

BOARD ADVISORY LLC

“PAVE” the Way to Transition Success

We've been involved in Transition Coaching more than ever before because of the importance rightfully being placed on improving the assimilation of new leaders into organizations. In recent years, the failure rate of transitioning leaders (whether external hires or internal promotions) has been surprisingly and unacceptably high—anywhere from 30%-60%, depending on who's research and metric you're using. And the cost of a mistake at senior levels typically runs 10-15X salary. Indeed, Boards and Executive Teams are “owning” this crucial challenge, as they should.

Executive transitions are complex affairs, so we try to simplify things with a few basic concepts and a guiding framework. The foundational concepts are (a) transition success is a function of followership; (b) followership stems from trust, and (c) trust comes from two types of credibility—professional credibility and personal credibility. Professional credibility means that people will trust and therefore follow a leader because they believe she knows what she's doing... she has the experience, the credentials, the track record that gives others confidence that they will be led to the right place. Personal credibility means that people will trust and therefore follow a leader because he cares about me... he behaves in a manner that gives me confidence that I matter and will be led in the right way. In the transition window, the leader can take steps that are primarily transactional or activity-based to build professional credibility, and steps that are primarily relational or behaviorally-based to build personal credibility.

Furthermore, transition steps can be targeted to four (4) primary “targets”—Boss, Team, Colleagues and Self. Most transitioning leaders pay attention the first two, at the expense and peril of the second two. But all four need concerted attention. The boss tends to believe they've solved a big organizational problem when the new leader takes the reins, so they turn their attention elsewhere. That's why they're paying them the big bucks, right? Compounding that erroneous assumption is that the new leader wants to prove her independence. But if the new leader and the boss aren't fully lock-step not only on exactly how success is defined in the leader's role, but also how the two of them will operate, with frequent check-points on both, the new leader is driving this change blind-folded at best.

The team dynamic could be the most intense. After all, the new leader landed in their lap, and possibly in the role a few of them wanted and thought they deserved. While making quick change in this space is tempting, due diligence and patience could be what's most needed. The new leader will only be as good as his team, so getting this right is paramount to a successful transition.

As alluded to above, many transitioning executives are vertically oriented, paying attention to the boss and taking care of the team. Yet lateral and diagonal relationships in the rest of the organization could well be the most important of all, since multi-faceted support is required in today's complex organizations, and lack thereof can torpedo things fast. Besides, the new leader's peers are the bearers of the current culture, which often has a strong immune system and thus by design rejects foreign bodies. Deliberation and considerable finesse is often required to navigate this minefield.

Last but by no means least is oneself, as neglect here can be an easy and very costly mistake. If the new leader is not at the top of her game—mentally, emotionally, and physically—her odds of failure increase exponentially. Conversely, attention to self will ensure the new leader has the sharpness, stamina and fortitude to effectively lead potentially the biggest challenge of her career through to fruition.

Prime yourself.
Align with your boss.
Vector your team.
Engage the organization.

The adjacent acronym and action matrix is one way to be mindful and purposeful in the transition window.

Executive Transition Matrix

		ACTIONS	
		Transactional (activity based) <i>Professional Credibility</i>	Relational (behaviorally based) <i>Personal Credibility</i>
TARGET			
Self	What you do with Self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Wellness • Coach and/or Mentor • Other 	How you conduct Self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity • Authenticity • Other 	
Manager	What you do with your Boss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scorecard • Work Plan • Other 	How you align with your Boss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Accountability • Other 	
Team	What you do with the Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assimilation • Talent Review • Other 	How you affect the Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating Others • Building Talent • Other 	
Organization	What you do Organizationally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Stakeholder Input • Other 	How you influence Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Relationship Building • Other 	

We find that being deliberate in this manner can help transitioning leaders bolster credibility, build trust, and gain the followership required for a successful transition.

- Kevin R. Hummel, Ph.D.

Kevin Hummel works with a number of Board Advisory clients, across a variety of industries, on executive coaching and leadership development issues. Dr. Hummel's bio is available at <http://www.board-advisory.com/team.php>. If you have any question or comments on this article, or want to speak with Kevin about any executive coaching, performance, or succession issue, he can be reached at Kevin@boardadv.com, or at (954) 783-2585.
