Issue No. 4: The early days
Ensure success for your new hires

Expectations set during the recruitment process are quickly put to the test once a new executive moves into his or her office. The notion of a grace period of 90 days for a leader to get their bearings went out of style with the Filofax. Early on, leaders are expected to be ready to make crucial decisions and outline a strategy to deliver tangible results.

The pressure can be destabilizing and if not carefully managed, culture clash and misunderstandings can increase the risk of derailment, or lead either party to question their prospects for a successful future.

For all of these reasons, a comprehensive onboarding process is vital to creating a solid relationship between the new leader and the company. According to Korn Ferry consultants, HR teams tend to be clear about why they’ve hired a particular person, they often don’t know how best to help these new people succeed.
Ideally, HR leaders have created a supportive and responsive environment. What does that entail? Engaging all those with a stake in this new hire’s success to put them on a fast track to high performance. HR should manage a flow of feedback to the executive, preventing miscommunications. Common coaching practices also can facilitate an executive’s adjustment. HR should have a personalized “customer service” mindset, doing all they can to ease the transition into the new role. After all, the failure of a new leader is an HR failure.

**Facilitate conversations.**
Over-communicate about how a new leader is being perceived by key stakeholders. Is his or her leadership style working? Are messages getting across? Frequent, in-person meetings should be led by the executive’s direct manager, who should encourage the executive to ask for clarification, and to offer an opportunity to discuss any feelings of resistance or negativity that threaten to hold them back.

**Don’t move the goal posts.**
Ensure all stakeholders are completely aligned around concrete objectives. Shifting expectations or timelines on key deliverables can add an extra stress levels dur-

“As with any relationship, there is a lot more to discover about each other once you’re officially in it. .... Whatever you sold to the executive, you now have to prove it.”
ing what already is a high-pressure situation. This can cause unproductive behaviors and raise erroneous conclusions about the person’s level of commitment, focus and energy.

- **Make prompt course corrections.**
  Too often, any early sign that an executive is off-track leads some to jump to the conclusion that a “hiring mistake” has been made. But the early days with a new company are just the beginning of a transformational onboarding journey. The stakeholder team should remain focused on what would help this person thrive: what information, for instance, might he or she be missing? What other headwinds might be encountered? At the same time, stakeholders must be agile and help steer any necessary adjustments and course corrections.

- **Deliver feedback.**
  When managing high levels of stress during a major career transition, new leaders may be less open to feedback and more likely to interpret it as criticism. But it is vital. At this level of seniority, friction in a new job most often stems from subtle difference in culture or communication, and frequent clear feedback is the only way they’ll know if their leadership style is working.

  Even organizations that assess candidate for cultural fit during recruitment must acknowledge that every person has personal attributes, quirks, or habits. When stress goes up, a person’s self-awareness, mindfulness, and openness go down. This exaggerates both their weaknesses and their strengths. Eager to make an impact, the executive may start to overuse or misapply their strengths, and unintentionally alienate new colleagues.

“The higher up the ladder an executive gets, the more limited their ability to perform in a different cultural environment is without extra support. It’s almost like a marriage—if you have been in a relationship for 25 years, your ability to start living with someone new is harder.”
The Korn Ferry Insider
Advice from the world’s most influential executive search consultants.

Don’t delay development.
Seasoned executives who have easily adapted to new roles before often are surprised that there are areas they need to develop to be successful in a new organization. HR directors and line managers will need to be assertive yet reassuring when raising the prospect of targeted development. Give clear, yet sensitive examples of behaviors that might hinder their performance, and frame development as an opportunity to refine their personal leadership brand to exhibit the values they want to be known for.

Demonstrate a values match.
When it comes to culture, the way people behave day-to-day and treat one another matters more than any statements about “shared values.” Small details—do employees keep office doors closed or open, for example—are indicative of how things are done, and this may clash with...
an executive’s personal values once they are on site full time. Korn Ferry consultants warn that if a person feels his or her values are compromised or in conflict with how the organization operates, the new hire will not stick. The onboarding program should put them in a variety of situations that show them how their own values are reflected in the organization.

● **Stay committed.**

By the ninth month on the job, executives are making valuable contributions and accepted as part of the company. The official “onboarding” phase may be completed at this point, but the individual will continue to evolve through the first 18 to 24 months. Ongoing support from a coach, with active input from the HR team, will help them continue to grow and thrive as a person and a professional.

It is essential for HR to commit adequate time and energy into building and nurturing relationships with such leaders. Comprehensive assessment tools, combined with advice from experts who understand the levers of culture, can help you make the most of that investment and create an agile workforce led by innovative leadership teams.
Preparing for the arrival of a new executive requires a lot more than painting an office and connecting a computer. We advise the following actions as well:

• Assign someone to manage the process—whether an internal advisor or an expert transition consultant—who has a personal understanding of what it is like to make this type of transition (e.g., coming to a new city, country, function, geography, or organization).

• Clarify the expectations of the board and other members of the C-suite (or other line managers) around measurable objectives as well as specifically how they should be achieved. Leave nothing left unsaid or open to interpretation.

• Consider the well-being of the executive’s spouse and children. A holistic and high-touch relocation package should support the integration of the entire family.

• Map the network of people who the new person must know in order to be influential and arrange for meeting with each within the first 30 days.

• Identify a strong mentor who is not personally tied to the incoming executive’s performance, but who can help them navigate internal politics.