

5 Tips for First Time Programme Leaders



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Hypothetical; you have just walked out of your boss's office with a new assignment. Your company is going to undertake a business transformation and they want you to lead it. It must be delivered within a strict timeframe without disrupting normal operations. Oh, and by the way, this is your first time leading a transformation programme.

So, your exhilarated and apprehensive in equal measure. Your company believes that you are the right choice to make this happen but now the weight is on your shoulders. You have a mountain to climb, a shopping list of urgent tasks and no one to share the load. Where do you start?

1. Focus

- Any transformation programme can be won or lost by the quality of preparations and planning at the outset. You need to give it your full attention.
- Review your current workload and decide what you can stop, delegate or defer.
- For the work that you have to complete prioritise its urgency and set yourself deadlines for getting it finished.
- Communicate with your "customers" so that they understand that you are bringing your existing work commitments to an appropriate conclusion.

2. Reflect on your leadership style

- As a programme leader you have a direct impact on the tone, behaviours and people's experience of the programme.
- To quote the proverb *Physician, heal thyself*, an insightful leader takes time to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.
- Ask your peers for feedback on your leadership qualities; what you do well and what you need to work on.
- This is the opportunity to sharpen your leadership skills.

3. Understand the brief

- Obviously, you need to review the proposal document and business case justification but it's almost certain that you will have questions or require further context.
- Seek clarity to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations that will catch you out further down the line.
- Summarise the programme into a few slides; the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. This will help refine your understanding.
- Practice a two minute "elevator speech" that articulates the business reasoning for the programme; its goals and benefits. This will help when promoting the programme with stakeholders.
- Devise a one sentence "hook" that represents the essence of the programme that the team, stakeholders and wider business can grasp and relate to.

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4. Mobilise your core team

- As well as selecting candidates with the right skillset, your core team needs to be individuals you can trust with a positive "can do" attitude. Consider candidates from your personal network and take recommendations from colleagues.
- Balance your core team with business knowhow, technical expertise, youthful enthusiasm and insightful experience.
- Discuss with your team their roles and responsibilities. Be clear on what you expect from them and establish what they need from you.
- Identify a trusted confidant that you can use as a sounding board. They should be part of your organisation but separate to the programme. There is value in getting a different perspective.

5. "Plan for the Plan"

- Define the programme roadmap outlining each phase and its major milestones. This should be a one-pager that can be presented on a slide.
- Establish a checklist for the mobilisation tasks and deliverables to help you stay on track whilst the detailed execution plan is developed.
- Define your team's specific goals and deadlines to achieve them.

And finally, one bonus tip; you must take care of your physical wellbeing and,

6. Manage your stress

- Build stress management techniques into your day i.e. moments of quiet time, coffee with a colleague, a walk around the building etc.
- Bookend your day by reviewing your schedule and reflecting on how things went and what you can learn from it.

With the right mindset being a programme leader can be one of the most satisfying career experiences, but it can also be a burden that there is no respite from.

So, listen to advice, share the load, be positive and, most importantly, try and have some fun along the way.

About the Author: Mark has +20 years' experience in delivering complex, global business transformation programmes within the Pharmaceutical industry including manufacturing capacity optimisation, major system deployments and manufacturing facility acquisition and integration.

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