

# Training the Leaders Who Follow

Executive onboarding processes are in need of improvement. **By Aparna Nancherla**

Onboarding a new employee or transferring an old one into a new position involves a barrage of steps. She must be trained on the organization's practices and policies, while gradually adjusting to her job function. Making sure the employee understands her role in regard to her co-workers is also crucial.

Now factor in that the employee is in an executive position. The transitional process should be structurally conscientious to ensure the smooth and favorable future of the organization. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

According to the "Executive Transitions" study from the Institute of Executive Development and the Alexcel Group, 30 percent of senior leaders who transfer into new companies, and 21 percent of leaders who transfer within the same company, are not successful in their new positions after a period of two years.

Scott Saslow, executive director at the Institute of Executive Development, notes, "The assumption is that for the internal transfers, they already know how the organization works. Companies have subcultures. The politics are different, the players are different, and how you get things done is different."

Another key finding was that ramp-up time (time needed to perform the job as expected) for internal and external hires was not substantially different. According to 36 percent of respondents, ramp-up time for external hires ranges from six to nine months, while 26 percent reported that it is longer than nine months. For internal hires, 47 percent of respondents reported that ramp-up time ran from three to six months, but 25 percent reported that it took longer than six months.

Patricia Wheeler is managing director of the Alexcel Group. "[Ramp-up time] does take longer than 90 days," she reports. "If people take their eye off the ball at that point, they may be setting themselves up for less success, and potentially failure."

The main component to solving this issue is managing expectations. "Our results suggest that a relatively small amount of time, if invested correctly, will help senior executives assimilate in their new roles and may prevent the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars and work-hours," says Wheeler.

Some of the methods suggested include revisiting the hiring process to include evaluating interpersonal skills and situational behavior; making relevant onboarding plans that communicate expectations for new roles and responsibilities; finding mistakes early; and using tools like coaching, mentoring, and 360-degree feedback to track progress and chart growth.

Additionally, Saslow notes that the talent development units within companies need to reach out to recruiting firms and headhunters because all the information collected on a new employee, "needs to be part of the person's portfolio on the day they start."

The study, which was released in May, collected data from 150 executives and talent professionals across 11 countries and 18 different industries. Companies surveyed included Booz Allen Hamilton, Credit Suisse, Deloitte & Touche, HP, ING Canada, Saudi Aramco, Symantec, Wachovia Corporation, Wells Fargo, and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals.

**Aparna Nancherla** is an associate editor of T+D; [anancherla@astd.org](mailto:anancherla@astd.org).

## The BIG Number

# 21%

of executives who make internal transfers fail to meet expectations within two years.

### >>Reported Ramp-Up Time for New Hires or Transfers

External hires  
 6 to 9 months . . . . .36%  
 Longer than 9 months . . . . .26%

Internal transfers  
 3 to 6 months . . . . .47%  
 Longer than 6 months . . . . .25%



### >>Percent of New Executives Who Failed to Meet Expectations in Their First 2 Years

External hires . . . . . 30%  
 Internal transfers . . . . . 21%

Source: Alexcel Group; Institute of Executive Development



YES!

I want to subscribe for only \$99, (\$165 Outside the U.S.) to T+D magazine—12 monthly issues that keep me at the forefront of workplace learning and performance.

TD0833

Order Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Check One: [ ] \$99 (USA) [ ] \$165 (Outside the US) [ ] VISA [ ] MasterCard [ ] Amex [ ] Discover [ ] Check (USD) (Payable to T+D)

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax this form to 1.703.683.9591 OR Mail to: T+D, P.O. Box 1567; Merrifield, Virginia, 22116-9812, USA

Order online at store.astd.org
Phone: 1.800.628.2783 (1.703.683.8100 outside the US)

Orders processed within three business days.
If you have questions, please contact subscriberservice@astd.org

Prices valid through 12/31/2008. If you should wish to cancel your subscription for any reason, you will receive a refund on all unmailed issues. Your subscription to T+D may be a tax deductible business expense. Please allow 6 to 8 weeks to receive your first issue.

T+D is published by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

010859.63250

