

Assuming a New Leadership Assignment

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You've been transferred to a new location. How do you quickly meet your new colleagues? How do you establish yourself as a trustworthy resource in helping your direct reports be successful?

Asking open-ended questions is a good way to learn about people. Admittedly, what follows is an overwhelming quantity. Prioritize your initial focus on what you need most.

Over the first few weeks, gather additional information as each individual perceives your intentions as honorable. Share your own background to the extent that each person shows interest.

Personal Information. Please tell me about your family members. How successful have you been in balancing your work life and your personal life? In what ways might I help?

Work Context. What keeps you working here? What are the most satisfying aspects of your job? How are you addressing the less satisfying aspects of your job? How does your work fit into the strategic direction of the organization? What are your career aspirations? How might I help?

Your Customers. Who are your customers? If they are internal customers, how does your contribution to them ultimately benefit our paying customers? If I were to interview your customers, what would they tell me is most satisfying about what they receive from you? If they could change anything about their relationship with you, what would it be? How are you responding to that need? In what ways might I help?

Your Daily Work. How do you measure your success? What improvements over the past year would you like to share with me? Do the people who need to know of those achievements actually know of them? What improvements do you anticipate making over the coming year? What obstacles do you expect to face? In what ways might I help?

Your Colleagues. What are the strengths of our team? Do you and your teammates have the resources you need to perform your work to the level of excellence your customers prefer? Who are your best friends here at work? How does their friendship contribute to your success here? How can I help strengthen the relationships among your teammates?

Your Growth. What should be done to increase your ability to do what you do best every day? Describe your growth over the past few years? How are you currently building your skills? How open to feedback are you? How can I help?

Final Questions. What do I need to know that I've not asked? What should I expect of you? What should I expect of this team? What is your advice for me as I assume this new responsibility?

I suggest you use all this information in two major ways—personal and organizational.

On a personal level, I suggest you create a file for each of your direct reports. Store your collected information for subsequent one-to-one conversations. Refer to this material periodically during your initial work with each individual, so you don't overlook something that is important to him or her.

On an organizational level, look for trends and common needs. Consider what your priorities will be and to what you are willing to commit in supporting your direct reports. Use the information to prepare an expectation-sharing meeting with your entire team. Identify your vision for the organization, share your anticipated contributions, and reaffirm your desire to hear their ongoing suggestions.

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