

## The New Mindful CEO Guide

### Up, down, out, short, medium or long?

You've got the job. The champagne bottles are in the recycling. The cards of congratulation are on the mantelpiece. Your leaving party has been arranged. Now what do you do to prepare for this exciting and terrifying job? Did they make the right appointment? Where do I go for help? What should I do first?

These are some of the many questions that new ceos ask and unlike any other job you've ever done it can so easily feel that you are on your own. The lonely road where you can't stop off for a quick coffee with your peers to moan about the board, or that awkward stakeholder. The racing track with an animated audience waiting for you to win the race or else laugh if the wheels come off. Or the sled waiting to be pulled in any direction the pesky huskys choose to go!

Here is a simple guide and model to help you to plan your first year successfully. There are some general thoughts to keep uppermost and then there is a tool for guiding you through the tricky task of managing up, down and out over the short medium and long terms.

General thoughts.

- 1 **Find out as much as you can** from all sources about the new organisation, beyond that which you did for the interview - what you find out everyone else will and therefore it's important feedback on how the organisation is viewed and might give you some pointers as to what your immediate tasks should be. Do a SWOT analysis before you get the official one. Ask open questions. **Listen** very openly, people might tell you more before they have a vested interest. Do it authentically and transparently - don't create suspicion. Do let fact inform rather than encumber your opinion! Keep notes: you simply won't remember it all. I once had lunch with a very senior TV exec who told me she could no longer remember anyone's name since she worked out that she had been introduced to 432 people in her first month!
- 2 **Learn from history.** Look back at when you were at your best in a new situation. What did you do well? What did you spot/ How did you get supported? How can you use the learning here?
- 3 **Get alongside the chair.** Be really clear with each other what you think and feel a good relationship with each other will look like. (see the model below). Be very practical, outlining roles, responsibilities and expectations. A former chair of mine, who was chair of many organisations, told me at my annual appraisal that of all the ceos he 'had to ring' on a Sunday night I was the one who lifted his spirits, totally unaware that mine were in dread of his calls to tell me what a friend of his had said at a dinner party the night before!
- 4 **Your job isn't their job.** The classic temptation is to stay doing the job you did before, or meddle with the person doing that role in this organisation. Only get operational when the going gets tough, when you are asked for help by that member of the team, or when there's a crisis someone hasn't spotted. In most cases this will be obvious from your research or someone might, feeling the new air of a fresh start confide in you. The most extreme example I heard was where a high profile ceo had to have her FD arrested in the first week of taking up the post! Ask yourself every day 'what is it that **only** I can do?' Your job is to help them to do their job. Ask them what they think good will look like, describe what good would look like for you and ask them what they need from you to achieve it.

- 5 **Avoid Narcissus.** You don't have to know everything, nor do everything to win them over. I once worked with someone who genuinely thought that if he had the time he could do the work of his 62, yes 62, reportees better than they could. If you want to still do the job then don't become CEO. You will infantilise staff and they will be demotivated and of course then think you are not very good at the job you've got!
- 6 **Don't model yourself on anyone else** - your old boss good or bad, was good or bad, or even good-enough, for a different organisation. Be yourself - authentic, value-driven and principled. Play to your natural strengths. Neither be overawed by, nor blame your predecessor. (see 12!)
- 7 **Give feedback.** The ratio is between 2.904 - 6 to 1 if you want to make a difference by motivating people positively!<sup>1</sup> Do it authentically not just for the sake of it. Turn your attention to what is positive in all those you encounter.
- 8 **Ask for feedback.** Doing this sets up the strongest modeling of your values and helps to develop a learning culture from the outset. Ask everyone using the 6 Golden Questions.<sup>2</sup> From your PA to the chair. Be mindful that some people will be pleasing and trying to get noticed and wanting to gild the lily. A ceo of a large construction company once announced innocently that one of the things he loved about working for it was that whoever he rang, anywhere in the world, seemed only too pleased to help him! Bless.
- 9 **Get focused.** Once you have garnered intelligence and listened to lots of people decide what needs attention in the short, medium and long terms. You cannot do everything at once. Do the thing that will make a big win quickly and that's normally about how you are with people. Don't be afraid to chat to someone you don't know. They probably know who you are! Genuinely get alongside them. A client, tenant, patient, service user. A member of staff who voted with their feet this morning to come to work for your organisation. Thank them. Decide what can wait, important but not urgent and then get on with the urgent and important. Have a clear eye if you can on shifting the ship by one degree, if it was the right one degree after a year you will end up on a different continent, if it wasn't then you'll know that after a few months and you've only drifted slightly. Don't change things for the sake of it. I once worked with an organisation in the NHS which had been reorganised 5 times in 8 years with 4 new ceos.
- 10 **Your top team aren't your peers.** Nor are the trustees. This is the biggest loss from your last job. You cannot treat your top team as intimates, colluders or plotters as you might have done when you were amongst them, this is the road to division, favouritism and special pleading. Keep your counsel. Have keen antennae for who you can trust.
- 11 **Find yourself a confidante.** It might be a coach, mentor, colleague CEO, partner or even pet! Really ensure that they are robustly confidential and have fantastic listening skills. You can't go back to your old colleagues, they might be competitors, or you might want to merge with them in a year.
- 12 **Up, Down & Out.** Establish as quickly as you can where your attention is needed in managing the chair and the board, managing staff and managing the outside world of stakeholders, competitors, partners. (See model)
- 13 **Be mindful that your induction and probation will be different to what you expect.** Are you generally secure or insecure in a new place? What do you normally think about authority figures? Is that what you think about the chair? What will the new staff think about, project onto you from their own history with authority? Help them to see that you are real and see them as individuals. Use our model for creating secure attachment during probation for yourself.<sup>3</sup>

- 14 **Add love and compassion.** Whether humming or hurting the organisation and all its individuals can benefit from love and compassion. They are anxious about change, in the current culture not knowing what changes you are going to make, wondering if you will make the ones they know to be right and whether they are safe and can trust you.
- 14 **Be mindful.** Notice. Take time to experience what's happening inside. Physically, emotionally, creatively and spiritually. This is a really trying and testing time. Stay grounded. You will find lots of rich information from others simply through noticing what your body and heart are picking up.

up,down,out	short	medium	long
<b>up chair, board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>managing the relationship with the chair / proving s/he made the right choice</li> <li>get really close - this is your key relationship, outline expectations on both sides, roles and responsibilities</li> <li>meeting and greeting key trustees and listening to their key issues</li> <li>assessing strengths, development needs and alliances</li> <li>managing governance relationships, the right people, terms of office, constitutional issues</li> <li>establishing whether there are any urgent governance matters which need attention</li> <li>assessing the trustee's attitude to the top team</li> <li>outlining what good will look like at the end of 3 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing direction</li> <li>building strong relationships with chair and trustees</li> <li>clarity of role, purpose and collective and individual governance targets</li> <li>beginning to drive the governance agenda</li> <li>established a real feel for priorities and direction</li> <li>established governance priorities from evaluation</li> <li>beginning to establish relationships with potential and new trustees</li> <li>building relationships between top team and trustees</li> <li>dealing with issues swiftly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>excellent relationships with chair and trustees</li> <li>succession planning in place</li> <li>smooth running of governance matters</li> <li>trusting environment where issues can be raised, quickly and appropriately shared</li> <li>evaluation of meetings and targets ongoing</li> <li>long term plans set and constantly reviewed</li> <li>good relationships with Top Team</li> <li>strategic issues the priority and less operational</li> <li>networks being used positively</li> <li>successful appraisal review</li> <li>developing your own governance for another organisation</li> </ul>
<b>down top team &amp; staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>managing the relationship with the top team</li> <li>listening to the key issues for them</li> <li>assessing strengths, development needs and alliances</li> <li>who are your key partners from the team</li> <li>are there any urgent and important structural changes which need attention</li> <li>listen</li> <li>build the team - they need consistency</li> <li>asking them what good will look like at the end of 3 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing strengths and development needs of the top team and supporting the team's and the individuals' development</li> <li>successfully handled first big issue</li> <li>clarity of roles, purpose and collective and individual governance targets</li> <li>presence with the wider staff group on key issues - transparent communication</li> <li>motivating and rewarding 'beyond obligation' performance</li> <li>dealing with issues swiftly</li> <li>checking on whether you achieved the what good would look like</li> <li>establishing the 'good' for the relationship and the team's performance after 1 year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>excellent relationships with team and staff</li> <li>successfully handled big issue</li> <li>challenging plan for delivering 'beyond obligation' service</li> <li>supported personal challenge, growth, reflection and learning for the individuals and the team</li> <li>developed autonomy</li> </ul>

up,down,out	short	medium	long
<p><b>out funders, stakeholders</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>managing the relationship with the key stakeholders, listening to the key issues and assessing strengths, development needs and alliances</li> <li>assessing the brand of the organisation</li> <li>deciding priorities for the part you can play in building the reputation of the organisation with the stakeholders</li> <li>bringing previous knowledge to bear on who might be new stakeholders</li> <li>assessing any key issues for stakeholders and establishing timelines to resolve them</li> <li>assessing stakeholders' attitudes to the organisation, its governance, top team, staff and delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>building good relationships with existing stakeholders</li> <li>identifying and cultivating new stakeholders</li> <li>building the brand of the organisation</li> <li>addressing any issues from stakeholders</li> <li>transparent communication on key changes of direction or policy</li> <li>delivering on measurables</li> <li>dealing with and being seen to, address issues swiftly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>excellent relationships with key stakeholders</li> <li>brought in new stakeholders and built relationships between new and old where appropriate</li> <li>built the brand of the organisation to be a provider of choice and the one being talked about</li> <li>transparent communication about successes and challenges</li> <li>being approached from external partners, press and media</li> </ul>

## Notes

1 Happiness at Work: Maximising Your Psychological Capital for Success. Jessica Pryce Jones. 2010 Wiley-Blackwell

2 **The 6 Golden Questions<sup>®</sup>**

- 1 What went well?
- 2 What contributed to that?
- 3 What is the learning?
- 4 What went less well?
- 5 What contributed to that?
- 6 What is the learning?

3 **The Mindful Probation Programme<sup>®</sup>**

- 1 Notice your own attachment pattern and how it normally plays out in stressful situations
- 2 Ask your chair to be consistently available to questions and anxieties
- 3 Ensure there is social time - the chair, trustees and top team - have fun
- 4 Get rich and diverse experiences in the first week
- 5 Engage your meaning, purpose and values - model them
- 6 Set clear goals for your role
- 7 Show compassion, UPR, love and respect for those you meet as individuals, ask for it too
- 8 Show gratitude - ask for it

- 9 Give immediate feedback and strokes, conditional and unconditional
- 10 Ask for the same for yourself
- 11 Do something well very early on
- 12 Challenge yourself
- 13 Ensure there are rewarding tasks
- 15 Listen hard at all levels and with all intelligences

4 **tMLF's GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING CRITICAL RELATIONSHIPS®**

- 1 Make a description of the person
- 2 Try to understand them
- 3 What are their needs?
- 4 How can you meet them?
- 5 What would the cost be to you of meeting their needs?
- 6 What is similar in your patterns?
- 7 What do you choose to do?

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