

The Top Twenty Tips for New Top Team Members

I picked these up a decade ago from a much respected friend and mentor in New York, Kathy Strickland (see Links). There's been no need to adapt them, either for the passage of time or for the trip across the Atlantic. I'd say they represent universal wisdom. The only caveat is that they are not all applicable for people taking on an immediate crisis or survival assignment – although lots still are.

1. Spend the first three months listening. Hold back from giving your brilliant suggestions.
2. Ask questions. Be curious. Ask how, what, when (*not* why) questions. Observe what is done, what is said, and vice versa.
3. Never say: "... at [*my last place*] we did ...". Do not use prior company name under any circumstances.
4. Dress as other executive team members dress – elegant, immaculate, perfect – at all times, and whether in casual or business attire. *There is no sloppy casual dress code for executive team members.* No matter what your weight, height, etc you can always look your best: so do so. Buy new clothes immediately, if necessary.
5. Be positive about everything.
 - Exude confidence, quietly
 - Be enthusiastic and positive
 - Accept problems and crises with ease
 - Do not criticise or complain, even if other people are doing so
6. Spend time with everyone.
 - Schedule meetings, and keep them, with:
 - Peers
 - Subordinates
 - Other Business Unit Heads etc
 - Prepare thoughtful general questions ahead of time about:
 - The company
 - Its culture
 - Their suggestions for you personally in the business
 - The unwritten rules of the place
7. Spend as much time as possible with your boss
 - Learn his/her perspective, priorities, ways of positioning, managing, leading and communicating
 - Expectations and priorities for you
 - As early as you can, find out about his/her key priorities and initiative for you in the first year.
8. Be confident in your leadership, management, communication and crisis management.
 - Always respond positively
 - Speak with clarity and confidence
9. Take time to reveal yourself in totality.
 - Listen more than talk
 - Remain professional – do not get personal too quickly
 - Do not become best friends

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10. REMEMBER: IT TAKES TIME TO BE ACCEPTED.
 - Go forward gently
 - Be clear of your position and expectations
11. Your new ideas can be interpreted as criticism of the way things are.
 - People may agree but still take it personally (as criticism). Be careful.
12. At executive level you are expected to be perfect for at least six months. So *be so*, in :
 - Speech
 - Appearance
 - Management and leadership
 - Behaviour
 - Everything
13. Imagine a film crew recording everything you do, say and think.
 - Remember: people tell three people of positive reactions, 20 people of negative ones
14. At the executive level, language is important. Women may never use foul language. Men have a little more leeway – be careful.
15. Be aware of culture and existing politics.
 - Do not comment
 - Do not criticise
 - Do not participate or take sides in politics
16. Take responsibility.
 - Give specific direction
 - Clarify objectives
17. Be gentle with yourself.
 - Be aware of the tendency for the “new guy” to want to *prove* what a good hire s/he is, how smart, how fast at implementing change etc.
 - Do not put these pressures on yourself or others
18. Get a coach or confidant outside the company to talk with...
 - Who will be objective
 - Who will give you tough feedback
 - Who will listen to you
 - Whom you can trust, and
 - Who helps you see how you can more effectively integrate
19. Smile. You were hired because you can do the job. The *job* is not what causes difficulties – it is *how you integrate* into the culture, get accepted and ultimately become respected by others. This takes time.
20. Executives seldom fail in new jobs because they lack the skills, the know-how or the experience. They fail (are asked to leave) because they focus on getting the job done – and do not focus on relationships and team building. Executives support others whom they respect, trust and like. Building respect, trust and relationships take time.

SLOW DOWN – RELAX – LISTEN

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