Keep or Replace the Existing Team?

When you step into a leadership role, you step under a spotlight, and the first 100 days can make or break you.

There are no hard or fast rules for whether to keep the existing team or replace it altogether, but there are pluses and minuses to both options.

Option 1: Keep the existing team

Pluses

- **You don't have to recruit all new direct reports**
- The incumbents have a lot of institutional knowledge that is available to you
- Work can go on underneath you while you formulate your game plan

Minuses

- You need to do your own assessment of the staff (conducted by you or a third party) so you know their capabilities
- Your team may withhold information or sabotage your efforts
- The staff you inherited might have been part of or contributed to why your predecessor was removed
- You still may find that you need to replace people, and if you do it over time, it is more disruptive for a longer period than doing it all at once

Option 2: Clean house

Pluses

- You get to pick your people
- You may have some people who worked for you previously that you could attract and get in place relatively quickly
- The remaining employees are likely to be more open to change
- The new staff does not know about - and will not attempt to hold onto - **the "old"** way of doing things

Minuses

- People you recruit may not fit this culture

- You will need to spend a lot of your personal time recruiting, which will take away from getting your arms around the business
- It will take the better part of six months to get your new team in place
- Your new team must learn how things "work" here
- Your team must assess their staff and develop their game plan
- **The organization's output will be negatively impacted during all the changes**

Either option has several negatives, but you may find a hybrid between the two alternatives. You can usually see this hybrid approach in action when a new president comes into the White House. The new president has about 3,000 appointments to make, and can, in fact, **"hold over," or essentially reappoint, some heads of agencies from the previous** administration.

It may be that the new leader, while not from within the current division, came from another business unit of the existing organization. That might mitigate some of the issues of unfamiliarity with the organization for the new executive.

The new leader could assume the reins with the latitude to keep or change team members as he decides. If the person was internal, he or she would have an inside network to ferret out the strong players and those who might need to be changed out.

Once, when I took over a new team, there were two people I inherited who my boss offered to give severance packages to if I wanted. But I was young and altruistic and thought I could work with them.

Wrong decision.

I ended up spending way too much time trying to rehabilitate them, which ultimately took focus away from developing and promoting my agenda. And after all that time working with them, the two individuals ended up leaving the organization within six months. If I had it to do over again today, I would not have kept them.

On the flip side, I have also witnessed organ rejection. When I was employed at Anheuser-Busch, there was a senior level executive brought in with the mandate to upgrade the **company's technology. It was a mandate the larger organization was very hesitant** to adopt, so a quiet but intentional stonewalling developed and spread throughout the organization. The most resistant people were the most senior, because they felt they had done without **technology this long and didn't see the harm in continuing that way** for a few more years.

One day, I saw this senior-**level executive in the company's parking garage carrying a box** with his personal effects from his office. He was a very capable person, but as an outsider, lacked any base of support in a company with an extremely strong culture.

Making a significant change at a high level in any organization takes careful planning. The decision to make a change in the person may be the easiest but ensuring that person is successful requires some strategic effort.

About the Author

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