

# THE “GOLDEN HOUR”



So you’ve just been promoted. Congratulations... and now what?

You’re in a “Golden Hour.” At no other time may employees be as open to change as they are now. With the right reflection and actions in your critical first quarter on the job, you may ensure your success.

Starting from a clean page, in your first critical quarter you can surface information to generate fresh insights and ideas. You can make important decisions and set a new direction. You can lay down a roadmap to new performance and achievement of results. In short, you have latitude to make real change happen.

With so much happening, your “Golden Hour” can feel stressful, even overwhelming. But with the right reflection and actions, you may ensure your success as a leader.

## **Eight domains of focus are critical in a leadership promotion:**

1. Personal Advisory Board
2. Relationship with your Boss
3. Engaging your Organization
4. Building your Network
5. Your Leadership Team
6. Setting the Course
7. Setting the Tone
8. Managing Transitions

## Domain #1: Personal Advisory Board

Many newly promoted leaders think that the requisite knowledge and skills will be acquired on the job. This may be true – but it might take too much time. You can accelerate your learning curve if you are willing to be supported by others: teachers, guides, advisors, and coaches.

You may be surprised to find out just how much time individuals are willing to give. Your Personal Advisory Board may constitute one of your greatest assets in the coming years. Accompli suggests five roles:

1. **Business Strategist:** This senior individual provides you with general business advice regarding your strategy and its fit with the organization's business strategy. He or she may be within or outside of the company.
2. **Content Specialist:** A professional seasoned in your domain can challenge your thinking and provide you with best practices and thought leadership regarding your role, the strategy you wish to lead and the operations you need to roll out. This individual can be within or outside of the company.
3. **Mentor / Consigliere:** A senior member of the company provides you with advice regarding your career within the company, the political playing field within the organization, and expectations and opinions of senior leadership.
4. **HR Representative:** A business partner working within your company's HR department provides you with guidance to make astute decisions regarding the people of your organization.
5. **Coach:** An outsider who knows the inner workings of the company provides you with feedback to constantly improve your skills and performance -- to stay ahead of the game.

**Personal Advisory Board Action List**

- Write down the roles that must be fulfilled to create your Personal Advisory Board, and list all of the individuals who might serve these roles.
  - Use the five roles listed above, or create your own.
  - Make sure to include individuals from both inside and outside your organization.
  - Make sure to include a diverse group.
  
- List two to three “candidates” for each role, based upon these criteria:
  - The individual’s level of knowledge, skills and expertise
  - The individual’s track record and list of accomplishments
  - The level of respect and trust the individual has acquired
  - The level of honesty and candor the individual will provide
  - The amount of time the individual will be able to provide
  
- Spend time speaking to each individual for each role, quietly testing them against your criteria; take your time in this critical phase.
  
- Make your selection; inform the individuals of their roles; provide them with an estimate of the time you will require; discuss appropriate “quid pro quo.”

## Domain #2: Relationship with Your Boss

A new promotion typically brings a new boss (or the same boss who expects more). Often, this boss is different to any experienced in the past, may have greater authority and influence in the company, and may hold the keys to important career possibilities.

Building a clear relationship with your boss is critical. Many newly promoted leaders believe that will happen naturally over time. This is true – yet it is risky.

Approach your boss as a “designed relationship.” Give it care – structure, consistency, the active management of performance and social time – to develop trust and strength. The following six elements can help you establish the foundation for a successful boss relationship:

1. **Dialogues:** Schedule a consistent meeting with your boss, establishing a standard agenda with items created by both parties. This will forge reliability. Use the opportunity to:
  - Discuss a variety of matters within the company, your organization, and your Leadership Team
  - Resolve outstanding issues, and make decisions
  - Clarify appropriate communications
2. **Feedback:** Obtain permission to give and receive real feedback. Ask for it occasionally. This will forge honesty.
3. **Proactive Performance Management:** Do not wait until performance review time – check your progress against objectives and goals every so often. Also, offer to support your boss in achieving his goals and objectives. This will require a bit of boldness, but it will forge a relationship of accountability.
4. **Mistakes:** When you make a mistake, tell your boss – and do it before any other source can. This fosters a powerful relationship between two professionals. It will forge trust.
5. **Learning:** Admit to your boss when you do not know something, and ask for support or help. Show your boss that you are a committed student. This will forge respect.
6. **Social Time:** Do not forget to spend some quality one-on-one time with your boss outside of work. This social time should involve minimal business talk, more life and philosophy. This will forge friendship.

**Relationship with Your Boss Action List**

- Establish the Dialogues schedule with your boss.
  - Structure and agree to the agenda.
  - Establish the frequency (75 minutes every three-four weeks for the first three months, every four-six weeks thereafter).
  - Schedule them out one year.
  - Conduct two or three, and check on their effectiveness.
  
- Request your boss's permission to give and receive feedback.
  - Discuss and agree to guidelines for constructive feedback.
  
- Gain clarity on your performance objectives and goals; agree to an informal follow-up with your boss every three months.
  
- If appropriate, request that your boss share his objectives and goals with you; commit to supporting him in achieving them.
  
- Discuss the notion of admitting mistakes and learning with your boss gain her assent – first for you and then for her.
  
- Be proactive in setting up a bi-monthly lunch, dinner or drinks.
  - Find out what your boss enjoys doing on time off.
  - Engage one-on-one with her at first; include others in separate activities.

### **Domain #3: Engaging Your Organization**

Many newly promoted leaders focus on what might go wrong in the future. And many think they know exactly what to do about it. They start making decisions and taking actions immediately, by themselves, without gathering input regarding the current state of the organization. This is a mistake – and may not lead to real change.

Instead, focus on what is right and what needs improvement. It is critical to question and listen to the members and groups within your organization – to understand what they know, what they want, and what needs to happen to succeed.

You will get many answers to your questions – some of them contradictory and confusing. Vet your findings with your Personal Advisory Board and with your boss; obtain their opinions and insights, as well.

You will begin to ground your assessments, and see what is really needed. In addition, you will have involved others and made them feel like you are truly interested in their perspectives.

**Engagement Action List**

- Make a list of all the individuals and groups with whom you need to speak regarding the future of your organization.
  
- Prepare a set of clear, concise questions, such as:
  - What was good about the way the organization worked in the past?
  - What needs to change or stop to make the organization successful in the future?
  - How would you like to see the organization run?
  - If you were the leader, what would you do?
  - What do I need to do to be a successful leader for you?
  
- Take the time to meet with and informally interview these individuals and groups, using the questions you developed.
  
- Consolidate your findings in a written document that accurately reflects the themes that you heard.
  
- Share this document with members of your Personal Advisory Board and with your boss, if required.
  - Take the time to discuss your findings; distill themes to the key elements.
  
- Outline three to four key initiatives to respond actively to these key elements.
  
- Integrate these initiatives into your document; distribute it to all the individuals and groups with whom you spoke.

**Domain #4: Network**

The product of relationships we have cultivated over time, networks give leaders a critical advantage – providing support in the form of advice, guidance, coaching, connections, sponsorship, and buy-in.

Unfortunately, your existing network is often insufficient to provide the necessary support for the new roles and responsibilities that come with promotion. You will be designing and implementing ideas that touch many more stakeholders than in the past. Since the impact of your role is broader, your network must be broader.

With the Personal Advisory Board and a clear relationship with your boss, you are in a strong position. But it is also critical for you to think through the long-term impact of your role on various parts of the company, and then to broaden your network.

**Network Action List**

- List your current network within the company.
  
- Chart the impact your role will have by creating an organization/ stakeholder impact map.
  - Think through all individuals and groups you will be affecting, formally or informally.
  
- Match your current network to this impact map; identify any gaps.
  
- Create a list of the new individuals and groups within the company that you will need in your network.
  
- Prepare an approach to meeting with each individual.
  - Prepare a synopsis of your role, objectives, and challenges.
  - For each individual, define a set of professional needs that will generate mutual success.
  - Define the type of relationship you would like to have with the individual – i.e., informal check-ins, formal reviews, social conversations, etc.
  - Design a set of questions to better understand the individual's role, objectives, challenges, needs, and preferred relationship type.
  
- Set up an informal meeting with each individual.
  - Focus, first, on getting to know each other at a personal level – to establish the rapport and trust that will be the foundation for your relationship.
  - If appropriate, talk through the presentation and questions you've prepared – be as formal or informal as you deem fit.
  - Ensure that you walk away with agreements.
  - Ensure a consistent follow-through for the long term.

## Domain #5: Your Leadership Team

Success will depend, in large part, on how well you and your leadership team members work together to model the attitudes and behaviors you want your organization to embrace. Remember, while this is a challenging and exciting time for you, it is probably a cautious time for your team members. As the vision for the organization evolves and you gain experience with what works and what doesn't, you will continually adjust direction and style. So there will be plenty of opportunity to strengthen your leadership team over time. But getting off on the right foot will have a large influence on the team's trajectory.

You will need to work through six elements to make this "your" leadership team:

1. **Build relationships:** Take the time to establish rapport, trust and confidence with each of the direct reports who will make up your leadership team – even those you already know in a different context.
2. **Assess capabilities:** Gain a clear perspective on each team member's ability to support your organization and the course that you and your leadership team will set (see Domain #6) via your own observations and other sources.
3. **Understand how they operate as a team today:** Identify what is good about the way they operate, both as individuals and within the team context, and what needs improvement.
4. **Decide on what (if any) reshaping is needed, and take action:** Define the changes that need to occur to improve the team – individuals who may not fit, team behaviors that need altering, management processes that need to be put in place.
5. **Set up management processes:** Establish the methods, tools, and routines.
6. **Set the tone:** Lead by example with the attitude and behaviors that you want your leadership team and, thus, your organization to adopt. (See Domain #7)

The followership you will build – one of the key measures of a leader – will depend on your team members' assessments of two factors: your strength and your character.

They will assess your strength based on such factors as:

- Capacity to lead the vision, objectives and goals
- Ability to take action when warranted – even unpopular action
- Conviction and tenacity in the face of adversity
- Commitment to the success of the team and the organization
- Strength of your support for them as individuals

And they will assess your character based on such factors as:

- Honesty and integrity
- Authenticity
- Consistency
- Resiliency
- Openness and candor
- Ability to listen and incorporate their input
- Overall attitude

### Leadership Team Action List

- Schedule time with each of your direct reports.** Just as you would like to be able to spend an hour with your boss every so often, so will they want quality time with you. In the initial conversation, focus on getting to know each other at a personal level. Make sure your humanity comes through – remember that you may be an intimidating presence to some of them.
  
- Assess their performance.** Build your own perspective through discussions with them and objective measures of performance. Also, read performance reviews; talk to former supervisors, if possible; discuss with your HR representative.
  
- Understand how they operate as individuals today.** Your “newness” gives you latitude to inquire about “how things work around here.” Ask how their old boss operated – what worked well, what would they change? Spend time with individuals on the job, getting to know what they do and how.
  
- Establish management processes, answering:**
  - Why and how often will we meet as a team?
  - How will we run these meetings; what will we do, and how will we set the agenda?
  - How will our team plan and manage work?
  - How will our team communicate within itself and to the rest of the organization?
  - How will our team manage the decision-making process? How will our team resolve issues?
  
- Spend time during your meetings to stop and, as a collective, observe and comment on the team’s work approach and behaviors.** Ask individuals to provide feedback on how the team is functioning – real time. Also be rigorous and courageous by requesting feedback on your performance as a team leader.
  
- Through this observation, decide, as a collective, what the team needs to keep doing, change or stop doing.** Commit to these.
  
- Assess how well each individual follows through.** Through this assessment, determine what actions are needed in terms of individual coaching, team re-alignment, or personnel actions.

## Domain #6: Setting the Course

Organizations are in motion. The job of the leader is to work with his/her team to establish the course for the journey, and then steer the organization toward delivering higher value for the enterprise, working through the obstacles that can block progress and erode effectiveness.

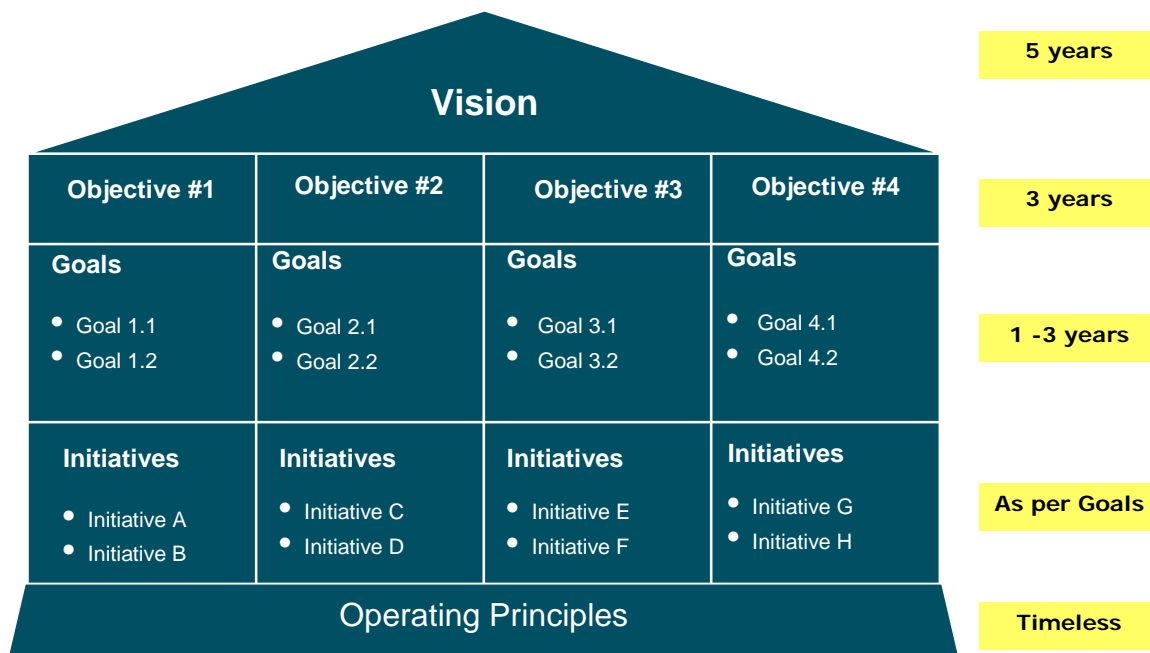
Journeys require three things: a destination, an origin, and a path from one to the other. Your organization will look to you to establish the destination, the vision, and strategy. They will expect you to be the spokesperson for the organization, putting a stake in the ground regarding what you plan to achieve.

You also bear responsibility for the path to that destination. In many ways the path is more challenging than the destination. Envisioning the desired future state encourages (perhaps, demands) letting go of the present reality. The path, however, is always experienced in the here-and-now, and must take into account the present situation, even if it's not particularly attractive or exciting to do so. The path also has many branches, choices that will make the subsequent journey easier or more difficult. So making astute decisions along the way will have great bearing on your results.

Although the accountability is ultimately yours, the creation should be shared. This means that you and your leadership team should generate the vision and strategy for the organization. Jointly establishing the destination can be an energizing and inspiring exercise, and it is a great opportunity to bond with your team and to get a read on their potential. In addition, deciding how to embark on the path will be more effective and more enjoyable if done as a group – with you at the helm.

**Setting The Course Action List**

- Set up a series of meetings with the members of your leadership team to draft a vision and strategy for your organization.** Work with an external facilitator so that each member of the team, including you, can participate fully. Use a basic strategic framework map model, like this:



- Solicit input regarding the resulting draft vision from all stakeholders,** including your boss, clients, your Personal Advisory Board, and members of your organization. Use the input to rework the strategic map with your leadership team.
- Understand your starting point.** Solicit input to understand how the company evaluates your organization’s performance – what metrics do they use? What levels constitute great, acceptable, and poor performance? Where external benchmarks exist, calibrate current performance against what others have achieved. Where are the greatest gaps? What would be the most visible improvements?
- Decide what to do first.** Work with your team to translate the initiatives into concrete steps. Make sure that these steps are highly achievable and visible, to establish credibility and build positive momentum.

## Domain #7: Setting the Tone

As a new leader, you have both the great opportunity and the great responsibility to “set the tone” – to translate the organization’s values into appropriate attitude and behaviors. While what you say is important, your team members will pay more attention to what you do and *how* you show up. They will quickly seize on any inconsistencies – which will lessen the impact of your leadership in the future.

The fact is that your state of mind will impact your organization. If your tone is worried, harried, reactive or angry, you can expect to impact your organization adversely. If, however, you show up calm, clear, proactive, and positive, your organization will respond in kind.

In other words, you must model how to live the values in a way that creates a productive and constructive work experience, setting the tone in four ways:

1. Reinforce the organization’s stated values, both verbally and through action.
2. Explicitly state the behaviors you want the organization to embrace.
3. Take appropriate personnel-related actions, e.g., hires, promotions/demotions, terminations, special recognition.
4. Embody the desired state of mind each and every day.

### Setting Tone Action List

- List the values of your organization**, and write down the attitudes and behaviors that manifest these values; share your list with your leadership team.
  
- Observe yourself.** Work with a coach and use members of your Personal Advisory Board for feedback on how well you are living the desired attitude and behaviors.
  
- Request that your team members create their own lists** and share them with the others during one of your meetings; stress the importance of living the attitudes and behaviors they have listed.
  
- Establish a system of reciprocal feedback** with the members of your leadership team – one-on-one and group feedback.

## Domain #8: Managing Transitions

The “journey” metaphor used earlier to describe the long-term progression of your organization applies equally well to the journey of this critical first quarter. You have a starting point and an ending point, milestones to accomplish, obstacles to avoid, and results to produce. You will be accompanied by others. Things will get rough at times, and some individuals may not make it to the destination. On this journey, you are the captain and are responsible for navigating successfully.

Ideally, during this critical first quarter several significant transitions will take place:

- You will transition from “the new head of the organization” to “the leader”
- Your “direct reports” will become your “leadership team”
- Your boss will transition from “your superior” to your mentor and supporter

As you consider how to best manage this transition, keep in mind what the experience might be for you and your leadership team:

- While initially excited and energized, you may feel overwhelmed at times. You may be in a state of steep learning – absorbing a great deal of new and unfamiliar information and building new relationships. You may experience periods of self-doubt. And all the while you will know that others are watching you and relying on you to lead through this phase.
- Your team members are also likely to experience uncertainty, anxiety, and fear for what the future might hold for them. Even for those who knew you before, in your new role you are an unknown quantity. Forging a relationship with you will seem like the most important thing in their work lives in the short term. They will be watching carefully, and reacting to the direction you set and signals they detect.
- Your boss, while likely less anxious, will also experience feelings associated with a transition – wondering if he/she made the right decision, trying to gauge how and when to engage with you for maximum positive effect, watching to see how well you perform and whether your organization will embrace you. Clearly he/she has a strong vested interest in your success.

Knowing all this, what can you do to make this transition period as successful as possible for everyone? Four basics can help to make this journey a little smoother:

1. **Stay present and centered:** Keeping your composure is critical. If you can remain present to what is occurring around you, you will maintain your perspective. With perspective, you will stay centered and have a tremendous effect on all around you. Remember: those who chose to put you in this role believe you are up to the task. Take comfort in that, and draw on memories of past successes as a source of strength.

2. **Focus on the future:** Many things will draw you into day-to-day, tactical work; this is normal and desired. But you must never lose sight of the future. Review your strategic map with its vision, objectives, and goals. Recall what you wanted to accomplish, both personally and professionally. Do this with your leadership team or, better yet, as a communication exercise with your entire organization.
3. **Establish guideposts:** When the going gets rough, it can be easy to lose your bearings and veer from your desired destination. To stay on course, you need reference points: milestones, concrete deliverables, performance metrics, predetermined criteria established with your boss. Whichever you choose, set them up during the early days.
4. **Savor the journey:** You are not in your new position simply to achieve a set of accomplishments. There is a journey that is occurring each and every day. Your ability to experience it all – good and bad -- will allow you to see more, learn more, and evolve into the leader you are meant to be.

### Transitions Management Action List

- Make a list of why you were given this job, why you're the right person** for it. Include your strengths and past successes. Use this as a touchstone to maintain composure when times get rough.
  
- Refresh yourself with techniques you have used in the past to maintain focus, composure, and relaxation.** Use whatever works for you – deep breathing, meditation, relaxation techniques, etc. Schedule time – every day if possible, but at least a couple of times a week – to use these techniques to stay centered and maintain a positive demeanor.
  
- Keep your strategic map handy at all times.** Bring it to meetings, and speak about it with your leadership team. Use it as a reference when faced with difficult decisions – which course is more likely to lead toward that vision? Which choice will make the organization stronger in the long run? And, equally important, what should not be done?
  
- List guideposts.** What milestones will indicate whether you're on track? Use specific achievements or performance targets wherever possible. Incorporate regular “how are we doing?” conversations as part of your regular routine with your boss, your leadership team members, and your Personal Advisory Board.
  
- Make time for personal enjoyment.** Put it in your calendar, and honor it as you would a major business appointment. Include this as part of your work life (e.g., team dinners or outings, informal after-work get-togethers), as well as your time away from work.

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