

Scaling Up to a Bigger Job without Drowning

from the Executive Coaching Roundtable



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Craig Jackson was two months into his new job – a big scale-up – and he couldn't quite get out from behind his desk. He was shocked at the steep learning curve and the fact that everything seemed urgent. Plus, his boss thought Craig was the only person who could handle the technical aspects of the merger. Craig had apologized to his new team several times, promising he would get around to meet everyone as soon as the final details of the merger were settled.

The tsunami that hit Craig in his new job often accompanies major scale-ups and can knock the most competent managers off their feet. Most cope by doing what they've always done – they hunker down, work long hours, plea bargain with the family, and hope that everything turns out for the best. A more helpful strategy is to realize from the outset that this is a different job and it's going to require different strategies.

The Executive Coaching Roundtable, a group of seasoned coaches who frequently work with executives like Craig, offers the following principles and tips for executives who are undertaking a major scale-up:

1 This is a Different Job.

- Get used to the pace of many things cresting all the time and what can seem like a steady stream of bad news.
- Be careful not to undervalue the political aspects of the job while overvaluing the technical.
- Don't automatically assume that this is a mandate for turn around; get clear on whether there is a change agenda or not.
- Learn as much as you can from your predecessor and then trust your own instincts on how to do the job. Resist temptation to speak negatively about him/her.
- Learn the finances of the business in a deep way; know how money flows in the organization on a monthly basis.
- Understand who your new stakeholders are and what their interests and concerns are.

2 Your Role is Different.

- Realize that you have to wear at least three hats – the technical hat, the people hat, and the strategic hat – and that you must constantly change from one to the other.
- Remember that you are in a more visible role and be deliberate about how to act/react to situations.
- Don't underestimate the power of your authority. And don't overestimate it either.
- Realize that part of the job is dealing with people's expectations of the leader and their history with authority as well.
- Begin planning with your deputies - both those you choose as well as those you inherit – and begin delegating right away. Draw from the historical knowledge of legacy employees. Manage competition between old and new deputies.
- Figure out who your allies are, as well as those who would not mind if you failed – make friends with both.
- Resist the temptation to be the hero or feel as if you have to fix everything at once.

3 Bigger Jobs Require a Systematic Approach.

- Create ways to communicate with the entire team or enterprise. Even the most well-intentioned deputies won't communicate information exactly as you would. Draft weekly emails to the entire team, for example, or hold monthly town halls. Let them see and hear you on a regular basis.
- Similarly, develop ways to stay connected to staff at lower levels – plan periodic skip-down meetings, mixed-level task forces, breakfasts, etc.
- If you have not yet mastered meeting management, now is the time to do so. Also, figure out what size meetings are best for making decisions and who should be involved.
- Use your calendar strategically. Make sure you attend to the important as well as the urgent.
- If you want employees to communicate with you in specific ways, let them know. One CEO, for example, told employees to always bring problems to her attention, but to also bring proposed solutions. Another shared his preferred strategy for dealing with disagreements.

4 Sustaining Yourself Requires a Consistent and Intentional Effort.

- This is not the time to cut corners on the practices you already use to maintain your health and wellbeing in an effort to save a few minutes.
- Stay centered to help you traverse difficult situations and maintain clear ethical standards.
- Reach out to trusted colleagues and invite them to give you a balanced view of how things are going.
- Plan times to get away as well as ways to stay physically and mentally healthy – even the President of the United States works out and has date nights.
- Remember to celebrate successes.

The **Executive Coaching Roundtable (ECR)** was founded in June of 1998 as a forum for the continuing professional education of experienced, senior-level executive coaches. The founders sought to create a stimulating, supportive and confidential learning environment where they could continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills. This document was created by the ECR in 2010 to aid clients interested in executive coaching.

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