New Manager Tips for Success

By James Browning

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While several books offer sage advice for managers during the first 90 to 100 days of taking on a new role, many significant milestones and results will take anywhere from three to nine months to achieve—with some taking up to 12 months. The following is an excerpt from the "First Year Tactics for Success" chapter in James Browning's book, Embracing Senior Leadership (Universal Publishers, 2022). In the following excerpt, he offers insights and approaches you can take when first meeting with your staff.

The first few meetings with direct reports are especially important and need to be planned appropriately. Before meeting with your direct reports, be clear in your mind about what you hope to achieve—the purpose of the meeting and the desired outcomes.

The leaders I know suggest the two following approaches. If the initial meeting is simply "meet and greet," that is, more a social event than a business meeting, then meeting as a group is okay. Such a gathering allows the direct reports to have social interchanges with you and get a feel for who you are as a person, and vice versa. However, they did not recommend that organizational and job-specific discussions take place at such a meeting.

Why not? Likely you are inheriting your direct reports. Each direct report will have his or her own issues. They are competing for resources (budget/people) with your other direct reports. They each have a relationship history with your predecessor, other direct reports, and with the rest of the organization. They could have hidden agendas. There is a good possibility, even probability, that past history and gamesmanship will be embedded in their responses in a group setting.

If the purpose of the meeting is to discuss organizational or departmental issues, they recommend the first meeting be one-on-one.

During these meetings, listen actively and learn. This is not a time to make points; instead, it is to listen. Provide your direct reports with a standardized list of questions before meeting them. This allows you to compare responses and gain insights about each direct report.

You will gain insights into their leadership capacity. For example, do they make issues about others impeding their efforts, and hence, are they a potential whiner? Do they indicate how they take action to obtain workable solutions, and hence, might be a potential leader? Are they open, to sharing their knowledge and expertise with you or do they tend to keep that expertise close to the vest? It is critical that you stress that these one-on-ones remain confidential. The following 14 questions are offered as food for thought:

- What do you believe are the most significant challenges the organization is facing or will face?
- Why do you believe the organization is facing (or going to face) these challenges?
- What do you believe are the biggest opportunities facing us in the near and long term? (Note: This is an essential question. Many of your direct reports may be busy putting out fires and haven't taken the time to ascertain and evaluate potential opportunities. Asking this question prior to the meeting gives them some time to reflect. They may come up with an idea that could be a "quick" win.)
- What do you think of our existing strategy, and what changes should be made?
Are current initiatives and strategic objectives appropriately resourced?

How well do you think the organization is using or leveraging technology?

What are you hoping I will do?

What are you afraid I may do?

If you were me, on what would you focus your attention?

What surprised you this past year about working in your present position?

What will success look like in 12 months for your area of responsibility?

What are your mission-critical processes?

Who are the key stakeholders? Why are they important?

What has your respective department or division accomplished, and what are you proud of?

In my discussions with Peter Schlote, chief operations officer for Hensoldt (Germany), he offered two questions: "What are the five things you appreciate in the organization?" and "What are the three things you hate in the organization?"

Some follow-up questions might be: "What processes do you contribute to or control? Are there times a process is out of your control? Do the process steps add value, or are they impediments or redundant?"

The answers could give you a sharp picture of the mission-critical processes for which you are ultimately responsible and accountable.

James Browning served as director of the Navy’s worldwide leadership development programs, was founder and chief of the Library of Congress Corporate University, and was a faculty member and chairman of the Department of Strategic Leadership at the Eisenhower School in Washington, D.C. Visit his website

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