



Preparing For Your New Position - Quick Tips

So, you applied for a position, dazzled everyone during the interview and successfully negotiated the critical elements for your appointment to a leadership position. And, as is usually the case, the actual starting date is a few months from now. While you should certainly take time to celebrate your success, actions you take during the interim period can affect the potential for your long term success as a leader. Here are some quick tips on how to set yourself up for the best start possible in your new position:

Clarify and Understand Your Concept of Success

- Is it sufficient to maintain the status quo? In some highly successful units this may actually be the case. But remember, if a unit is standing still it is actually losing ground.
- Is there potential to lift the unit to a higher level of performance and recognition?
- Take steps to explore the expectations senior leaders and the broader stakeholder community may have for you and the unit.

Commit to Deeply Understanding the Unit You Will Be Leading

- Read any available histories or recent reviews of the unit and become familiar with available data pertinent to the unit's current performance and trajectory.
- If at all possible, meet with individual faculty members of the unit. (If your role is to be dean, meet with department heads/chairs).
- In the early days and weeks of your new position, your emphasis should be more on being seen and listening to as many people as possible, rather than telling them all "how it's going to be."
- Ask a few questions consistently of all. Here are some examples:
 - *What do you do?*
 - *What is your long-term personal ambition?*
 - *What limits your ability to achieve your goals?*
- Listen and ask questions; do not offer an opinion or render a decision at this juncture. Remember to control the conversation: you should not solicit or permit this to become a complaint session.
- Become familiar with the physical space. Arrange to walk the areas your unit is responsible for, and to see all the buildings and facilities in person. Knowing that they are there, and their condition, is necessary, not sufficient.

Develop a Vision for the Unit

- Study the institution, its history, values, culture, and societal expectations.
- Begin by considering what will resonate with both internal and external audiences.
- Understanding the environment is key. Is there a constituency that expects the unit to produce a large number of employment-ready graduates? Is there a national research/development priority that must be addressed?
- What are the limitations that will constrain success?
- What is your realistic first-draft strategy for overcoming these obstacles?
- How will you build stakeholder consensus/mutual ownership of a shared vision for the unit?





Give Thought to Your Management Style

- Will you operate by “rules” or by “deals?” Deal makers tend to be successful in the short-run but operating within the context of well-understood rules fosters long-term success. Can you articulate the principles you will apply in daily practice?
- Develop personal scripts relevant to the issues you expect to encounter.
- Think of how you will communicate (tweets, weekly conversational memos, informal chats in the coffee room, etc.) with members of the unit. Regular, transparent communication builds trust and moral authority.
- Avoid populism. Long-term, effective leaders ask questions, accumulate facts and make decisions that are in the best interest of the unit and independent of political forces.
- Commit to communicating the basis for your decisions to all affected individuals in a dispassionate, logical manner as kindly as the messages permit.
- Be clear in outlining your performance expectations and what degrees of independent action you are comfortable with allowing.

Invest Time in Getting to Know the People of the Institution

- This is especially important for those individuals who will make decisions that will impact your unit. Are they trustworthy and ethical? If not, how will you protect yourself and your unit from capricious decisions and inappropriate requests?
- Understand the kinds of relationship that the leaders have with subordinates. Will they trust you to proceed independently or micro-manage your every action? It is possible to work in either circumstance; one needs to know the environment.
- What is your best strategy for engaging with those around you? You may prefer office meetings, but some leaders with whom you will need to engage are very protective of office time and your best opportunity may be to engage them at social events.
- Have a system for and habit of documenting key elements of conversations. Do it.
- Take the time to know the people who make the place run; this especially applies to the people without fancy titles.
 - Introduce yourself to the key gatekeepers in the Dean’s office.
 - Get to know some of the student groups affiliated with your unit.
 - Visit at least some of those who report to you in their offices; don’t always summon them to yours.

Prepare for the First Day(s)

- Plan an introductory event. Coronations usually precede leadership failures, but early communication about your goals and expectations are important to building success. Members of the unit will want to get to know you. Seminars, speeches at a welcoming reception, an article in the unit newsletter are all valid communication vehicles.
- Who you have on your calendar the first days and weeks will speak volumes about you as a person. Pick thoughtfully and be sure to include people from as many levels of the institution’s operations as possible. You can bet that your choices will be noticed and conclusions drawn about you from them.





- Plan to dress the part. In our current society, it is popular to “dress down” in order to “fit in.” Your goal is not to “fit in;” is is rather to be the visible, respected leader of the unit. Dress in a way that—within the culture of the unit—sets you apart as the person in charge without inviting ridicule.
- A recent study found that more than 60% of highly successful, long-term leaders were humble—they were able to create an atmosphere where subordinates were empowered to tell the leader, respectfully, that they were wrong on a particular issue. And, the leader was willing to accept advice and make changes—display humility.

Be Ready For the Changes that Loom Ahead

- Understand the impact of your new role on relationships and how you will deal with that change, especially if you are stepping up to leadership in a unit of which you have been a long-term member.
- Speculative conversations in the “break room” are no longer appropriate – your words have impact and can be misinterpreted.
- Avoid or minimize friendships that may compromise the perception of your ability to make fair decisions.
- Think about how you will avoid entangling personal relationships with staff, etc.
- Assess the strengths and weakness of the staff in your new office, and consider what changes may be necessary in the near future. Avoid immediate change, as that will provoke allegations of capricious behavior.

Please consult our [Leadership Collection](#) to find additional curated materials and advice from experts on topics like handling role transitions, setting boundaries, managing expectations, giving performance feedback and much more!

