

# EXPERT PERFORMANCE

*Charting Your Course to Higher Performance*

## Building Confidence

### The Number 1 Challenge for New Leaders

Dr. Robert Karlsberg  
Dr. Jane Adler

**CHALLENGE:** Today's leaders need to meet an increasing demand for measurable results in ever decreasing time frames.

**SOLUTION:** Ultimately a leader's ability to meet expectations depends on the willing performance of the workforce. Leaders who inspire confidence find that employees become partners, and invest time, energy and effort toward the desired end result.

#### The Building Blocks of Workforce Confidence.

**Trust** - Build trust through frequent, candid, and consistent communication.

**Objective** - Get buy-in for one overriding and inspiring business objective.

**Plan** - Create a plan with input from the organization.

**People** - Ensure that people are in the right roles.

**Success** - Achieve early successes that inspire.

As boards and shareholders scrutinize the performance of new CEOs more closely than ever before, today's leaders need to meet the increasing demand for strong, measurable results in limited time frames. Leaders who fall short often find their tenure very brief indeed.

For the new leader, a failed transition can bring a sudden end to an otherwise promising career. For the organization, the tangible costs of a failed transition at the top can run into the millions of dollars. Yet these costs pale in comparison to the intangible damage.

Loss of key employees, declines in morale and productivity, damage to company reputation, and reduced investor confidence not only interfere with current performance, but can dramatically reduce an organization's ability to rebound with the next leader.

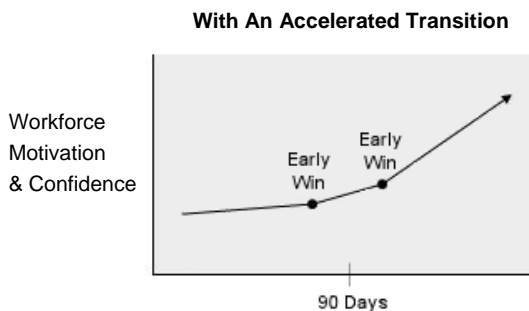
It's no wonder that a new leader's first days on the job face such intense scrutiny from both inside and outside the company. It's in everyone's best interest for the new leader to make a rapid transition and show results quickly.

Today's new leaders have a number of tools at their disposal for initiating change and motivating greater productivity. They can change incentives, reorganize units to encourage brainstorming and collaboration, bring in innovative processes, etc. Any one of these may help enhance performance. However, there is something deeper -- a more essential element that must exist *before* any process change can show significant results. That element is confidence.

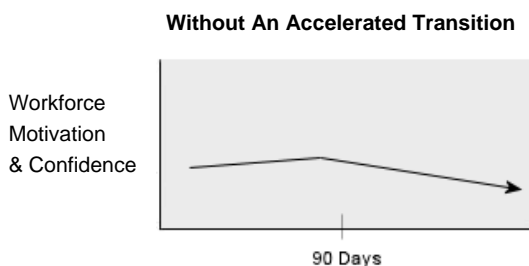
## A Brief Window of Opportunity

To reduce the risk of failure and rapidly maximize performance, senior leaders need to take charge of their new roles immediately. This increases motivation and confidence, fueling even higher levels of performance.

Whether it's a single leadership transition or a larger-scale organizational change, your goal must be to ensure that you realize maximum potential from your transition investment as soon as possible.



A prolonged transition reduces an organization's confidence in the leader and in its own ability to perform.



## The Value of Confidence

Ultimately, what determines whether a new leader will be able to meet expectations is the motivation and effort of the workforce. While a great reputation may give the new leader a brief advantage, it's the ability to inspire the willing contribution of tens, hundreds, or thousands of people that enable him or her to deliver results rapidly and sustain these results over time.

Just as confidence in a company's future prospects attracts investment, confidence in a project's outcome attracts effort, loyalty, and commitment. When people have confidence, they willingly invest their time, effort, and energy toward the end result. It is this willing contribution that leads to the collaboration and responsiveness so necessary in today's rapidly changing business environment.

New leaders can get better results, and get them more quickly, by making confidence-building a central focus of their transition plan. But this doesn't mean they start out with a pep rally. The kind of confidence people need doesn't come from impassioned speeches or from patting people on the back and letting them know you have faith in them, but from a carefully crafted plan that guides people toward early successes and inspires them to ever higher levels of performance.

As Rosabeth Moss Kanter found in her research for her book, *CONFIDENCE*, once an organization is on a "winning streak," it takes relatively little effort to sustain performance. So it makes sense for new leaders to focus their initial efforts on early successes. These successes inspire people in the organization to have confidence in the leader, in each other and in their own ability to win.

## How to Build Confidence as a New Leader

Organizations need confidence in several areas:

- People need to have confidence in the leader
- The leader needs to have confidence in the people
- Everyone needs to have self-confidence and confidence in the team's ability to win

So how do new leaders rapidly build confidence? While every organization is different, and every new leader will face unique circumstances, the good news is that any leader in a new role can rapidly encourage confidence by implementing the five building blocks.

**TRUST** -- Build TRUST through sharing information, frequent communication, etc.

**OBJECTIVE** -- Get buy-in for one overriding and inspiring business OBJECTIVE

**PLAN** -- Create a PLAN with input from the organization

**PEOPLE** -- Ensure that the right PEOPLE are in the right roles

**SUCCESS** -- Achieve early SUCCESS that inspires further performance

### TRUST

As a new leader, know that everything you do communicates something. The messages people get from your early actions impact the confidence they will have in your leadership for many years to come.

In everything you do, you need to communicate honesty, enthusiasm and a confident attitude. It's important that you communicate both positive and negative information regularly and rapidly, to avoid surprises. There's nothing worse for your credibility than to have your employees learn bad news about the company from the morning paper.

A great way to build credibility and mark the beginning of your leadership is by solving simple problems that get in people's way. Eliminate bureaucratic barriers and meaningless work that causes people to stagnate. Improve systems, upgrade technology -- whatever is necessary to support people in their work.

The best way to determine which small changes will have the biggest impact is to get out and talk to people. When you decide on the changes to make, make them quickly and publicly.

People need to trust your motivations and feel confident that you'll keep your word. The more exposure they have to you and the more you show interest in their concerns, the more likely you are to build trust. Demonstrate that you care by listening to what's going on without judging or reacting. Encourage disclosure. This rapidly increases confidence in your leadership. Maintain this confidence through ongoing visibility and transparent communication.

### OBJECTIVE

Far too many leaders are great at giving specific directions, but neglect to remind everyone on the team of the greater direction and vision of the company. But offering a strategy without a meaningful goal is like providing a map, pointing out a direction and telling people to “just get started” and you’ll fill them in later on the destination. The journey quickly becomes meaningless, and if the travelers encounter any roadblocks or detours, they’re likely to just give up, since they don’t know the greater purpose.

People are goal-directed organisms. Providing a meaningful objective taps into people’s natural motivation to succeed. As a new leader, you need to rapidly identify your prime objective for the first part of your tenure and get buy-in from all stakeholders – the board, executive team, and organization. For any goal to inspire team confidence, it must truly be shared by everyone.

When people are confident of the clear, overriding purpose for their activities, they can respond flexibly, rapidly and confidently to unanticipated obstacles, changing circumstances and new opportunities. As a leader, you need to take responsibility for keeping people connected to the direction and vision of the company on a regular basis. This keeps people from getting lost in daily activities and losing momentum.

### PLAN

No football coach who wants to inspire the confidence of the team is going to suggest they can win without a clear game plan. In the same way, you can’t expect your players to get out on the field without a strategy. Can the plan change along the way? Of course. But it’s having a plan – a roadmap for action – that inspires players to get out on the field and get started.

It’s important to engage people in developing the strategy. Not only will you gain valuable information, but you’ll increase people’s feeling of ownership in the plan. When people participate in creating a plan, they feel more invested in bringing it to a successful outcome.

The strategy needs to be clear and it needs to include a plan to secure, develop or maintain the resources people need to do their work. It also needs to promote evolution of the culture.

New leaders often need to transform their organization’s culture to reach yet higher performance capabilities. As you develop your plan to achieve early objectives, you need to make certain that the methods and metrics you use are consistent with the culture you want to create.

Most importantly, you need to ensure that you formulate every element of your strategy with an eye on the target. Every milestone, program, and initiative needs to move the organization in the direction you want it to go. And everyone in the organization needs to be aware of how his or her role fits into the larger objective.

### PEOPLE

By ensuring that the right people are in the right roles, you, as a leader, can feel more confident in them. Putting people in roles that fit their competencies also increases their self-confidence and the confidence of others on the team.

In order to do this, you need to:

- Evaluate:** See that the right people are in the right jobs. Support those who are, move those who are not.
- Coach:** Guide, critique, and assist people to improve their performance.
- Build:** Encourage and recognize people regularly. Specific encouragement and reward gives your people the courage to stretch, take risks and achieve new levels of performance.

Don't wait for scheduled meetings, reviews, or ceremonies to give people feedback and recognition. Every interaction you have with your team is an opportunity to energize people and encourage them to move them in the right direction.

### SUCCESS

It's important that people feel momentum building during the transition period. The best way to accomplish this is to focus people on achieving early wins. It's important to avoid initial challenges that carry the risk of failure and instead identify goals that can be achieved within a short time frame. Seeing tangible results boosts motivation and encourages further effort.

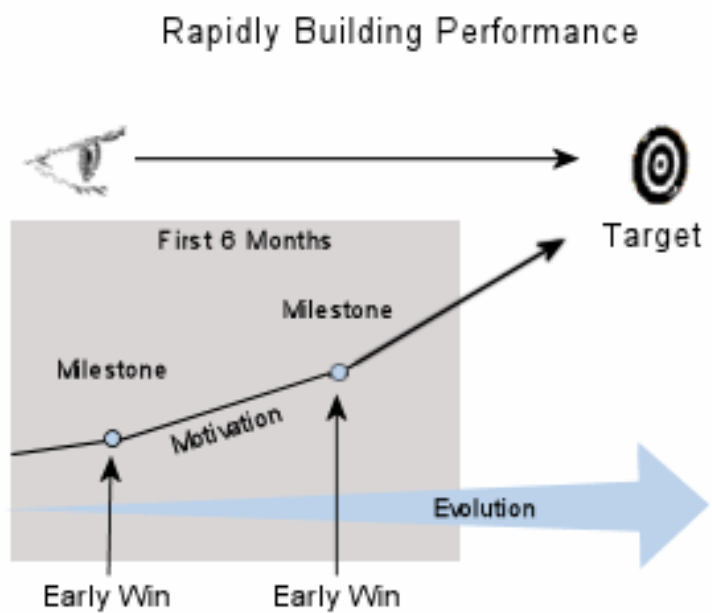
Leaders need to identify milestones that lead the organization in the direction of the overriding objective. Achieving these milestones constitutes early wins and gives the organization and leadership team something to celebrate. Achieving these early victories builds the leader's credibility, the organization's motivation, and the team's confidence in its own ability to win.

Not only do you need to identify milestones and create a path to achieve them, you also need to celebrate victories, even the small ones, from the very beginning. Celebrating not only creates an atmosphere of recognition and positive energy, it bonds your team members together in the spirit of shared accomplishment. This inspires further confidence in their ability to collaborate and to win.

**Overriding Target:** Leaders need to identify a prime objective for the first part of their tenure and make sure that all stakeholders buy-in to this target.

**Milestones that Build Momentum:** With an eye on the target, leaders identify milestones for “early wins.” Achieving these objectives builds the leader’s credibility, the organization’s motivation, and the team’s self-confidence.

**Evolution:** As leaders develop their plans to achieve early wins, they need to ensure that their methods and metrics are consistent with the culture they want to create.



### Confidence is the Key

In any transition, getting the beginning right is critical to achieving the end results you want.

As you move into a new leadership position, you'll have many things to do. You'll find yourself pulled in multiple directions, needing to respond to multiple stakeholders and outside observers, often at the same time. Keep in mind, however, that workforce confidence is the driving force enabling you to deliver on expectations. No priority is more important than building that confidence. The sooner you master this, the sooner your strategic plans are likely to deliver on their promise.

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Dr. Robert Karlsberg and Dr. Jane Adler, are experts in leadership development and the psychology of high performance. As principals of Expert Performance Systems, they work with senior executives and business leaders to maximize performance and accelerate key business results.

For information on reprinting this report, or excerpts, please contact  
[info@ExpertPerformanceSystems.com](mailto:info@ExpertPerformanceSystems.com).

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