

*The New-Leader 100-day Action Plan* (second edition) by George Bradt, et al., 2009.  
Reviewed by Steve Gladis, Ph.D., March 2011.

What's the old Chinese saying about living in interesting times? Transitions are interesting, full of opportunity, and, at the same time, potentially threatening. Whether it's a high school graduate going off to the first year of college, a new college graduate landing her first job, or a seasoned executive moving to a new company – the first few months of their transitions will be equally exciting and risky. George Bradt, Jayme Check, and Jorge Pedraza (all from Prime Genesis, an executive transition consultancy) have taken out a lot on the risk side with the second edition of their book about the first 100 days of a leader's transition. What I liked about the book is that it takes the mystery out of executive transition. The stats on executives surviving are more than sobering: Estimates of failure rates are that 40% of executives fail in the first 18 months. Much of the time when executives get bounced out, they scratch their heads, along with the folks who hired them. Often, neither the hiring execs nor the exiting exec fully understand what went wrong. Thus both sides are doomed to repeat the same mistakes again and again at an enormous price, both personally and for the corporation.

George Bradt and his team provide a clear map for the executive looking to come into a company. [If you want to look at how the corporate side should work, read Bradt's earlier book, *Onboarding*.] Bottom line, his latest book should be in the hands of any executive who even starts to think about getting a new job and well before taking a call from an executive search firm. I recommend this book to all my clients in transition as a MUST read. The book is divided neatly into sections: Getting a head start BEFORE the new job; crafting your own message as you enter the new job; building your 100 day plan (and your team). Also, the checklists or "Tools" at the end of each chapter are excellent and are bookmarked in my copy. Finally, the authors' website provides a treasure trove of sources and tools: <http://www.onboarding-tools.com>.

1. Getting a head start – creating your new leadership role. You have to get the job to have a transition, so get the job first.
  - a. Executive job interviews are often a litany of questions, but according to the authors, all those interviewer questions boil down to three critical questions: 1) Can you do the job?; 2) Will you love the job?; 3) Can I tolerate working with you? And your answers, whether expressed over coffee, lunch or at a formal interview, should be respectively: 1) My strengths are a match for this job; 2) I'd love it...am motivated by this kind

of work; 3) I'd be a great fit for the company. The authors explain in great depth about how to participate effectively in the job interview.

- b. Due Diligence: Before you say "I accept," act like an investigator and conduct a due diligence audit on the company. The potential sources of critical insider information are what Bradt calls the 5 C's: Customers, Collaborators, Capabilities, Competitors, and Conditions. Getting to the 5 C's by seeing how you might be connected (think Linked-in) could save you considerable heartburn. Also, the authors talk about avoiding the "Top Seven Onboarding Land Mines" such as lack of a good organizational model, poor definition and communication about the role of the new executive (you), failure to develop 360 relationships (up, down and across the organization), to mention only three of the seven.
  - c. Promoted from within: Sounds like a good deal, and it can be or not. The company has a real advantage because it can negotiate quickly and doesn't have the fallout of an outside exec who doesn't make it. But when you come from the ranks, there can be jealousy, resentment, and fears. Three things the authors explain in detail that I'll just mention: 1) You can't control the context, so be set for a lot of adjusting as you go; 2) Take control of your own transition, especially how and to whom it's initially announced because most companies do a poor job of this; 3) There is no real honeymoon – maybe only a weekend! Because you're an insider, the leadership will assume you know what you're doing and will expect you to get going.
2. Take control of your start. You are your best advocate, so put your best foot forward.
    - a. Take advantage of the time you get from acceptance to start. There will be weeks and in some cases even months from the time you say yes until you open the doors to your new office. Use this time to do even more focused homework on the company and your role. Consider the following: ID your key stakeholders, plan your entry message, conduct research on the company and people, conduct personal informal meetings, and do whatever helps smooth your landing on Day One. Check out pp. 85-92 for the heart of the book regarding both job and physical relocation.
    - b. Remember to respect culture and to communicate. There's an old saying that culture eats strategy for lunch. Respect the power of "how business is done around here," and while you might want to change it over time, sudden dislocations create fear, anger and uncertainty. And those

reactions can create resistance that can cripple a new leader. The authors suggest considering tactics on how, depending on the situation, you might want to enter: Assimilate, Converge and Evolve, or Shock. I like the authors' reference to the Be-Do-Say axiom about culture and how all three must be in sync for culture to work (being the kind of person who does what you say). Finally, in a succeeding chapter, the authors note the absolute importance of communication: Your 1) Platform for change (why it's important now); 2) Vision (a brighter future for all); 3) Call to action (what the team must do to get to the vision).

- c. Take control of Day One. The first day counts more than all the rest. In some cases it's not quite a make-or-break day, but it sends a powerful message that can substantially extend or shorten your tenure. People are on pins and needles trying to figure out whether you will be a threat or a help to them. Be careful not to turn people off. The authors provide an excellent list of what NOT to do – like spending too much time on the phone or having lunch with old buddies. This is the time to see and be seen by the new team. Check out pp. 130-132 for a great checklist. Also, pay close attention to the new manager's assimilation session which can cut out a lot of long term pain. Read p. 132 with great care.
3. Your 100-Day Action Plan – Here's where you pull the whole enchilada together.
    - a. Create the burning imperative. People will only jump from a high platform into the ocean if that platform is burning and the alternative to jumping is unacceptable. You have to somehow create an absolutely compelling reason for your team to make the "jump" with you. And, according to the authors, you'd better do it in the first 30 days or start looking for a new team to lead because you'll lose your strongest momentum booster – being new. The components of a burning imperative are the headline (an all-encapsulating tagline) followed by your vision, mission statement, objectives, goals, strategies and values. See p. 145 for an outline for conducting an off-site imperative workshop.
    - b. Use milestones to drive performance. If you want to get somewhere, you'll need directions and check points to know if you're on the right track to where you want to go. It's the same in business. Setting a timeline with milestones is the final addition to your 100-day plan. Here it is in simple terms: No follow through, no success. Anticipate things you might miss or overlook that are critical, steer away from the first-come-first-serve mentality, and integrate across, not down, the organization. Very critical

to your success is managing the milestone process – keeping people keenly focused on the vision with weekly or biweekly meetings. See p. 155 for a great tool that shows you how to conduct such meetings.

- c. Driving toward 100 days. Just as important as follow-through is momentum. In the middle of any car trip, kids will invariably ask, “Are we there yet?” Teams do exactly the same thing. They start running out of gas and need a recharge. So, pick interim objectives that are important to your boss and the organization, overinvest in making sure they happen, and celebrate and publicize the team’s success to keep the momentum up to reach the long-term goal. Key to any success is talent. In fact, talent management, I would contend, is at the heart of success. If you have the wrong people rowing the boat, you never make it to the finish line on time. The author uses the A-D-E-P-T model or acronym to remind leaders how important talent management is. ADEPT= Acquire, Develop, Encourage, Plan, and Transition talent to make it to your vision of the first 100 days.
4. FINAL WORDS: This book presents the most comprehensive transition process I’ve seen. At times it’s a bit like drinking from a fire hose. But I think several readings over time will make the good leader a great one. Kudos to George and his team. This second edition is a real winner. Further, the appendix and the website provide tools and additional information designed to help any leader.