

A new leader for the team

Regrets, I've had a few...

One of the things that always worried me during my time as a HR Director was the limited effort that companies put in to make new senior appointments successful. As a rule we spent lots of time and money selecting and hiring but very little over the first few critical months to support that investment and the person we had hired.



Some time later in my consulting life I spent a good deal of time working on major construction projects. One of the things that happens commonly on these projects is that new teams are always being established or having new leaders introduced to them as the project commences and moves from one phase to the next. When this happens the best of those major constructors spends considerable time and effort on getting those new teams to a state of effectiveness as quickly as possible – they know there is no time to waste on a big project and that clients expect teams to hit the ground running.

Putting those two experiences together made it clear for me that most organisations can learn a lesson from major construction companies about taking positive steps to bring new leaders and their teams up to maximum effectiveness as soon as possible - when we appoint a new leader for a team it is not acceptable to simply hope that they get their act together quickly.



What you don't want to hear 6 months in....

"it took us longer than it should have but I think we are now finally starting to work really well as a team"



Is it worth the effort

Of course there is always something extra we should be doing so should we spend scarce time, energy and resources on this?

It seems a no-brainer to me but let's list some of the reasons why we should:

1. Effective teams get stuff done. Are you willing to have a senior team spend an extra 3-4 months getting its act together?
2. Patterns of behaviour in teams are set early and are then difficult to change. It is better to spend a little bit of effort up front rather than having to do a difficult turn-around later
3. Judgements get made quickly, the new appointment may be permanently labelled a "failure", "difficult", "doesn't fit here" if it takes too long for them and their team to become effective.
4. If the recruitment effort can be likened to a capital investment then this is a small operating cost which makes the capital investment start paying off quicker

Shouldn't the leader be doing this themselves?

Some make the argument that it is up to the new leader to build their team around them. Probably true, but do they have to do it all by themselves?



HR should be the experts in this area and the new leader should be able to rely on them to provide the process for them to use and to be there to help and guide them.

How to design of a new leader/team on-boarding day

It is not difficult to design a day which will help new leaders and teams become effective more quickly. Some key elements are:

- **Timing** - it should take place about 3-4 weeks after the new leader has started
- An **external facilitator** – there are likely to be some things that the new leader would like to explore or discuss that they are not yet ready to confide in to an "insider"
- The **new leader owns it** – final calls on detailed design are made between the leader and the facilitator
- **Core elements** of the day will include:
 - At the beginning the facilitator gathers from the team (without the leader being present) key issues that they would like to find out about him/her and also the things they think he/her should know about them/the company/clients/partners etc
 - The facilitator privately presents and explains these to the new leader (maintaining confidentiality)
 - The new leader discusses his response with the facilitator
 - The new leader presents his response and discusses it with the team
 - Agreements and commitments reached during that discussion are recorded



Depending on the particular circumstances discussed between the new leader and the facilitator the day can be extended to include things like

- How will Corporate Values work in this particular team
- A review of strategy/business plan
- More attention on how team members behave with each other (as distinct from with the new leader)
- Understanding the impact of change on individuals and organisations (often new appointments are part of a major change initiative)
- and so on

If you would like to find out more about how this process works in practice please give me a call.

Best Wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Gunzburg', with a stylized, cursive script.

David Gunzburg

Director DGHR Services

