have gleaned some perspective of the expectations of the organization for the role, both generalities and some key areas of focus.

The generalities may be found in the more day-to-day aspects of the role that typically would be found in a job description.

There will also be the more transformational expectations of the business that often form the big challenges of the role.

However, it is essential that the recruit establishes the real focus of the role. What is said or inferred at interview and the expectation that is created on either side can actually result in a lack of congruence when these things are discussed in detail. Such expectations need to be defined so they have a clear picture of what lies before them and what needs to be achieved. The key player in this will be their immediate manager.

It is important that a recruit's personal objectives and targets are defined and agreed, early.

However, establishing SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound) requires an informed position for the recruit and his or her manager, which may take some time and a number of meetings.

Objectives for all employees generally sit within a company timetable for the performance management process, so the recruit may very well be starting his or her new role a long way into that defined period.

That needs to be taken into account in developing their personal objectives and in any contribution to defined team targets.

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Setting personal objectives and development plans

Within a recruit's first week, they should have the first meeting to discuss their role and the business expectations they will face.

They should agree some principles around the areas where their key objectives need to be so that their development and definition can begin.

They should aim to have them agreed within the first month but should not finalise them until they are sufficiently informed from their time within the organization to make them SMART and to know that they meet with the wider organization objectives.

SMART	Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time bound

Their impact should be meaningful and visible to those that matter within the business so that the recruit is seen and acknowledged as a high performer within the bigger picture. If they have set the hurdles too low, what at face value may look like a great performance will do their credibility no favours — and that credibility is necessary to underpin their career advancement within the organization. Agreeing unrealistic targets will just set them up for a fall. That is why the whole exercise needs time and energy devoted to it.

Let us stay on the subject of personal objectives, as these will undoubtedly be used to measure a recruit's success and future potential, and also bring their personal development into the picture.

Regardless of a recruit's role within the business, they should take a commercial perspective of the value they will add to the business. If they can't articulate the difference they will make to the bottom-line, regardless of whether they are operational or in an enabling function, then they will not make an impact on the organization, no matter how much endeavour the activity requires.

The fact of the matter is also that their personal objectives should stretch them in terms of performance, and help them develop and grow as an individual and as a player in the organization. They should be clear about the personal development required and build it into a plan.

More and more organizations also measure new hires not just on what they achieve but take account of how they achieve it, so recruits should be clear about the cultural influences within the organization — understand how they play the game and ensure they play by company rules.

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Ten principal guidelines for "C" level executive leaders / senior managers

The people who appointed the recruit, the exec team or the board, will be looking for them to produce results and once beyond the honeymoon period they'll be looking for those results.

They will be looking for a meaningful contribution. In the early days the recruit will have cost them time and money and they will need to determine what their break-even point is (consider impact / outcomes and timescales) and move beyond this, to become a significant net contributor.

1. New hires should not assume that their interpretation of what is expected of them is correct.

Immediately on starting a recruit should clarify their purpose with the stakeholders and business owners by making a succinct list of objectives and an action plan. They should remain in close contact with the stakeholders to ensure clarity over goals and expectations. Robert Tearle, Director at Robert Tearle Consulting, who has 20 years head-hunting experience into "C" level positions worldwide, says:

"If recruits ask bosses and employees what is expected of the job holder, all too often they will get different answers. They should focus on right issues from the outset before they've missed their chance to excel and before it's too late."

2. The most important thing (from an executive point of view) is to assess what needs to be done to achieve the corporate objectives for which a recruit has been hired.

Recruits should consider the following:
- What are the critical financial objectives to be realised?
- Is the current strategy correct and effective?
- How can they close the gap on any shortfalls?
  - Do they have the right people — who do they need to retain or replace?
- What changes do they need to push through and why?
  - If they do not set their agenda here in the first 3 to 6 months, they may end up dancing to somebody else's tune and this could lead to failure.

3. Recruits should connect officially or unofficially with their predecessor to gain insight.

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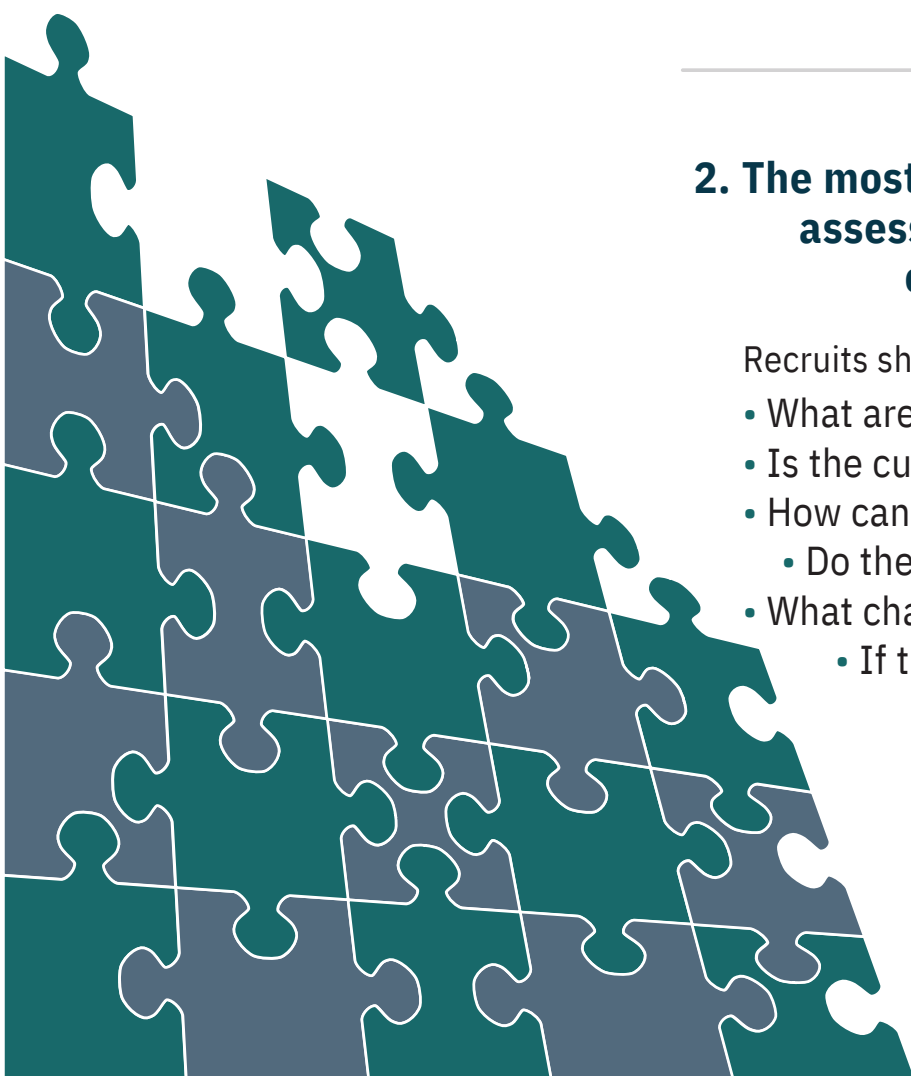
To get off to the best possible start, the ideal for the new hire is to start planning their approach to the role in advance of their start date. At senior levels it is not unusual for them to have discussions in person and or on the phone with their boss/s prior to officially commencing in the position.
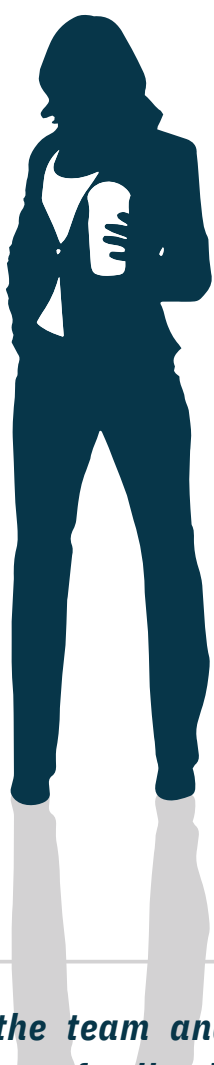
4. Recruits should meet the management team as a group and individually and look for any common themes.

— says Stephen Branley, Founder, Branley Consulting.

• They should try to get the team on board by sharing information about themselves with the team, and telling the team how they like to manage.

• Then they should meet people individually to find out what they like and dislike about their jobs as well as finding out ways they think the business can be run better — establish any common themes.

• Identify your key stakeholders for success and start to build strong relationships with them.

5. Recruits should ask for "state of the nation" presentations from their management team.

They should ask the team to list their top 5 business issues and to propose solutions to these. They should try to synchronise objectives in terms of short term goals i.e. 30, 60 and 100 days, and discuss 1, 2 and 3 year business plans with the senior leadership team.

6. They should stop the practices that are not working and carry on with those that are. And initiate new practices to fill any gaps.

7. Recruits should look for quick wins with maximum business impact.

They should start considering what major changes could have a transformative effect — but be careful to avoid jumping to conclusions too soon on big issues. They should consider the McKinsey way - a deep root cause analysis underpins their approach to projects and re-engineering. They should make sure they are addressing the right issues.

8. Recruits should synergize the team and with the team.

They should build a culture of collaboration and develop lines of communication. Take plenty of time to listen and connect with the team and staff.

They should empower their team and create opportunities for others to lead – distributed leadership can be a wonderful thing. At executive management level the decision that they make affects people around them so it's important that they let others around them know that they care. Recruits should not alienate themselves nor get fired because they've failed to fit in.

Synergize the team and with the team. Set up feedback loops so emphasise that listening is a continuous process and not just something that you do once.

9. Recruits should meet their top 5 customers or business partners.

10. Mind the gap.

It's not unusual for those changing their environment to bring with them perceptions which are incorrect, or out-dated. There's a difference between similar and same. Recruits should ask the people who hired them, including HR, what perceptions they may need to change and what knowledge gaps they need to bridge.

Ten principal guidelines for Sales leaders / Sales managers in their first 100 days

1. Recruits should not assume that their interpretation of what is expected of them is correct.

Immediately on starting they should clarify their purpose with the stakeholders and business owners by making a succinct list of objectives and an action plan. They should remain in close contact with the stakeholders to ensure clarity over goals and expectations. Robert Tearle, Director at Robert Tearle Consulting, who has 20 years head-hunting experience into "C" level positions worldwide, says:

"If a new hire asks bosses and employees what is expected of the job holder, all too often they get different answers. They should focus on right issues from the outset before they've missed your chance to excel and before it's too late."

2. Recruits should not get distracted – it's all about revenue.

100 days of focus on deals will not be wasted; nothing sets out their expectations to their sales people more clearly than deal and pipeline scrutiny – says Jim Close, SVP of Software AG.

3. They should establish what needs to happen to hit the targets.

4. Put themselves out there!

New hires should get out and meet customers with salespeople to develop better customer insight and understanding of their sales team members.

5. Is there a winning formula and if so, is it being repeated?

If not, the new hire should put it into action. Whilst doing this, they should go in with open eyes and not jump to conclusions. What they are being told, or what they think is happening, may not be 100% correct. Too often plans are built on the wrong assumptions. They should identify their SWOT situation.

Revered management consultants McKinsey always dig deep, right to the root cause, to make sure actions are taken on the right foundations. In start-up mode recruits should focus on actions to drive the numbers and keep their eyes open.

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6. New hires need to establish who are the winners and losers on the team.

Which salespeople on the team are the real contributors and who's not pulling their weight? They should determine who can be turned around and who cannot and formulate a plan to remove dead weight fast!

Who are the "A" players (top 20%), who are the "B" players (majority) and who are the "C" players (bottom 10%).

When determining who the good people are and those who are not — they need to seek broad opinions.

Some poor people may have got lucky and, conversely, unlucky ones may be those with the best potential. Seeking broad views (inside & outside of their dept.), may help them identify how they can get the best out of their team and develop a process to make them and the business perform better.

7. By the end of their first 100 days, recruits should be able to understand the whole picture.

8. They need to look at current operations.

9. And ask a lot of questions within the group.

They should review account plans for all major customers and new business activity. let people know what they are thinking, and most importantly, ask staff what they would like to see improved. The recruit's curiosity should extend beyond sales. They should talk to heads and others in aligned business units, to find out what they see as external and internal issues – and consider SWOT analysis.

10. Mind the gap.

It's not unusual for those changing their environment to bring with them perceptions which are incorrect, or out-dated. There's a difference between similar and same. Recruits need to ask the people who hired them, including HR, what perceptions they may need to change and what knowledge gaps they need to bridge.

NB We have a specific white paper which outlines what is considered best practice specifically for senior salespeople approaching their first 100 days. If you would like a copy, get in touch.