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Applied Insights from the HOK University

THE FIRST HUNDRED DAYS

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PAVE THE WAY FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND TRUST

Success or failure is primarily decided at the beginning of a new job. This applies to starting a career, moving to another company and being promoted to management positions. Interestingly, almost nobody is systematically prepared for this. In this practical newsletter, we show you what is important.

By Prof. (FH) Dr. Roman Stöger

A SUCCESSFUL START TO YOUR CAREER OR CAREER CHANGE

There are some days in life that remain permanently in your memory: starting school, your wedding day, births, and of course your first day at work. Starting a career is very different from previous phases of life. This is the first time you have real responsibility, the first time you earn your own income, and the first time you have superiors, colleagues, and customers. Every career start is a first and there is no experience to fall back on¹. What are the decisive points of orientation?

1) Get to know the business and the company

Right from the start, a plan should be made on how best to get to know the business and the company. Ideally, this starts with the customers. That is where the market services are sold and a solid performance must be provided. Unfortunately, there are more and more companies where an increasing number of employees have no connection at all with customers and the market. This is dangerous because such organizations become sluggish, slow, and self-centered. The best are characterized by the fact that they seek contact with customers and get to know the company through customer lenses, so to speak. Especially at the beginning, it is important to find out what makes the company "tick". How are decisions made? What is talked about and what is not talked about? Who can or cannot work with whom? What coalitions are there? What are the company's real strengths and weaknesses? Usually, this is not in the official mission statements, organization charts, or manuals. You have to find out for yourself and through many conversations.

¹ Torres, R. / Tollmann, P., Myths of the first 100 days, in Harvard Business Manager online, 02.07.2012.



2) Work with bosses and colleagues

It should become clear relatively quickly how cooperation with your superior works. There is no such thing as an ideal manager, there is only ever one specific boss. Some prefer to communicate frequently and briefly, others prefer to communicate rarely but at length. Some tend to be readers, that is, receptive to all forms of written communication, while others can only be addressed verbally. Some have a good structure, others are more "spontaneous". No matter what your own preferences are, as an employee you will have to adapt to my superior, and not the other way around. In concrete terms, this means clarity about assignments, feedback, reports, tasks, skills & competencies, responsibilities, and your own personal development. In principle, the same applies to colleagues. You need to find out how these people work, what their strengths and weaknesses are, what you can learn from them, who has a good working method, and so on. It should be noted that collegiality should not be confused with amicability: work colleagues do not necessarily have to be good personal friends. A trusting, professional working relationship is sufficient in most cases.

3) Identify your own strengths.

Most people do not know their strengths, or know far too little about them. In most cases, very general and non-specific characteristics are mentioned, such as "communicative" or "flexible". Your real strengths should be clear by the time you start a new job at the latest, because this is the only source of top performance. How do you discover your own strengths? Contrary to popular belief, the question is often not "What do I like doing?", but "What is easy for me?"

For example, one student often took over the written documentation in working groups during her degree program and organized the contributions of her fellow students perfectly. The strength that emerges here is structuring and writing things down. This is exactly what she can apply relatively quickly in her professional life, when taking minutes of meetings or documenting projects. Sources for identifying strengths are previous training, holiday jobs, involvement in associations, and other such experiences. These strengths should be matched with the requirements of the job and developed further. This is particularly challenging for school and university graduates because they have only ever dealt with "their peers"; people of the same age group, the same interests, and the same level of education. It is usually completely different in the first job.



4) Make a contribution to the whole and achieve something

Especially as a beginner, you should not ask yourself the questions "What do I find interesting?" or "What would I like to do?", but "What is the best way for me to contribute to the success of the company and make a difference?". This contribution to the whole is crucial. It is about quickly becoming effective independently and achieving tangible results. A good result is always measured by whether the company is moving forward or whether customer benefits are being created. This is what makes the difference. Does someone justify their position through results or is someone in the company only through positions? Is someone busy with something or are there useful results at the end of the day? Similarly, career interests are only meaningful and credible to the outside world when there are real results and trust has been built. Incidentally, it is completely normal for frustration to set in early. Those frustrations can have to do with superiors, colleagues, customers, internal processes, and more. This also shows how good someone is at dealing with these initial - perceived or actual - setbacks. It is also necessary to have such experiences for your own development. Sparring partners with whom you can talk openly and honestly about professional issues have proven their worth here.

The first hundred days are crucial for success when starting a career and moving to another company (see Fig. 1). In principle, the same issues apply to promotions, although there are additional aspects here.

Fig. 1: Core topics for the first hundred days

Career entry or career change	Promotions
1. Get to know the business and the company 2. Working with bosses and colleagues 3. Find out your own strengths 4. Making a contribution to the whole and making a difference	1. Rethinking and retraining 2. Getting to know the new management environment 3. Find the best comrades-in-arms 4. Develop a leadership program for the area of responsibility

AN EFFECTIVE START FOR PROMOTIONS

The importance of the first 100 days is particularly evident in the case of a promotion². This step upwards can either take place in the previous company or as a promoted lateral entry into another organization. In all these cases, there is experience of starting a career, but at least the first promotion is also a first.

² See especially the leadership-related tips in: Malik, F., Die ersten 100 Tage, in: malik on management 12/1995, p. 189 ff.



1) Rethink and retrain

As paradoxical as it sounds, what led to a promotion is usually different from what is required in the new management position. What many people realize, especially when they get their first promotion, is that in the past you only had to be effective, good and successful on your own. Now it's about making a team, a department, or an area effective. These are two completely different things.

An example: The best sales employee in a mechanical engineering company is promoted to "Head of Sales". What this person is no longer allowed to do is devote 100% of their time to selling. Now salespeople have to be managed, budgets worked out and personnel developed. Of course, a sales manager should spend a certain amount of time with customers, but this is no longer the main focus. Instead, the focus is on making as many sales employees as possible perform effectively. As a rule, "promotion" means new behaviors, new working methods, and new tools. The R&D employee of an automobile manufacturer will no longer have CAD programs as a tool after her promotion to development manager, but will need completely different tools, such as meeting management, budgeting, project management, etc.

2) Get to know the new management environment

One initial mistake is to make big announcements right at the beginning. The first hundred days are days of listening, getting to know the employees, customers, suppliers and, of course, getting to know the owners even better. Not to be underestimated are the management processes that have now become central tasks, such as target agreements or performance appraisals. Promotion often means moving from team member to manager. Cooperation and the relationship will therefore be different, no matter how often you swear that "nothing will change between us". Promotion also means that you will have a new superior. Here too, it is important to clarify how you would like to work together in the future, what strengths you have in common, what reporting should look like, and so on.

3) Find the best comrades-in-arms

A manager's most important assets are results, credibility, and trust. Every new manager is observed. This includes what they do, who they communicate and work with. It must be clear as quickly as possible who the best and strongest people are. Strong people are usually also strong personalities because they have a mind of their own. They are the ones who bring the best results and drive the company forward. The wrong ones are guaranteed to be the yes-men, head-nodders, whitewashers and, of course, the schemers who are good at one thing - talking badly about others. You should get rid of all of them as quickly as possible because they are a danger to the company, performance, and trust. This also shows whether someone has been promoted because they can do something or just because they know the right people.



The worst mistakes are arrogance, aloofness and, "bossy habits". They do nothing but cause damage. In most cases, this ends after one or two years and any company supervisor would be well advised to keep an eye on this.

4) Develop a leadership program for the area of responsibility

During the first hundred days, a clear assessment of the situation should be carried out and priorities set for the next one to two years. The aim is to identify the challenges and key issues for the area of responsibility and for the individual. Before the promotion, the focus was still on personal strengths. Now the focus is on the strengths of the area of responsibility as a whole and the strengths of the individuals. As a manager, you are a strengths developer and that also means having as many delegation-capable team members as possible. After one hundred days, you should have an action and personnel development plan summarizing the most important topics. It will not always be possible to achieve real, major results in the first few months, but at least initiatives should already be in place and something should have been started. This is also important because the first hundred days are usually shorter for promotions. Managers in particular are expected to be effective and "deliver" more quickly.

CONCLUSION: A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE FIRST TIME

An interesting phenomenon in our society is that there is no training for the really important issues in life, like a functioning partnership, a functioning family, a functioning retirement, a functioning professional life, or a functioning working method. Courses, certificates and exams are required for all sorts of things, but for many truly important topics you are left to your own devices. This is especially true for starting a career and for promotions. Success or failure is decided in the first hundred days. These are not difficult issues in themselves, but you should prepare for them systematically and draw up a development plan for yourself (see Fig. 2)³. Then, the first hundred days will not only be exciting, but will also lay the foundations for effectiveness and trust.

³ See Stöger, R., The toolbox for managers, Stuttgart 2016, p. 360 ff.



Summary: Application and benefits

1. Systematic examination of effective career and job entry
2. A professional start to a promotion
3. Avoidance of well-known rookie mistakes
4. Drawing up a personal development plan



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Fig. 2 Personal development plan: Example and tool

Background: A banking graduate changes companies and takes over a small team in business customer sales as a manager. The personal development plan for the first hundred days is intended to ensure an effective start.

No.	Topics	Measures	Date
1.	Customers and industries	• Getting to know the most important key accounts: personal introduction, customer history. • Updating the development strategy for business customers	30.09.
2.	Personal exchange with managers and employees	• Personal meeting of all managers and key employees (informal, e.g. lunch.) • Regular individual appointments with direct employees (from 30.06.) • Weekly jour fixe with your own superior (from now on) and the most important interface managers (in the first two months)	31.12.
3.	(Management) systems	• Mastering the sales software and all internal systems • Getting to know the management processes and systems (target agreement, appraisal interview, budgeting.)	31.08.
4.	Sparring and personal exchange	• Regular discussions with your personal sparring partner • Usage of the bank's internal exchange network and personnel development	31.12.
5.		•	