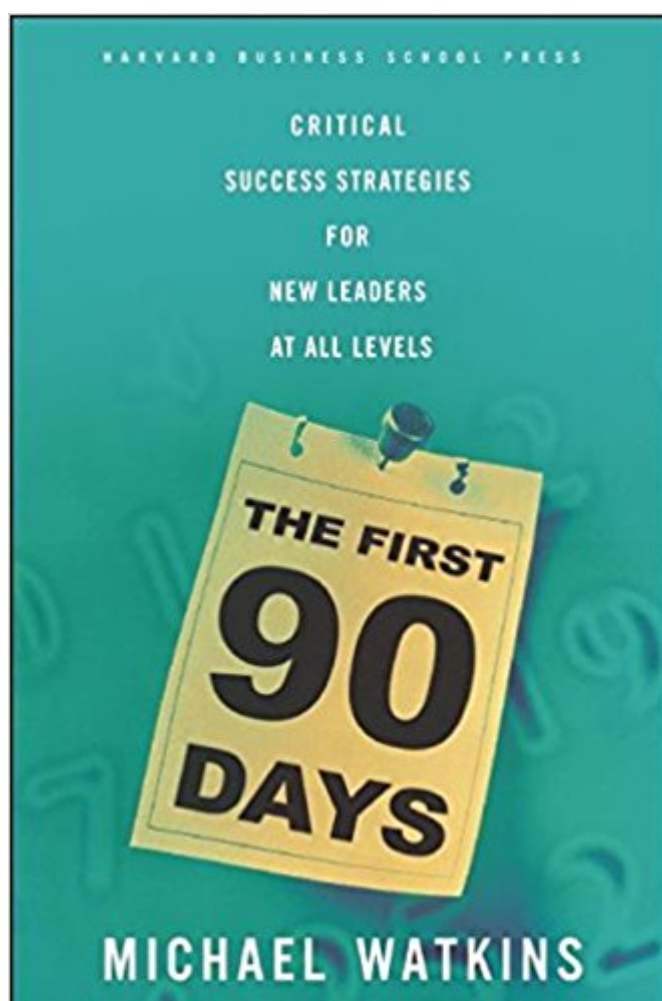


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# The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies For New Leaders At All Levels



## Synopsis

Fully a quarter of all managers in major corporations enter new leadership roles each year. Whether their assignments involve leading a work group or taking over a company as CEO, they face very similar challenges--and risks--in those critical first months on the job. How new leaders manage their transitions can make all the difference between success and failure. In this hands-on guide, Michael Watkins, a noted expert on leadership transitions, offers proven strategies for moving successfully into a new role at any point in one's career. Concise and practical, *The First 90 Days* walks managers through every aspect of the transition, from mental preparation to forging the right alliances to securing critical early wins. Through vivid examples of success and failure at all levels, Watkins identifies the most common pitfalls new leaders encounter and provides tools and strategies for how to avoid them.

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## Customer Reviews

This earnest guide to career transition periods--when a new job or promotion puts an employee in an unfamiliar role--asserts, reassuringly, that navigating the all-important first 90 days is a "teachable skill." Business professor Watkins, co-author of *Right From the Start: Taking Charge in a New Leadership Role*, lays out a "standard framework" for leadership transitions, based on "five fundamental propositions," "ten key challenges," and a four-fold typology of situations that new managers find themselves in. Fortunately, Watkins balances the theorizing with practical steps managers can take to get on top of things and initiate changes, including elaborate self-assessment

checklists, planning exercises and meticulous guidelines on how to have conversations with underlings and bosses. His advice, if not very original, is sound. He warns managers not to assume that their existing skills will suffice for new roles, advises them to pursue small-scale "early wins" to boost credibility, and admonishes workplace Machiavellis to "avoid pressing for closure until you are confident the balance of forces acting on key people is tipping your way." Watkins's penchant for cut-and-dried schematizations sometimes goes overboard, especially in the book's plethora of elementary graphs, tables, diagrams and matrices (novice orators are informed that "classic values invoked to convince others to embrace potentially painful change are summarized in table 8-1," while the oceanic topic of "Intersecting Cultural Dimensions" gets boiled down to a three-ring Venn diagram). But if the content of Watkins's counsel is not always obviously helpful, his systematized approach to thinking will at least help panicky executives keep their wits about them. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In these days of the public's microscopic scrutiny of corporate C-level executives, it's a wonder anyone would aspire to the CEO position. Amazingly enough, many eager managers are still climbing--and Harvard Business School professor and author (Right from the Start [1999]) Watkins helps prepare them for career moves, accelerating their transitions. This is, essentially, practical advice about undertaking new opportunities and understanding new vulnerabilities, quickly and without much upheaval. Different steps--sometimes simultaneously, sometimes sequential-- define success in the first three months, from promoting yourself (i.e., taking charge fast) to keeping your balance. Anecdotes enliven the checklists and sample learning plans; in fact, one specific case--Douglas Ivester of Coca-Cola--underscores the absolute necessity to adapt and change rapidly in new positions. Much content is human resources related, based on self-discipline, team building, and the availability of trusted advice and counsel. Would that every newly elected president of the U.S. heeded this practice. Barbara Jacobs Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

This is a really useful book filled with sage advice for anyone assuming a leadership position, particularly as a former outsider to the organization. It's filled with reminders that you don't walk in with "the answer," that instead winning the trust and respect of your cohorts is a learning process that you should begin with great intensity. The first half of the book relates directly to someone who is assuming a management role, the next quarter of the book is about what to do as a new employee serving under a boss or bosses (perhaps as a mid-level manager). The last bit of the

book gives a brief introduction to strategic thinking and the book concludes with questions to ask yourself (and your family) in evaluating your transition. It is applicable to any firm, church, non-profit, and even (mostly) the government. Here's a summary of the points I gleaned:

- Establish your integrity in first 30 days.
- Learn all you can about the organization, put on your "historian" hat.
- Don't suggest changes without examining what has been done previously.
- Silence is not accession.
- Meet with everyone in the organization to evaluate their expectations. Ask them what they think you should focus on.
- Ask same questions of all so no one treated different and you have a cross-section.
- Look for "early wins," low-hanging fruit of improvements you can make or other things to boost morale.

Dealing with your boss in the first 30 days:

- Be proactive, assume it's on your shoulders to build the relationship and get the support you need.
- Schedule meetings to discuss expectations, evaluations, and personal development.
- Figure out what would give your boss "early wins." Make his priorities your priorities.
- Be proactive in doing things that will allow your boss to hear from people he trusts that you're a good worker.
- Don't bring your boss bad news early, at least without bringing good news too.
- Don't assume he will change. He has a style, foibles, accept them and work around them and move on. You can learn a lot from a bad boss, and you will likely have many.
- Examine how others relate to your boss and how he responds.

Strategy

- Begin figuring out who you need to move off your team immediately, whose roles need to change, and who you need to evaluate further.
- Think strategically. After your first 90 days you should be able to present a plan that is actionable.
- Evaluate the vision of the organization, its values, and use SWOT analysis.

Ask yourself feedback questions every week.

- What isn't going well. Why? What can you change?
- What are you least happy about. What can you change about it?
- What meeting troubled you the most? ""
- What conflict needs to be most resolved? ""

Family also has to be considered. How is your new role and time commitment affecting your family? Was the move worth it? The author doesn't state it like this, but focus on doing what's best next. I give this book 4.5 stars out of 5. I highly recommend it.

This is a great overview of steps to follow when moving into a new position. I recently took over a new position in a smaller company and the lessons from the book helped me tremendously. Things that you may think are a given that I wouldn't have addressed if it hadn't been for this book really helped me to stay on top of my progress and relationships in the new company. I recommend it to anyone whether it's a job in a new company or your current company.

I liked some of the frameworks provided in the book (e.g., STARS model). I believe they will be

helpful in my upcoming transition. I'm giving it 4 stars because I found some of the concepts to repeat themselves over and over without adding much insights or value. I think the book could have been 20% shorter.

Anyone going through a transition (or who will go through one) should read this book. It has made me rethink my entire approach to assessment and planning. I highly recommend the strategies and the pragmatic approach because this book is backed by some of the best research in the field and by expert advice. This has got to be the best \$15 in terms of potential savings and risk mitigation that I have spent in a long time! I am going to be working with my HR partner to see if we can implement across our team to enable better and more efficient movement of our leadership team. I cannot wait to see what results we can achieve!

I use this when I am starting a new job. It works great at setting the tone in your new organization.

This is a good overview of what it takes to be a leader based on a personal reward framework. The advice is very achievement-focused and centered on the individual leader's accomplishments. There are some great tools in the book of evaluating your company and your new team but I'm not sure if I would want to work for the new leader this book strives to create. That new leader is so focused on the accelerated sprint they may not be prepared for the full race.

The reality is this: Most organizations' managers do a terrible job of onboarding new employees, be it individual contributors fresh out of college or more seasoned professionals. This book essentially teaches you how to onboard yourself and likely do a better job at it than your manager would anyway. I've been creating a "workbook" in Microsoft Word which I can leverage and take notes in directly. The book is written more toward seasoned professional who are responsible for areas of a business; however, the general content applies to new individual contributors as well. Highly recommended.

The lessons and strategies in this book can apply to anyone at any stage of their career. While it is great for those stepping into a new position or a new job, I think it's also useful for anyone tackling a new challenge or project, or who feels "stuck" and wants to get better results. I have also used the 90 day approach in interviews. I came in with an outline of what I would do in the job during the first 90 days and reviewed it during the interview. The hiring manager even said "Can I keep this?" It

sets you apart from other candidates. (BTW, result: job offer!) I've recommended this book frequently and gifted it several times. If you're like me in wanting to highlight things and scribble in the margins, I suggest buying the physical book vs. the Kindle version.

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