

A WEEK IN *Learning*

ALL ABOARD! MASTERING YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Libby Johnson, Learning and Development Manager

I come to you with solemn news: your first 90 days in any new role will determine your success. *How urgent! How unforgiving!* Yes - and yet how utterly *true*. How well you navigate situations, tools, and relationships in the first 90 days is the single best predictor of your eventual success in any transition.

Sprinting for Success

You may be asking yourself, *“what about training? Isn’t that important?”* As a Learning & Development professional, I can fill a hundred pages with why training is key to navigating a new role, successfully. Let’s take a step back. Think of transitioning into a new role as running on foot to board a moving train. A successful training program functions like the brake mechanism on that moving train. It seeks to slow the organization and its people down long enough to talk about the who, the when, and the why of the work. When you begin a new role, you may even feel it: the organization slowing down to let you aboard. The presumption is that soon you will acquire enough information and start adding value (referred to as the ‘tipping point’) and the organization can ramp back up to speed with you aboard.

Going along with our train metaphor, what if I told you there are skills you can master that allow you to sprint to meet that moving train? That the control could lie within you, allowing the train to slow a little less and resume its operating speed sooner- delighting everyone? Regardless of your role, organization, or the training provided to you, there are certain fundamental skills you can cultivate and master to better navigate any transition. This involves assessing your own technical skills, learning your environment, and tapping into relationships as learning tools. Let’s learn how to do that:

Know Your Strengths, But Don’t Be Limited by Them

What served you well in your prior role? Your unparalleled ability to make numbers happen, your reputation for the cleanest store in the fleet, or your interest in one-on-one time with your team? Your strengths in your last position made you who you are, and why you’re here – but don’t let them define you to a fault. If past successes have come from being numbers driven, be aware that metrics alone may not mean success in your new role. If one-on-one



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team development was how you made a name for yourself in your last role, be aware that too much focus on that one element may create a drain on your ability to tend to your own progress in a new role. Lean into your strengths, but don't assume that replicating past success behaviors will lead you to the success you want in your new role.

Know Your Opportunities and Make a Plan

You've inventoried your strengths, but what about your opportunities? Try and make a list of the things you don't know about your new role – either task or conceptual. Get someone close to your new role to review the list and ask them if you're missing anything. More than likely, you will be. It's not enough to know your opportunities. The next step is key: **make a plan**. This plan should include specific, time-based steps for how to connect to knowledge that you currently lack. Your plan should include people, tools, and experiences because all three are key to learning.

Create 'Virtuous Spirals'

As humans, we are consistently exceptional at one thing: generalizing people based on one encounter. Anyone who had an embarrassing high school nickname can attest to that. Right or wrong, our reputations precede us in many facets of our lives. Knowing that your name is going to float out from the mouths of others – you better *make it something worth hearing*. If you are new to your role, answer the phone with a smile in your voice. Help out beyond what's expected. Listen more, talk less. Apply yourself relentlessly to even the small things because people will notice. You're doing it right if someone looks forward to working with you before you've even met them. And that's how the seeds of a good reputation- or a 'Virtuous Spiral'- are planted.

Create Vertical and Horizontal Relationships

Everyone knows you're supposed to chat up and show interest in your boss. But have you tried being as interested and present for a conversation with your longest-tenured frontline team member? When's the last time you dialed up a peer to trade advice and help? Knowledge, like secret treasure caches in a video game, is hidden at every level of your organization. To connect effectively across, up, and down is the mark of a transition champion.

Seek Feedback Early and Often

There is nothing anyone can tell you about your own performance that is harsher than the stories you tell yourself in private. Don't guess how you're doing, ask! Ask multiple people and get varied perspectives. It's great if you feel you're doing good work, but it's even better if the person in charge of rating your performance feels you're doing good work. Seek feedback early, and often, and make sure that your energy and effort are aligned with the priorities of your organization.

There is one last secret of these tools: you don't have to be in a role transition to start using them. If you want to learn more, Michael D. Watkins' *The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter* is an excellent resource. Speaking of trains and training, be on the lookout for G90 - our newest incarnation of Retail Manager Training. She'll be pulling into the station later this month and she's heard great things about you.