



Successful Onboarding: Hitting the ground running

Taking on the role of CEO? Why your first 100 days are the most important!

CONSIDER your first 100 days a trial period. It's even possible, some would argue that if you perform poorly in the first 100 days, the game is already up. The gravity of your responsibility is inarguable. Successful onboarding can greatly improve your odds of getting through this make-or-break time. The quality of onboarding support you receive very much depends on the hiring company and its board. Ideally, from the moment you're hired, they would commence a formal executive onboarding programme, in close collaboration with you, focused on your understanding of the company and its challenges.

Preparation is key

As a new CEO, you should prepare yourself for the possibility of resistance in the environment. Some of your new colleagues will likely find it anxiety triggering to acknowledge that the future could hold major modifications of existing strategies and processes.

Many employees and even top executives find it difficult to accept a new leader and believe in new authority, especially if employee tenure is high.

It is your job as CEO to win your management team and employees over and earn their trust by providing evidence that you are capable of taking on this role. The sooner you understand the corporate culture, the faster you will become an accepted member, which will allow you to drive necessary and important changes.

This depends to a great extent on onboarding. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to set the stage for onboarding success:

1. **Expectations** - Balance expectations with the chairman of the board (this can be initiated during the recruitment phase).
2. **Analyze** - Initiate a meticulous analysis of the company's strategy.
3. **Visibility** - Make yourself visible internally and externally. Be curious and get to know your company and customers in depth.
4. **Engagement** - Start evaluating and setting up your management team.
5. **Transparency** - Make sure all of your communication is clear and unambiguous.

The board and hiring organisation have obligations too

Taking ownership of your role in on-boarding is very important, however, the responsibility is not solely on your shoulders. The hiring company has a big stake in making the recruitment successful. Often, I find the hiring company is at fault for a failed onboarding.

Poor planning on the part of the company prior to the new CEO's appointment, unreasonable expectations, and ambiguous guidelines for the content of the position can lead to disastrous outcomes for the new CEO, who often cannot fix the problems caused by others within a short time frame. Onboarding is a difficult process and it takes time, but the investment made will definitely pay off.

It is vital to have support from the board, the management team, and employees at all levels of the organisation. Without optimal planning for the transition, the newcomer will find it exceedingly difficult to gain support for their decisions and lay the groundwork for change.

A message to hiring organisations, particularly with external hires:

In order to make the transition from one CEO to another as smooth and effective as possible, every part of the corporation must be well equipped and prepared to be led by a new and unknown person, who may have entirely different views on the direction of the organisation. Following the recruitment process, with all of the time and expense that entails, executive onboarding is a strategic tool of upmost importance.

It is easy to underestimate the importance of this process and overlook the need for on-boarding in a hectic, fast-changing environment. But this is a grave mistake, made all the more so by the substantial resources that go into hiring the right candidate. Rather, the organisation should make a concerted effort to facilitate the transition and assimilate the newly appointed executive by wholeheartedly supporting his or her process of getting to know the company.

Transparent expectations

For your onboarding process to be successful as a new CEO, it is important to ensure that the board clearly defines, in writing, directions on the content and parameters of the position. When you take the top job in the firm, your relationship and cooperation with the board may be redefined from what existed previously, and new roles might be created.

In relation to the board, expectations must be aligned to avoid future conflicts or uncertainty about the role's prerequisite responsibilities and competencies, as well as the nature and timing of new strategies. This will ensure you know exactly what is expected as the company's new CEO. The hiring company must make an effort to introduce you to the company in the best possible way.

The first 100 days is a crucial time to begin formulating new goals and opportunities you have for the future of the company. You must come well prepared, communicate expectations clearly, arrange and conduct meetings to get to know the company, and dedicate all the time needed to hit the ground running in your new role.



Food For Thought is a series highlighting discussions about candidates, organizations, assessments and boards. Kenneth V. Mortensen is Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Boyden Denmark. He developed a well-deserved reputation as being very client and candidate driven, with a passion for delivery and results. His success is grounded in his fundamental belief in the correlation between human behaviour and financial performance.

Kenneth V. Mortensen, Managing Partner

Copenhagen, Denmark | T: +45 20 44 42 42 E: kvm@boyden.dk