

**Neff, Thomas J. & Citrin, James M. - You're In Charge – Now What?***Crown Business, 2005, [Business] Grade* ★★☆☆

The first hundred days has become an ingrained feature of business management perception, vocabulary and subsequently real practice. In media often referred to as a grace period, the days in question are hardly ever graceful. The first hundred days are the first few months for a new manager – CEO or other. They are vital from a number of aspects, as you never get a second chance to make a first impression. With this book the authors want to help the reader to get the best possible start in their managerial position by helping him to construct his own agenda and a First 100 Day Plan and also avoid the many pitfalls that will be encountered during the period.

During the first 100 days the rules are different: the manager to some extent gets a free pass from the many small day-to-day emergencies as he must familiarize himself with the company and he also has a golden opportunity to make changes – in fact he's expected to make them. After the first few month changes will be harder as the mandate for disrupting the status quo is less explicit. A clear well thought out agenda and good preparations are thus of more importance than many realize. The authors with backgrounds from board work, consultancy and academia did a three year study of leadership transitions – both the successful ones and the less so. The authors structure the book with eight building blocks after one of the more successful examples of CEO initiations - that of Paul Pressler joining GAP.

The building blocks for the “great first 100 days”, that also make up most of the chapters, are quite self-explanatory so here they are: 1. Prepare yourself during the countdown (from acceptance until day one), 2. Align expectations (day one until end of first month), 3. Shape your management team (the whole 100 days), 4. Craft your strategic agenda (the whole 100 days), 5. Start transforming culture (month's three and forward), 6. Manage your board/boss (the whole 100 days), 7. Communicate (the whole 100 days) and 8. Avoid

common pitfalls (the whole 100 days). To some extent the advice presented is fairly obvious. This does not mean that it is of no value. Having a well-crafted systematic plan, addressing the multiple demands on a new CEO should be a tremendous help when the pressure of the day-to-day business sets in. There are a number of psychological traps for the rookie boss and the ability to take a step back and consult a First 100 Day Plan should be highly beneficial even if the terrain never really resembles the map.

Some of the more common sources of not so great first 100 days are discussed in a useful chapter. They include for example trying to impress and therefore setting unrealistic or unsustainable expectations – or for that matter talking down the predecessor, lack of communication, not finding a good balance between making rash decisions and suffer from analysis paralysis, inability to understand where the true power of the organization lies or to leave the previous employer behind mentally and much more.

Now and then the advice becomes a bit too generic in my opinion, for example general advice on how to handle the board instead of focusing on handling those first 100 days. All the better then, that there is an example of a full First 100 Day Plan in the appendix – this makes the topic more concrete and the reader gets the chance to ponder on how he would have crafted the plan differently. The book is full of examples and the name dropping of well known CEO:s is extensive. As I'm a rather academic person the number of war stories at times become too many for my taste, but taste is obviously something individual. In the end, any leader who uses this text when preparing for his coming assignment will most likely do a better job and so the book delivers.

The authors' own condensed version of the building blocks is: “*Listen and learn. Underpromise and overdeliver*”. That's good advice.

Mats Larsson, February 4, 2014