

The newbie strategy



By [Jane Stevenson](#)

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Having recently changed career path, I find myself in a challenging space that can be incredibly frustrating, and ranked among the highest stressors in a person's life...

The first 90 days in a new role can be tenuous yet loaded with opportunity. Leaders, regardless of level, are most vulnerable in their first few months in a new position.

You have entered a new space with a toolkit of knowledge, skills and wisdom but you lack the detailed understanding of the challenges you will face and what you need to overcome them, and the right network of relationships. As such, the application of your skills is something yet to be defined.

Transition is also a time when small differences in a new leader's actions can have colleagues straining to take lead from you and may be forming opinions based on very little information. The stakes are high. Failure to create clear communication and momentum during the first few months guarantees an uphill battle for the rest of your tenure. Building credibility and securing some early wins lays a firm foundation for longer-term success. So how do you go about this?

Start strong

I say this with trepidation as I am certainly not advocating being a bulldog. What I mean is be sure of the role you play and the skills set you have. The elated feeling of being offered a new job can soon be replaced with fear and doubt due to being in uncharted territory - don't allow it.

Communicate - and communicate again

Your role is new - the team may not understand the value you contribute nor the focus you have. They simply see you getting involved in areas where perhaps they have had leeway before. Tell them. Be honest and upfront about your focus. Invite them to be part of the journey with you.

Go in ready to learn

You might be driven to do something, but initially take the time to listen and understand the culture, the people and the way of currently doing business. Every organisation (and person) has unusual or unique ways of doing things. They may consider these 'normal' but you will be oblivious of them if you don't observe.

So ask questions, learn the subtleties of your new environment, show initiative, and learn systems inside out. You will be amazed at the amount of information you can glean and by doing this you will add value through the application of your on-going learning.

Understand the strategy behind your efforts

If you'll be leading a team and/or an organisation, you have to have an unemotive and fresh perspective with no baggage or political sway. Understand the current organisational situation, and why you've been hired, and how your experience and skills will make a difference. Then put your strategy in motion.

Get to know people

Don't wait for "them" to come to you, create opportunities to get involved and "be" with the team in order to start building relationships with the people, not the skills they have. While strong relationships are helpful to understand the culture and get your job done, they also increase your ability to truly have an impact in the culture.

Be objective

People will rally to share their woes, keep an open mind and create your own opinions - quietly. Be careful of sharing your own views too widely as you may inadvertently place yourself in a situation that you never intended to be in. And please know the rules of the kitchen. Bizarre I know, but I have dispersed many squabbles in the corporate world, due to kitchen issues.

And finally, be authentic and consistent. That will be your most endearing quality of all.

ABOUT JANE STEVENSON

Named by CEO publication as SA's most influential government businesswoman in the SME sector in 2012, she's big on vision, strategy and effective communication. Start with a successful business strategy and executive coaching consultancy to leading national brands... add the experience of being a Board and EXCO member of the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber; and stir in some fearless Scottish roots and a dedication to building organisational vision. The result? A motivating, passionate team player.

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