

Do You Need A Coach?

The Business Case: Why do 40% of new leaders fail?

Most executives think it is important to "go it alone" due to their belief in the myth of individualism; they hold tightly to the idea that everyone succeeds or fails on the basis of individual efforts and abilities. This assumption is so powerful that when an alternative view is suggested (that success depends on our relationships with others as much as it does on us) the usual reaction is denial. Denial of the role of relationships in the executive's success preserves the self-enhancing illusion that we are masters of our own fates and, therefore, deserving of all the credit for our successes.

The myth of individualism can negatively affect our chances for success. Consider that four out of ten newly promoted managers and executives fail within 18 months of starting new jobs, according to research by Manchester, Inc, a leadership development firm in Bala Cynwyd, PA. "Failing" includes being terminated for performance, performing significantly below expectations or voluntarily resigning from the new position. When newly recruited, the following types of executives experienced the highest failure rates within the first 18 months: senior-level executives (39%), sales executives (30%), marketing executives (25%), and operations executives (23%).

Here are the major reasons for failure in the new job:

- They fail to establish a cultural fit.....75%
- They fail to build teamwork with staff and peers.....52%
- They are unclear about what their bosses expect.....33%
- They don't have the required internal political savvy.....25%
- There's no process to assimilate executives into the firm.....22%

During the second half of 1999, when statistics began to be compiled, nearly 270 chief executives were forced to leave their companies or simply resigned, according to Challenger, Gray & Christmas, the Chicago-based outplacement firm that follows employment issues. Since then, the pace has quickened--in 2001, 929 chief executives departed and another 749 followed in 2002, according to the firm.

Leaders often fail for a few common reasons: due to unclear or outsized expectations, a failure to build partnerships with key stakeholders, a failure to learn the company, industry or the job itself fast enough, a failure to determine the process for gaining commitments from direct reports and a failure to recognize and manage the impact of change on people.

Executive on-boarding or assimilation coaching of the newly recruited or promoted executive can turn around this high rate of failure.

New job. New employer. And new headaches when staffers resist your new approaches.

More Americans will soon confront this challenge. How can you champion enough change to justify your hiring -- without rocking the boat so much that you endanger your latest gig?

Failure to strike the right balance often derails newcomers. "They push too hard, too fast and do it in a non-diplomatic way," says Ben Dattner, a New York industrial psychologist. Yet few corporate orientation programs help recruits "work through what's the best approach to get up to speed in the new job," reports Michael Watkins, a Harvard associate professor of business administration and author of the new book, "The First 90 Days."

It's up to you to manage your early days well, navigate a different business culture and win support for your game plan. For starters, make sure you understand what kind of workplace you joined. A troubled enterprise is more likely to welcome radical fixes than a successful one.

Freshly hired executives increasingly turn to an outside "on-boarding" coach. Such services can be costly. The coaching division of recruiters Korn/Ferry International typically charges a company about \$10,000 to counsel a newcomer for six weeks.

Make a pitch during the courtship for your potential employer to cover some assimilation coaching. Describe it as evidence of your commitment to get up and running fast, recommends Marti Smye, the division's president.

Alternatively, pay for the advice yourself. Judi Glova coughed up \$500 for four assimilation sessions with an executive coach during her first month last summer as a public-affairs director of Roche Pharmaceuticals in Nutley, N.J. "It gave me the confidence to feel I at least had the first steps" needed for acceptance, the 36-year-old manager remembers.

Ms. Glova learned to identify players with the power to block her ideas, for example. She spent extra time getting acquainted with them before their meetings and deliberately sat beside them during lunch. Today, those colleagues help with her requests.

---Source: [Managing Your Career](#) by Joann S. Lublin, The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 25, 2003