



Seven steps for re-recruiting and engaging your new team

By Ajit Kambil

TRANSITIONS are a tricky time, and can give you and your staff some anxious moments. Your entry as a new team leader can be disruptive to the existing norms and relationships in the team. You may be uncertain about whether your new team members will commit their best energies to you as a leader and how you will fit in and be accepted by the staff. The team and broader staff may be anxious about your intentions and the direction in which you want to take the organization. Each of them is watching and deciding if you are good for them personally or for the organization as a whole. As the new incoming leader, you have to re-recruit and engage the team you inherit to commit their best energies to work for you and deliver the company's vision and intent.

How you re-recruit and engage your team sets the context for creating a high-performing team. Yet, in my transition labs I often see new

leaders not having thought through how they will systematically engage and communicate with their new team, and thus stumble in re-recruiting it. To keep the best and critical talent on your team, you need to recruit them to your leadership and create an attractive context for them to choose to stay and deliver their best on your behalf. This will take time and effort. This essay outlines some critical considerations that drive the time, effort, and communications required to effectively connect with your new team as well as some steps to facilitate re-recruitment.

Three considerations in engaging your team

While there can be many considerations in shaping how you engage your new team, the three most common ones I observe in my transition labs are:

1. **Your team inheritance:** In a previous essay, I outlined nine dimensions for systematically assessing your team inheritance.¹ Generally, I find executives will put their inherited team into four buckets: a) a strong functioning team with shared goals, clear roles and responsibilities, and shared ownership of results, b) a medium or weak team, where there is goal and role clarity but a lack of accountability and ownership of team outcomes, c) a broken team, where goals and roles are clear but there are silos, interpersonal conflicts, and lack of mutual trust, d) a non-team or work group, where there is no clear alignment on brand, goals, and roles. The more broken or low-performing the team, the more time you will need to allocate for persuading, recruiting, and developing your team to deliver higher performance.
2. **What your CEO or boss wants:** Your CEO or boss probably has expectations about how you will manage your new team going forward. They may have a fundamentally different mind-set than you and be reluctant to let people go that you find wanting in critical positions. This can be especially challenging if they were promoted to CEO from your current role. They may also have expectations for you to participate in dinners and socialization outside of work hours, which they feel is essential to building esprit de corps. In a large multinational organization, they may have expectations of you visiting your staff in key locations quickly despite all the other issues on your plate. Thus, as you begin to frame your strategy to re-recruit your team, it is important to understand the values and expectations of your CEO and other key leaders in the company. They are observing how you handle your team through lenses that reflect their values and beliefs.
3. **WIIFM (“What’s in it for Me?” from your staff’s perspective):** When you are coming in as a new team leader, most of your staff is likely to be asking, “What’s in it for me?” and assessing the likelihood of the organization’s success going forward. Personally, key leaders on your team, some of whom may have aspired to your new role, are asking if your appointment will block their career progression. Indeed, in our CFO transition labs, we often find key talent choosing to

leave fairly quickly for another company because they feel they can better achieve their aspirations to join the C-suite there. Others on your staff are watching to see how much you will invest in growing their careers or how much support you have from the CEO and the rest of the organization for continued investment and improvements in your area. As you engage your new team you have to be cognizant and responsive to their WIIFM.

The seven steps

Given the above considerations, here are some steps to facilitate re-recruiting your team during your transition as their new leader.

1. Communicate and set expectations of how you are using your time during the transition. As a new leader you cannot easily predict what you are stepping into. Some of the CFOs I have worked with have joined a new company and immediately been thrown into executing an acquisition or addressing another extraordinary situation that creates immediate and exceptional demands on their time. In other situations, you may have inherited a broken team and want to learn how your clients view your team. At the same time, your team and organization want to connect with you and hear from you. All of this can create tremendous conflicting demands on your time. To effectively engage your team, it is important to communicate and share with your team the key demands on your time and shape their expectations as to when and how you will engage with them during the transition.
2. Allocate sufficient time to authentically connect with your direct reports and select skip-level staff. During the transition, your staff generally wants to hear from you and be helpful to you. At a minimum, you want to personally connect with all your direct reports in the first few weeks and key skip-level staff within the first three months. On an average, executives who go through our transition labs have eight employees directly reporting to them. They in turn will have a similar number of direct reports. Even attending a first two-hour dinner meeting with each of your direct reports one on one to get to know

them and the issues confronting your team can take 16 hours. Add one-hour skip-level meetings with select individuals or groups (assuming each of your team leaders has eight direct reports), and it is likely to consume another 16 to 64 hours of meetings. In addition, there may be travel to select locations in a global company. Assuming a 60-hour work week in the first three months, just initially connecting with your key reports and key skip-level staff will generally consume at least a week or more of effort across the first 12 weeks. Yet, it is important to make time for these meetings to make a preliminary assessment of your team and to establish a personal connection with key staff.

3. Listen first, and focus on your team, not yourself. When connecting with your staff members, it is important to note they are initially assessing the implications of your new leadership role on them. During this time, it is important to really listen and learn about critical issues from your staff's perspective. In addition to learning their hopes and aspirations, you can ask them what they see as the one area the organization does really well in and the one area in which it does poorly and that needs to be addressed by the entire team. These questions can help you triangulate on your go-forward agenda. While this is a chance to mutually acquaint yourself with your staff, be aware of what you say about yourself. Especially, be aware that your story of sacrifice, accomplishment, and prior work may not be something your staff connects with, empathizes with, or can envisage for themselves. For example, if your idea of sacrifice in taking this new job is moving to a smaller apartment near Central Park in New York City from a large property in the suburbs of Washington, it may not elicit much understanding as a sacrifice from your employees who commute daily to New York City for an hour each way from New Jersey or Connecticut. Make the effort to really learn about your staff, and if you communicate stories about yourself, ensure that they are meaningful to your staff.
4. Co-create or communicate a winning vision. In a previous essay,² we discussed the importance of creating a brand with your team. You may not be certain at the outset of your tenure what the vision for the organization should be. You can initially set expectations that you are listening to your team before committing to a vision. Visions are powerful rallying and unifying statements that help align all members of your team to a common purpose. For example, Deloitte's vision is "to be recognized as the pre-eminent advisor to the CFO." Our work on transition labs in the CFO Program is consistent with this overall vision, and in the context of those who deliver transition labs, our subsidiary vision is equally simple and focused: "Deliver exceptional transition labs to at least 50 percent of the annual global 1000 corporate CFO transitions (approximately 75 per year)." Framing what winning means helps the entire team focus on how to help you win. Co-creating the vision with the team, helping to craft the language, can increase their buy-in.
5. Announce and commit to developing a tangible talent agenda. Your team and organization want to know you are committed to developing them. Enquiring about how talent is developed in the organization, the stars in the group, and talent programs for staff is the starting point for creating a talent agenda. Explore early with your team members how you can develop them as individuals and as part of the overall organization, and recruit them into the process of creating a talent agenda for your entire organization.
6. Demonstrate sponsorship and support for your leadership. As you frame an initial agenda with your team and have a broader staff meeting, it may be a good idea to open or close the meeting with an in-person or telephone visit from your CEO or boss. This can be designed in a way that visibly demonstrates his/her commitment to you and your organization's success and sponsorship for your agenda.
7. Address team dysfunctions early in your tenure. Your team inheritance can include a number of dysfunctions. This may range from mistrust and lack of information sharing and silos among team members to outright conflict. It's important to address these dysfunctions quickly and set the tone and operating model for the team that you want. Sometimes this can

be done through direct conversations with those concerned. At other times, more drastic actions are warranted—from assigning two individuals who do not work together the same shared office till they improve their collaboration to letting someone go. Addressing inherited dysfunctions quickly is likely to gain you respect, while allowing dysfunctions to persist will likely undermine you with your team and peers.

8. There is no guarantee that the above seven steps will by themselves build the confidence of your inherited team in your leadership. But systematically undertaking these steps can avoid common blunders and ease

the way to gaining engagement and followership from your team.

The takeaway

Every incoming leader has to engage and re-recruit the team they inherit to their leadership. The more broken your team inheritance, the more time and effort you will need to expend to create the team you want. Re-recruiting the team often has to be done within the context of the CEO's perceptions of the team and its intrinsic needs and motivations. The seven steps above can help you engage more effectively with your new team.

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Endnotes

1. Ajit Kambil, *Executive transitions: Drivers of team performance—Do you have a team, do you want a team?*, Deloitte University Press, October 7, 2014, <http://dupress.com/articles/executive-transitions-team-performance/>.
2. Ajit Kambil, *Executive transitions: Your team is your brand—Building a leadership brand with your team*, Deloitte University Press, November 9, 2015, <http://dupress.com/articles/building-leadership-brand-with-your-team/>.



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