

Strategies for a Successful Start to a New Career Opportunity

Moving to a new position presents unique challenges and opportunities. At the executive level, the stakes are particularly high for newly hired professionals and organizations alike. Various studies have suggested that anywhere from a third to half of external executive hires leave within the first 18 months.¹

EXTERNAL EXECUTIVE HIRES WHO LEAVE WITHIN THE FIRST 18 MONTHS



Given today's increasingly competitive healthcare market and thin margin for error, hospitals and health systems are especially sensitive to the success rates of new executives. As you embark on a new position, you'll want to focus on several proven strategies that heighten your chances for a successful start. The eight strategies outlined in this industry report are derived from B.E. Smith research and extensive experience placing healthcare professionals in a range of executive level positions.

1 Define Current and Future Expectations Early

Early on in your tenure, clarify and validate your understanding of the specific role requirements your position entails. Where uncertain or conflicting expectations arise, resolve them as quickly as possible to gain agreement with your direct report and fellow executive leaders.

While certain positions have relatively straightforward characteristics, many are undergoing varying levels of change and redefinition. Obtain input on and assess the forward direction your role is likely to take and the possible implications for shifting priorities or success metrics. This will enable you to adjust your efforts accordingly and remain relevant.

2 Be Open to Change

As the responsibilities for executive roles evolve, so too does the framework and skillsets required for strong leadership. B.E. Smith's latest Healthcare Trends Intelligence Report underscored this trend. According to the report, 23% of healthcare leaders said finding the right leadership competencies is their "top concern" for the coming year. Additionally, nearly a fourth of executives said finding quality candidates is the biggest challenge in filling executive vacancies. Vision and strategy remain at the top of must-have leadership attributes.



¹ See for example, S. Nawaz, "The Biggest Mistakes New Executives Make," Harvard Business Review, May 15, 2017.

Surveyed healthcare executives also placed great importance on integrity, communication, and agility. Newly hired professionals who develop a clear vision and communicate that strategy effectively will set themselves up for success. Demonstrate that you are receptive to new approaches and offer proactive ideas for change.

3 Understand and Adapt to the Culture

Every workplace possesses its own norms and customs which can be powerful influences on operations and strategy. Devote time to identifying the organization's culture. Ask questions and develop relationships with colleagues who can clue you in to key issues such as institutional risk tolerance, decision paths and styles, and roadblocks that may promote or hinder your efforts. Cultural sensitivity can earn you the kind of trust and support that will help you succeed and effect change.

4 Align Your Priorities

One crucial challenge facing healthcare organizations is ensuring alignment of projects and priorities with overarching strategic objectives. Mismatches can consume management attention and jeopardize realization of crucial organizational goals. Gain a full understanding of institutional strategy and use it as a lens to assess its fit with your activities and those of your subordinates.

5 Be Collaborative

Today's institutions and the problems they face are increasingly complex. Solutions require breaking down functional silos and working across traditional lines. Leaders must build relationships with myriad constituencies and for a range of reasons. This includes reaching beyond the four walls of the hospital as initiatives such as population health management place a premium on coordination with external care partners. Continually develop your collaborative skillset across clinical and administrative functions. The payoff will be success in a variety of team-based environments.

6 Set Near-Term Goals

Identify areas where you can impact meaningful change and generate early accomplishments that demonstrate your effectiveness and leadership potential. Objectives might relate to process improvement, starting a new initiative, or some other endeavor. Research suggests that seeking rapid results by defining specific goals that can be achieved in 90-120 days may be most effective.

While achieving goals is an important measure of success, waiting two to three months to set larger targets allows you a more comprehensive view of the challenges you face and the organization itself. After you've familiarized yourself with the people, challenges, and opportunities that exist within your new role, you'll be better able to set meaningful—and realistic—objectives.

7 Seek a Mentor or Coach

Keep in mind that career advancement opportunities are not typically accompanied with the training required to ensure a smooth transition. You may need to rely on informal learning paths. B.E. Smith research consistently shows that many organizations utilize mentoring and executive coaching as

key ways to cultivate new leaders. If your organization doesn't offer executive coaching, you should proactively seek a mentor who possesses the expertise and knowledge to provide you with this guidance. A well-matched mentor can also offer valuable insight into the formal and informal networks you should tap to achieve accomplishments and advance your career.

8 Increase Emotional Intelligence

Management research over the past few years indicates that "emotional intelligence" is as important as technical skills in relation to overall success. These qualities focus on:

- Self and social awareness. Recognizing your own emotions as well as others' feelings and perspectives helps you develop vital relationships with your peers and subordinates.
- Self-management. Exhibiting optimism sets a strong leadership tone, while adaptability ensures you can thrive through change.
- Relationship management. Exerting empathetic leadership and healthy conflict management inspires others to follow your lead.

As you undertake your new role, it is natural to emphasize your domain knowledge and specific job experience. Showcasing fundamental emotional intelligence skills will also help you attain your objectives while fostering your leadership potential. Figure 1 summarizes the key traits associated with emotional intelligence as originally framed by Daniel Goleman.

FIGURE 1



Conclusion

New career opportunities bring anxiety and pressure, but also anticipation and excitement. The eight strategies offered here can set you up for a strong start, helping you avoid common pitfalls and promote your chances for both early and long-term success. Additionally, developing a strong partnership with an executive search firm can provide you with the resources to further hone your skills, support for successful onboarding in a new leadership role, as well as access to advancement opportunities matching your leadership style and experience.

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