

AND NOW WHAT?

A Guide to Leadership and Taking
Charge in Your New Role

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A Guide to Leadership and Taking Charge in Your New Role

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To the participants in my programs, from whom I learn every day.

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PREFACE

Life shows us that the most important decision is the next one, not the last one, and that decision is always made now.

We live looking forward, but we understand things looking back; from there we can learn from our errors and successes, and for that same reason, also improve. *And Now What?* deals precisely with learning in order to improve as managers of others, beginning with ourselves.

The book arose from my classes in IESE Business School and from my advisory activity with managers and businesspeople facing the challenges occurring in their professional careers in times of change, which are, surprisingly, constant. On the base of facing reality and studying how other colleagues had analyzed similar situations, I became encouraged to throw in my contribution. Each page was originally written to be discussed in class, which allowed me to learn more, given that I have the gratifying privilege of being taught by my students. Better equipped after that exchange of ideas, I have faced day to day with renewed energy to apply what was discussed; to return later to class and carry on outlining the theory, which is nothing more than a view of reality; and thus repeatedly, in a loop which is as exciting as it is enriching. The readers have in their hands what I have seen regarding the landing (taking charge) of a manager in a new post.

The book begins with an introduction, which everyone knows is the last to be written, that offers a panoramic perspective of what a landing entails in terms of personal self-leadership and managing people and uncertainty challenges and then is structured into two parts. Part 1 intends to be a systematic review of the

several phases of a taking charge process from preparation to implementation in the most difficult environment of a merger or acquisition.

Chapter 2 addresses the traits which characterize what the manager arriving in a new post has to do, and the efforts to adapt that are demanded. We will take the reader from creating expectations with the initial messages of the new manager and the role played by trust and credibility in the first steps.

Chapter 3 discusses the impacts of the change that a landing entails and how to manage them. The reader will understand how prioritizing improves time management and the quality of decision-making, and how anticipation in a changing environment will avoid mistakes in communication and action implementation.

Chapter 4 proposes an integrating scheme of the factors which shape the landing. After having pondered them, the reader may develop a mental plan and a real approach, where renovating the skills facing the challenges will make the difference.

Chapter 5 notes the influence that the company culture, in both the formal and the informal or spontaneous versions exert on the recent landing and how to handle it. The reader will acquire a set of tools to assess the current culture and design the path to the new one.

Chapter 6 describes some key points on how to manage the protagonists of every landing: people. The reader will become acquainted with the keys of selection, hiring, training, development, evaluation and compensation policies, vital for a safe landing.

Chapter 7 addresses the situation of landing in a merger or an acquisition, once again emphasizing the hardest part of leadership which is often delayed or neglected. It offers an agenda to deal successfully with people uncertainty and traumas, making communication an ingredient of the solution and not of the problem.

Part 2 offers a range of real cases, although some with fictitious names in order to protect the identities of the protagonists, with a

brief analysis, arranged in a chronological order as they acquire greater responsibilities. This provides reality and facts. The reader will take a trip from the first stages of a professional life as leader to the highest responsibilities of the chairman's role, experiencing changes, promotions, exits, internationalizations, and takeoffs.

One has the right to a personal opinion; that is legitimate, as is respectable the way in which it has been formed, but one doesn't have the right to personal facts; if not, agreements would be impossible or nonviable because of their instability, and learning a chimera. The cases allow the reader to bring into play what has been dealt with in Part 1, go from theory to reality, so that one's own judgment is formed. This is the author's final intention.

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INTRODUCTION: A PERSONAL ADVENTURE

When you start a new job, there is an inevitable contrast — which can actually be quite productive — between what you believed you would find, what you knew for sure, and the reality you are actually faced with. This clash or gap between expectations and objectivity has to be managed to ensure that the landing doesn't provide a shock or something worse: “And now what? What options do I have to keep moving in the right direction?”

As we will see in the pages of this book, there are many different factors that should be kept in mind when laying out the path to follow and then how to travel down it. These include the following:

A blueprint for learning what you did not know but which is vital, and for setting aside what you thought you knew but which was false. In short, the goal is to contrast what you believe is obvious with data that contradicts it. If you come from outside the organization, it is a good idea to test your preconceived notions against reality. If you come from inside, it is wise to examine whether what brought you this far can still guide you from now on, or whether you need to update and round out your repertoire of working resources.

Determine the few issues that are truly vital and deal with them decisively. Less is more, and clarity is usually synonymous with

simplicity. The newness of the job itself brings enough uncertainty for the entire company without the need for hasty actions or confusing declarations that blame part of the team (“I’ve been told that ...” or “We need to make some changes”) or put the organization on the defensive. It is important to be aware of how others digest messages, knowing that people adjust their opinions more through observation than as the result of argumentation.

Identify what talent you need and the people you have at your disposal. What you look for when it comes to hiring is mainly attitude; talent on its own is not enough to get results. The sooner you identify the important goals and the people who have been passed on to you, determining which of them are suited to those goals, the sooner you will be able to make decisions regarding the team. This will end up benefitting everyone because it will cut down on needless worry and harmful rumors. There are no shortcuts to establishing quality relationships with the new people around you. The time you invest in cultivating them will be met with ample rewards. Making poor alliances brings a higher risk of failure — up to 40% according to the empirical evidence.

Develop the habit of stopping every now and then to consider whether you are on the right track and ask third parties for their opinions. In the case of a new executive, it is easier for words to be misunderstood or actions misinterpreted, leading to problems that were not consciously created and can be difficult to gauge. You have to make an effort to see yourself through others’ eyes. That being said, it only makes sense to ask for opinions if you are going to take them into account.

FROM DECISIONS TO ACTION

It is essential to begin to lay out a course of action starting from where you are, not from where you want to be, using what you have or can get right now. The limitations and restrictions of the

present, rather than unexpected obstacles, are precisely a means of channeling ingenuity and well-placed efforts. When options are limited, people focus their attention, which helps them to be more creative and generate more options that are also more varied. In contrast, seeing too many possibilities clouds our ability to evaluate them, which leads to a scattering of our efforts. That results in greater uncertainty and, sometimes, even a tendency toward paralysis.

The decision-maker and executor choose what to set aside, what to take out of consideration, because nothing is as paralyzing as facing unlimited possibilities: more is less and less is more in the world of action. Limitation leads to freedom of action.

Solid successes early on are essential for an executive who lands in a new job. That is what the people who appointed him or her can use to respond to others' doubts. It can also help the newcomer communicate his or her own priorities and influence others' behavior. As such, it is essential to choose them carefully: they should have a significant external impact; you should be sure that you can achieve them and that they would not have been possible without you; and the people helping you should share this sense of urgency.

Another source of concentration comes from a demand for accountability, taking responsibility for one's actions. Evaluations help keep executives realistic; they promote self-assessment so as to implement the appropriate measures. The same principle applies in the business world as in school: you don't fully know something if you haven't been tested on it. The desire to be successful is important, but the desire to be prepared is even more important.

Interestingly, hierarchy in organizations is another external factor that helps focus attention, that all-too-scarce resource. Although people say that they do not like hierarchies, the reality is that they make them feel more relaxed and at ease. People can be more productive when there are differences in status and power, and these differences are clearly understood.

The goal is to think in order to act, and thinking becomes clearer as you act: How can people know how they think before they see how they act? It is about acting like a leader and then internalizing that leader we all carry within us. This kind of behavior can only be learned by putting it into practice repeatedly.¹ People change their ideas by changing their behavior; they transform when they are challenged or threatened by outside factors and when they receive meaningful information from new experiences. The most effective direction is from the outside toward the inside, not the other way around. We change by changing the way we work, coming into contact with new people or updating the way we interact with the people we already know. Cultural changes, however, truly become real when the goal is set on execution.

As Ibarra (2015) noted, a network of contacts can help executives learn new things and new perspectives; become more innovative; corroborate ideas; contribute to getting things done; avoid the herd mentality; discover trends; and perceive new opportunities, leading them to look beyond the day-to-day routine and question the status quo. Naturally, that cannot happen if the people those executives are interacting with are overly homogeneous and similar, if their focus is on the past instead of the future, or if they know one another well and have a hard time imagining doing anything differently.

ADJUSTING

Any new job requires some adjustment: the more executive responsibility it entails, the deeper the necessary personal transformations will be. Carucci and Hansen (2014) mention a series of four: from the tyranny of urgency to the art of the long-term perspective (people need direction); from reacting and reflexes to persistence and concentration (saving energy for when it is really

needed); from seeing the parts to seeing the whole (understanding the interconnections within the organization and how they create value, as well as the organization with its own values, competences, and strategy within the market); and from taking on everything to choosing your battles (you only have so much time; prudence is key: deciding what to do in the here and now).

When an executive is promoted, there is a change in the way he or she is perceived by those who were not promoted. Some will feel fear; others will feel envy; still others will be pleased. A loss of approachability due to the weight of new responsibilities affects this new perception. With the start of the new job, he or she becomes the job by *antonomasia*: “He is Sales,” “She is such and such department,” etc. It is not worth fighting this reality because it comes with the territory. Nonetheless, it is important to keep the job from completely defining you. The more prominent the position, the more important your reputation is, and the less control you have over it. Unless an executive makes an effort to influence people’s perceptions, there is a high probability that the prevailing image will not be what he or she wants.

Promotions also have a major impact on communication; they have an amplifying effect. Casual comments do not exist anymore. Anything that comes out of the boss’s mouth can be used as the voice of authority: “The boss says ...” Since people will make judgments concerning the intentions and the message, it is important to think clearly about what to say, why and to whom, as well as how. Even behavior sends a message. Flawed or uncontrolled communication can be the beginning of the end: an executive accepting a new job should not take it for granted that everyone hopes he or she will be successful.

Access to information is not automatic — you have to earn it. As you ascend there is more information, but there are fewer nuances, which arise and flow from personal contact: the newly promoted executive has just been pulled away from it, and the newly arrived executive has not established it yet. Executives have

to convince people that they are worthy of the truth because they can be trusted and will react with respect and integrity. Otherwise people won't take the risk, and that will lead to ineffectiveness and errors in leadership. It will help to evaluate: how they are perceived in the organization, how they manage these perceptions, and how they have changed since the promotion.

People don't resist change as much as they resist being changed. One way of reconciling with this new identity is by becoming aware of the causes that lead to these inefficient or undesirable behaviors, which can endanger one's career given increasing visibility:² narcissism or obsessions cause harm in proportion to the degree of responsibility involved in the job, which is accompanied by increasing levels of psychological demands. As Carucci and Hansen (2014) note, either the executive takes control of these pathological traits or these traits will take over. The simple fact of being mindful will provide some improvement. If it is coupled with personal maturity stemming from continuous effort, based on reflections from third parties who know the executive and think highly of him or her — who must be allowed and encouraged to point out flaws — then refining and even reinventing a leadership style is possible. However, we should note something that Abraham Maslow (1998) stressed: “sometimes management theory passes over the existence of evil, or psychopathology, or the general indecency of some people.”

On the other hand, the strength of peer relations with executives at the same level can prevent unhealthy rivalries and enhance the possibilities of achieving sustainable success upon landing in a new position. In order to build personal alliances, you need to know and understand your peers: What motivates and concerns them? What are their goals? What challenges are they facing? So that you can ask yourself: How can I contribute to their success? It is imperative to avoid both controversial issues and office politics and instead to arrive at a general vision of the responses that affect each of them. Nothing will help strengthen relationships as

much as genuine gratitude and appreciation for those on whom we depend.

MORE AND LESS EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS

To perform effectively in a new job, it is important to gain a broad perspective in a twofold sense: of the market and of the forces that shape it, which will help anticipate trends and challenges; and of the business, including how it works, where the value is created, what trade-offs have to take place among the company's different functions, so that the right strategies and tactics can be implemented. The different points of view and even priorities between marketing and sales, or sales and technology, for example, tend to be ongoing and are unlikely to be resolved once and for all. Consequently, this means that the executive needs to have a global perspective that can close the gap, researching and testing out solutions at the intersections of these functions.

This complexity is magnified when a company is viewed as a series of fragmented, separate parts. Things should not be simplified because they cannot be: the world, people, businesses, and organizations are complex. Complexity will persist; as such, we have to continue looking for opportunities to help stitch things together. The only antidote is to lift our sights and, once we see the whole, manage the interconnections in the interest of common goals. In order to acquire this broad and integrated knowledge, the technical approach to the market and to business must be complemented with more versatile, qualitative knowledge.³ Being passionate about the business is not enough if it comes at the expense of ignoring the strategic milieu; the goal is to reach an operative synthesis between plans and tactics.

Leading with your focus only on the bosses above you significantly diminishes your effectiveness. That means you are neglecting all the energy that could be released through relationships

with your peers, either directly or indirectly, inside the company or externally, and also through your teams; the skills, resources, and influence to successfully execute an initiative inside the company depend largely on them. Real power comes from below and from the sides; ultimately the only thing that comes from above is delegation. It is essential to be familiar with and deal with the resources below the surface of organizations, beyond the formal organization, which contribute to forming the real organization.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that just as the efficacy of a leader is directly proportional to the time he or she spends working with employees on the team, success, nonetheless, will depend more on the relationship with peers in other areas and with superiors throughout the entire organization.

As noted above, quality leadership stands out for the consistency with which executives seek out and listen to the ideas and opinions of those around them in order to incorporate them into their plans with the goal of addressing problems. Lateral and vertical influences are ultimately squandered if they are ignored. To lead, you have to be close to people.

THE ART OF WINNING PEOPLE OVER

One of the essential competencies of an executive, which can be even more important when taking over a new position, is the ability to skillfully deal with emotionally and politically sensitive issues. Since the only person we can truly control directly is ourselves, we have to concentrate on what we really want and on what our behavior reveals about our motives.

The shortest distance between two people is a smile, which arises during or accompanies a conversation. While a smile is a good idea under normal circumstances, it is even better during difficult conversations. Furthermore, it is worth bearing other factors in mind with regard to an effective management of the emotional

components mentioned above: learning to see what is really happening during the course of a conversation, when a certain matter becomes critical, what constitutes an aggression, and whether the other party has chosen silence or violence. Peter Drucker (1981) noted that the most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't being said.

The first goal is to reach a safe zone for both parties, which means backing down when faced with silence as a response or violence; otherwise, both respect and the shared goal may be endangered. If the willingness is mutual, this is the time to explore initial misunderstandings and to apologize, if need be. At this point, the path for future interaction can be decided by sharing facts and reflecting on perceptions; taking an interest in others' circumstances and perceptions and realizing that perceptions are not facts; ultimately, approaching the situation tactfully; and encouraging others to express different points of view. If there is a common vision, focus on agreement; if something is missing, build it together; if the differences are significant, analyze them comparatively. The key lies in the fact that talented people have a corner on listening; those who lack talent usually do all the talking. We can't learn while we are talking. In this sense, leadership has more to do with willingness than with position.

Ever since Dale Carnegie published *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), a great deal has been written based on the scientific evidence that was missing from that famous bestseller. Nonetheless, looking at it from the standpoint of the process of taking over a new job, it yields a great deal of relevant intuition and advice.

*Do not criticize, condemn, or complain unless you start with yourself.

*Say thanks sincerely and honestly.

*Spark a great desire in someone, and they'll follow it.

- *Take a genuine interest in others.
- *Encourage people to talk about themselves and their interests. Make them feel important because you consider them important.
- *The best way to get out of an argument is to avoid it in the first place: even if you win, you lose.
- *If you're wrong, admit it quickly and clearly.
- *Learn to see things from the other person's perspective as well as from your own: the goal is for them to change their minds without feeling offended or resentful.
- *Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.
- *Always let the other person save face and don't directly discredit their version.
- *Help others build up a good reputation so that their behavior has to live up to it.
- *Help them believe that the mistakes they have made can be corrected easily, and they will do it.

Carnegie's advice, which is quoted more often than it is followed, ultimately points to the need to inspire trust when leading; otherwise, everything becomes an obstacle. People trust those whom they respect personally and professionally. Adam Galinsky and Maurice Schweitzer (2015) talk about how the people who inspire the most trust are those who show the qualities of warmth (approachability and cordiality) and competence. Neither has a legitimate substitute.

In the intense period of starting a new job, and in general when it comes to managing, the most important thing for a leader is not how to motivate, but their motives for moving others; their reasons for acting are what is most significant. In that sense, managing is not only a set of knowledge, experiences, or techniques, but

also is really a personal adventure. Let us continue exploring this adventure at the specific moment when an executive is taking over in a new position.

NOTES

1. And, if need be, pretending until you actually figure it out: “Fake it until you make it,” as Austin Kleon very insightfully described.
2. “Organizations the world over are full of people who are unable to recognize repetitive behavior patterns that have become dysfunctional. They’re stuck in a vicious, self-destructive circle and don’t even know it — much less to escape.” Kets de Vries.
3. “One theme that ran consistently through our findings was that requirements for all C-level jobs have shifted toward business acumen and ‘softer’ skills. Technical skills are merely a starting point, the bare minimum. To thrive as a C-level executive, an individual needs to be a god communicator, a collaborator, and a strategic thinker — and we think the trend toward a general business orientation over functional orientation will continue.” Groysberg, Kelly, and MacDonald, “The New Path to the C-Suite” from the *Harvard Business Review* (March 2011).