FIRST 90 DAYS: SUCCESS FOR HR LEADER

Key considerations to help you succeed in your new role
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THE FIRST 90 DAYS

Got a promotion? Landed a new gig at a different company? The first 90 days in this position can mean the difference between success and failure - not only in your new job but for your career as a whole.

Why are the first 90 days so important?

The first 90 days in a job are essential for establishing yourself and impressing your manager and colleagues. During this period, those around you will form opinions about you. These first impressions are difficult to change later down the line, so you definitely want to make a good one.

You want to be perceived as polished and professional and you want your new boss, company, colleagues and subordinates to be absolutely certain that they made the right decision to hire you.

Planning for your first 90 days on the job will allow you to hit the ground running. Rather than “sink or swim”, strategic and efficient planning will see you “survive and thrive” in your new role.

Approaching the first 90 days – insights for the forthcoming transition

Now that you have been hired, your first 90 days in your new role is fast approaching. How can you be assured of a successful and accelerated transition?

At Kelly, we believe that a solid and informed foundation - based on the successes and failures of others in your field - is essential.

Research shows that transition failure is not rooted in an individual but is rather a result of a detrimental interaction between an individual and their strengths or susceptibilities with an opportunity and the pitfall-riddled status quo.

With this in mind, it is advisable to systematically plan and utilise organised methods to decrease your chances of failing and make the transition a quick and easy one.

What is the foundation for new job success?

To be successful in your transition, you need to know what exactly the foundation of the first 90 Days is.
Kelly shares the below foundation components:

- **Promote yourself.** While it is difficult for some of us; talking about ourselves, our experiences and our successes provides those around us (our colleagues) with the information they need to build, not only an understanding about who you are and where you come from, but also forms the backbone of their first impressions of you.

- **Accelerate your learning.** This involves identifying which skills you need to develop further, researching the required information and/or spending time with a colleague who can assist you through skills transfer activities, and seeking feedback on your progress from your boss or manager.

- **Match your strategy to the situation.** Ultimately, a great strategy is no good if it does not work ‘on the ground’. While you may have gone into your new position with a specific strategy in mind, this may need to be adapted or changed completely when you are more familiar with the environment and what is required of you.

- **Get some early wins checked off the list.** Set a few goals that are relatively easy to pin down and focus on securing these early in your first 90 days. Once you have some early wins in the bag, bigger and better things can be put into play – with the increased confidence of your team and colleagues.

- **Negotiating success.** Communication is key in many aspects of life, your professional life included. Effective communication skills can build your influence in your new position.

- **Achieving alignment.** For a company to succeed in achieving its objectives, staff need to be on the same track, working towards the same goal. A newcomer to the office, while you come with your own ideas, should align with the overall objectives of the organisation and offer new and effective ways of reaching these goals.

- **Build your team.** Coming in to work with an existing team can be difficult, they know – and are comfortable with – each other and have established their roles within the organisation. While there are sometimes obstacles to overcome, having a strong team is vital. Identify and develop the skills of existing staff and fill the gaps with new hires where necessary.

- **Create alliances.** This involves identifying a few key players within your new organisation to connect with. With their experience and relationships within the company, these alliances can assist you in understanding current focus areas and concerns.
• Don’t lose your balance. In a new role, it is vital that you don’t get carried away with a single project or focus but rather take a holistic and balanced approach.

• Accelerate everyone. By leading a team, you are a team member working towards a common goal. Growing those around you is crucial to your own success.

These components, when integrated, create momentum and make an impact - setting the stage for establishing relationships and building your credibility in the company.

**Practical steps and considerations before your first day**

Everyone wants to begin a new job on the right foot, but because you haven’t started, you don’t know which priorities or projects are critical to the organisation at this point in time. You have some idea of your duties and responsibilities in your new role but haven’t met the key players or learnt how your role impacts others in the organisation yet. These factors are all critical to formulating your plan for the first 90 days.

Initially, Kelly advises that you develop a 30-60 day learning agenda which will assist you in acquiring critical information you need to become successful in your new role.

Your learning agenda should include:

*Ask:*
- How does my boss prefer to communicate? (ie. via email / instant messaging / face-to-face)
- What are my key projects/goals within the first 90 days?
- How does my department directly or indirectly support other departments within the organisation?
- How does my department contribute to businesses goals and overarching strategy?
- What are some of the successes my department has made in the past?
- How does my role support my department / the organisation’s short- and long-term strategy?
- What quick wins will enable me to demonstrate my value to the organisation in the early stage of employment

*Action:*
- Review the company’s business / department goals and objectives
- Review your job description and organisational charts
- Schedule meetings with influential colleagues
- Learn departmental processes and systems
- Schedule recurring ‘touch base sessions’ with your team
- Ask your boss for feedback on processes and ways for you to contribute further
Once you have completed your learning agenda, you should be clear on:
• Your performance expectations, including: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), how you will be evaluated, when your performance will be reviewed and merit eligibility
• Company and department strategy, mission, goals and key initiatives
• How you can add value to your department and the organisation as a whole
• How to engage influential colleagues
• Short- and long-term goals for yourself, your department and the company
• The strategic priorities set out for your role
• Your manager’s assessment of your performance at various intervals (30 days, 60 days, 90 days)

It helps to create a template that includes your set priorities, goals, milestones, outputs and your manager’s feedback. This template is the basis of your plan and will help you stay grounded, identify wins and chart your progress on a meaningful map. Below is an example of a template that you can adapt to suit your needs.

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<tr>
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<td>• Diagnosis of the situation</td>
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<td>• Buy-in of plan for next 30 days</td>
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SLIP-UPS TO BE WARY OF IN YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Research has found that leaders who under-perform or crash in a new position often do so because they committed a dreaded, but all too common slip-up in their first 90 days.

Kelly has identified several common slip-ups that leaders are susceptible to and should avoid at all costs. Here is our list of what not to do:

• **Fail to embrace your new organisational culture**
  Company’s culture is ultimately the ‘norms’ and values of an organisation. This includes the behaviour and language of staff, the environment in which employees operate and the daily processes of the business. Coming in to a new role, this culture is already embedded in the organisation and new leaders need to be cognisant of the need for them to think, talk and act in a way which is in line with the company culture. Failure to adapt to this culture can see a leader becoming disconnected with colleagues and be side-lined from crucial information regarding what is going on within the business. Being out of ‘the loop’ in this way can cause further damage through uninformed decision making.

• **Not getting to know the people**
  While new leaders may understand the importance of getting to know the new organisation they now work for, getting to know the people within that organisation may take a back seat. The danger of isolating yourself from the rest of the staff is that you may be perceived as unapproachable and unfriendly. It also hampers your chances of establishing strategic relationships and gaining valuable information about what is going on within the business.

• **Being too presumptuous**
  With the aim of proving their value, a major slip-up a lot of leaders may be tempted to commit is being too presumptuous and believing that they have what it takes to fix any and all issues within the company. Although you may need to adopt a directive and decisive approach in your new role, other staff members can often perceive the ‘I can fix it all’ attitude negatively. Because there are often a number of factors contributing to a single ‘problem’, a quick and easy solution can be seen as addressing the surface issue in isolation while ignoring the underlying, more complex contributing factors.

• **Retaining consistently under-performing staff**
  When taking on a leadership role within a new organisation, you – naturally – inherit a team which was formed by your predecessor. While these employees have been with the company for a longer period than you have, they may not necessarily be the right fit. It is fair to give your team some time to transition and become comfortable with the recent management change, however, this transition period should not exceed six months.
While many leaders want to give existing staff the opportunity to prove themselves and the value they add, retaining consistently under-performing staff will hinder the success of your department and the organisation as a whole.

**Select your circle of advisors wisely**
As a new leader, you will have numerous employees competing for your time and attention. Some of these employees may have had some influence before you joined while others may be power-hungry, have good intentions or want to lead you on the wrong path out of jealously or resentment. When selecting a circle of internal advisors, time and effort should be put into identifying who exactly can add most value. Internal advisors should be unbiased and knowledgeable.

**Doing it all**
Just like every leader has their own style, every team has its own dynamic. While a particular approach may work for one team, it may mean failure for another. This brings us to our next common slip-up of taking on too many projects at once which sends the message that – as a leader – you expect team members to be able to handle numerous projects at one time and produce results quickly. This approach can, however, overwhelm staff – having the adverse result of everything falling apart rather than falling into place. Engaging team members on which approach works best for them and challenging them without putting too much pressure on them is advisable.

**Being unrealistic and inflexible**
Lastly, leaders need to be realistic and flexible. While certain project plans and requirements may have been disclosed when you were initially engaging to join an organisation or during your first few days, things can change quickly. For this reason, you should dedicate time to making a smooth transition and clarify your scope of work and expectations.
FIRST 90 DAYS IN A HR LEADERSHIP ROLE

As a human resources (HR) director or manager, you know that the first 90 days in a new job are crucial for putting the fundamentals of success in place, creating great first impressions with your colleagues and building relationships within your new organisation.

During this 90 day period, you will need to build up your understanding of the organisation and your role within it. To balance this with the pressure of making an impact and delivering value, you will need to work towards setting out a strategic plan for the company’s future while also developing a plan for the ‘here and now’.

Your first three months presents an opportunity for you to set expectations and demonstrate behaviour regarding your future role. This is particularly related to key activities such as strategic processes, performance improvement and defining metrics of success.

In your new role, you will be responsible for your employer’s most valuable asset, staff, ultimately contributing to the company’s growth, productivity and profitability. So what can you do to ensure that you make the most of this time?

1. Get to understand the business:
   To operate effectively, you first need to get to grips with the following:
   - The organisation’s business strategy
   - The company’s strategic and tactical objectives (written and unwritten)
   - How the organisation makes money
   - Who the organisation’s customers are and why they pay for your products / services
   - The people: stakeholders and the - formal and informal - power structures involved in running the business as well as the points of view of these individuals on how the company operates
   - The organisational culture, language, heritage and ways of doing things
   - The company’s competitors and the industry within which the business operates

2. Find out what is expected of you:
   Speak to your company’s CEO and the executive team to understand the requirements and objectives of your position - What is expected of you? What are the immediate actions you need to take?

   You should also enquire about the resources available to you, including both people and finances.
3. Build relationships:
   People often tend to focus too much on the technical aspect of their job and not enough on company politics. With this in mind, it is crucial for you to build relationships with key players early. Ask your boss, “Who should I get to know?” and invite those people to coffee or lunch to ‘pick their brains’.

   At this stage it is important to not only focus on building relationships with managers above you but also focusing horizontally, developing alliances with colleagues. It is beneficial to meet with everyone from the Chief Financial Officer to senior line managers.

   This will enable you to get a thorough understanding of goals and how certain individuals can help deliver on them. Different players within the organisation also provide varied, but valuable, insights into the business. Take time to observe the office culture and try your best to blend in.

4. Develop your credibility early:
   Use your first 90 days in your new position to establish your personal style and image. While some colleagues may logically believe that they will only judge the new HR Director or Manager once they have ‘settled in’, first impressions count. For this reason it is essential for you to pay attention to the way you dress, your demeanour, language used, style of interacting and a range of other ‘personal’ aspects of the way you act and present yourself.

   This period presents an opportunity for you to clarify the new role and clearly set out the behaviours, objectives and activities that the organisation will expect and be involved in.

5. Find out what HR work has been done:
   If possible, meet with and take counsel from your predecessor. Find out what worked for them and what didn’t. This will help you build on the past and avoid paths that have proved to be unsuccessful.

6. Understand your team and identify areas of success and concern:
   In your meetings with co-workers, encourage them to share what they believe the areas requiring improvement are as well as those that are working well.

   You should also try to understand and evaluate your team as well as their individual skills and competencies through one-on-one meetings. It is helpful to use job descriptions and established objectives in your discussions. After this, you can produce a gap analysis and identify which skills are lacking and need to be sourced.
7. Set out your priorities strategically:
Think about, prioritise and list areas within your department which you believe can be improved. When doing this, you should focus your time and HR investments on initiatives that will be both implementable (within a realistic time and budget) and have impact (make a visible difference in the business). Break down your priorities into short-, medium- and long-term actions.

8. Develop a plan of action:
When planning, start by identifying goals and from that a vision of success and road map on how to reach them. Your action plan should define the activities, resources required and timing related to each project / goal and should engage stakeholders throughout the organisation to ensure integration between business and workforce strategies.

You should also approach management to sign off and make suggestions or additions to your plan. Include outcomes that can be tracked and measured within your plan so that you can truly identify whether or not it was successful once completed.

By laying these foundations in your first 90 days, Kelly notes that not only will you be setting yourself up for success and showcasing your skills and abilities to your employer but you will also be ensuring a better working environment for the company’s employees. This, in turn, leads to organisational benefits including:

- Reduced absenteeism and staff-turnover
- Improved morale and motivation
- Increased attraction of top talent
- Increased productivity levels, customer satisfaction and profitability
- Harmony within the organisation

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FIRST 90 DAYS: SUCCESS FOR HR LEADER
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About Kelly

Kelly, a division of Kelly Group, an Adcorp Holdings Limited group of companies is South Africa’s first recruitment agency of choice for rapid permanent and contingency staffing solutions. Kelly has 46 years’ experience in the successful job-matching and placement of top candidates.

In addition to the permanent placement of professionals across multiple industries, Kelly’s specialised contingency staffing solutions include the replacement of permanent, temporary and contract workers - in line with clients staffing and capacity requirements.

With detailed understanding of each client’s business, Kelly’s expert consultants exhibit in-depth knowledge pertaining to the industry sector in which they recruit and consult. These industries include: Administrative & Office Support, Contact Centre, Engineering & Technical, Financial, HR & Procurement and ICT.

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