

New leaders: Tap your team ASAP

Here's one central piece of advice from hundreds of executives we have surveyed: Select your team of direct reports as quickly as possible.



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October 15, 2018 Transitioning to the C-suite is proving more challenging than ever as new leaders find they have very little time to adapt to today's constantly changing business environment. Here's one central piece of advice from hundreds of executives we have surveyed: Select your team of direct reports as quickly as possible.

What's clear is that success is driven by the ability to [get the right team in place](#) ASAP given the circumstances. Seventy-five percent of our survey respondents consider it very or extremely important to move swiftly, and 72 percent said they wish they had moved faster to put their team in place.

Our survey also reveals success is higher when the team is stabilized more quickly and fewer team changes occur. Still, no magic number exists in terms of the timetable for picking and steadying a top team, or the percentage of an inherited team a new leader should change.

Here are eight tips that can help in [assembling your team](#) of direct reports quickly:

1. Before committing to the role, determine first how much freedom you have to assess your team and make changes, and what constraints, if any, exist that could complicate choosing a team.
2. Shun extremes, such as replacing the previous top team or leaving everyone in place. One CEO had this recipe: He kept one-third, brought on another third from colleagues he had worked with, and appointed the other third with younger people from within the organization who offered fresh perspectives.
3. Involve HR, of course, but also seek the services of headhunters and other talent consultants who can offer objective perspectives on candidates. This can prove especially helpful if you've come aboard during a crisis and need your team in place quickly.
4. Determine the skills and talents you require to achieve your agenda. This includes those with technical expertise and those who excel in people skills who are best able, for instance, to help gain employee support for organizational change.
5. Avoid discarding out of hand candidates you don't believe have the right profile for the team. For instance, you might bypass someone with top administrative skills because you think the person can't talk about strategy or planning. Consider what coaching and training that employee can achieve in broadening those perspectives over the next several months; if development doesn't occur, then make a change.

6. Ensure that your team reflects the diversity of your organization and clients. Our research finds a correlation between the diversity of the top team and the performance and health of an organization.
7. If you've taken charge in a crisis, move quickly to tap your direct reports even if you don't have all the information you need. Recognize, as one CEO related, that it is riskier to make no decisions on a team than to make the wrong decision.
8. You need to have trust in your team members' abilities, judgment and integrity. By choosing team members who do not think like you, you ensure a diverse viewpoint when it comes to problem-solving and perspective.

Organizations pay a [high price for every failed transition](#), and a more systematic approach to support new leaders leads to better success, results show.

Once you've composed your team, the next step is to make it gel through team building and bonding. Ensuring interaction is deep, and not merely surface-level socializing, will be key. One CEO whose team members were scattered globally insisted they travel together to each office over six months to connect, and at the same time, involved them to set strategy, assess talent and decide other big issues. The team bonded through connecting in person and working on an agenda together.

Crafting a clear vision of strategic priorities, building teams in a timely way and rigorously assessing the organization's culture are all essential to success in a new role.