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# A 100-day plan for your new job

C-level execs aren't the only ones who should plan their first months in a new position.

Mary K. Pratt

**October 27, 2008** ([Computerworld](#)) Rebecca Paddock needed a way to prepare for her move from a test engineer job to a systems engineer position. So, inspired by the 100-day plans U.S. presidents historically use when they first take office, she developed a list of tasks to tackle.

"I used it as a preparation process for the interviews, and when I got the job, I had a framework in place," says Paddock, who now works in Plano, Texas, as a program manager and director of Six Sigma at [Raytheon Co.](#)

U.S. presidents aren't the only leaders who plan for their first few months on the job. Most corporate executives, including CIOs, use 90- or 100-day plans, too.

But Paddock knows that these road maps for successful transitions shouldn't be exclusive to the C-suite.

"The more you can have a vision of how you're going to get from Point A to Point B, and to know what Point B is, the more successful you're going to be, even at a junior level," says Matt Hartzman, vice president of IS at the College of American Pathologists in Northfield, Ill.

So for anyone getting ready to [start a new position](#) at any level in IT, here are five action items to use as a guide for your own 100-day plan:

## 1. Assess the situation.

Companies want new talent to bring something to the table. If IT is running smoothly, they want you to help move the organization forward. If something's wrong, they want you to help fix it.

It's best to determine the organization's needs early on, says Sue Leboza, group vice president of IT for the pharmaceutical products group at Abbott Laboratories, a health care company in Abbott Park, Ill. "If you don't ask or don't know, you could be working on the wrong things for your first 100 days," Leboza says.

## Tactical Tips

Here are a few tips to make your 100-day plan work more smoothly:

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- **Write it down.** "I have never seen anybody do this successfully without writing it down. You'll forget things, or you'll add things that weren't originally intended," says Rebecca Paddock, a program manager and director of Six Sigma at Raytheon.
- **Schedule action items.** Use a week-by-week breakdown, Paddock suggests. "I believe it's paramount, because if it's month by month, you'll get sucked in by the fires, and you'll come to the end of the month and realize you can't get [your plan] done," she says.
- **Be flexible.** Many parts of a transition plan overlap, so you'll need to adapt your action items as you gain new information.

Consult with your peers, your team members, your supervisors and any other stakeholders to help you develop the most complete assessment.

## 2. Determine expectations.

You need to know how your boss defines success for your position. But to find out, you need to both ask and observe, says Michael D. Watkins, co-founder of Genesis Advisers LLC, a leadership development company, and author of the [\*The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels\*](#) (Harvard Business School Press, 2003).

"There's the direct set of conversations you need to have, asking, 'What am I expected to accomplish?' And there are other more subtle expectations that aren't spoken, so you need to identify someone who exemplifies success at your new level and figure out what contributes to that," Watkins explains.

## 3. Identify stakeholders and build alliances.

Of course, you want to get to know your peers and supervisors. But to truly succeed, you also need to identify the individuals who will directly and indirectly affect your ability to get the job done, says Caela Farren, founder and CEO of MasteryWorks Inc., a career and talent management consulting firm in Falls Church, Va.

That's a particularly important point for IT workers, who have to please not only their supervisors, but also colleagues in the business units they serve, Farren adds.

"We're not talking about how many people you know in the organization. We're talking about a purposeful network, where you've met people who can help you," says Bill Byham, chairman and CEO of Development Dimensions International Inc., a management consulting firm in Bridgeville, Pa.

When Hartzman moved from his tech job supporting the sales division at a computer vendor to a job managing the tech support staff, he developed a plan that called for meeting with the salespeople.

"That's where I spent most of my time in the first 90 days -- building confidence within the sales team, so they would help me build the relationships I needed with the customers," Hartzman says.

## 4. Understand the culture.

One of the trickiest tasks of any new job is figuring out the [corporate culture](#) and office politics so you don't step on toes or run afoul of your colleagues.

[Cathie Kozik](#), corporate vice president of IT at [Motorola Inc.](#), remembers that when she first arrived at Motorola, she assumed that as a high-tech organization, it would have the same procedures as her previous company. So she ran monthly operations reviews as she had always done, not realizing it wasn't part of the culture there. Although it wasn't a major sticking point, she admits that there was a "What's she trying to prove?" sentiment as a result.

That taught Kozik to put aside assumptions and pay attention to the subtle behaviors that make the organization tick.

## 5. Target an early win.

People will judge you from the start, so you have to establish credibility quickly. One way to do that is to look for an early win.

That's why Paddock's plans include a step to identify and resolve a known problem. "I find the biggest

problem that I can and develop a plan to solve it, so it can have a big impact," she says. "This way, your bosses know you're not someone who will sit around and do the easy stuff. You're going to hit the hard stuff."

## You Blew It -- Now What?

Cathie Kozik, corporate vice president of IT at Motorola, vividly recalls making a major mistake in the first month at her first job out of college. She reformatted the drive on the company's test system, and with a single command, she froze up the system.

"I remember being terrified," she says, "but the take-away was twofold: One, fess up. Bad news does not get better with aging. And make sure you step up."

Kozik, then a customer service engineer at a high-tech company, admitted her mistake and then had to reload the system from scratch while her new colleagues enjoyed a few days' worth of downtime.

IT leaders and career coaches agree that Kozik followed the basic steps that can save your skin when you screw up:

- 1. Admit your mistake.** "There is the potential for recovery -- if you recognize what you've done," says Michael D. Watkins, co-founder of Genesis Advisers.
- 2. Apologize.** "Part of fixing the situation is demonstrating that you've got it," Watkins says. "It's saying you're sorry to people you ticked off."
- 3. Fix what you broke.** "It builds your reputation quickly if you handle it well -- that you're honest, that you're a problem-solver, that you're willing to learn," says Caela Farren, founder and CEO of MasteryWorks. "Those are things that are assets for tech workers, as IT is one of the quickest-changing functional areas."

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