



After The First 90 Days

Making An Impact As A New Executive By Gail Golden, MBA, Ph.D.

Guess what — the honeymoon is over! Three months ago you started your new job. You knew the next few weeks and months would hold many challenges and opportunities. You focused on learning about the company and your role, building key relationships and achieving some early wins. You were excited and apprehensive, ready to take on whatever came your way.

And now it's Day 91. You've settled in and know your way around. You've met a lot of people and learned a huge amount. Everyone has welcomed you. You've had some initial impact. Surely, you've arrived — right?

Many people mistakenly think new executives need only 90 days to integrate into their roles. In fact, research by RHR International has revealed it takes a full year for new executives to really make the job their own. The four phases in this process are the "Honeymoon Phase" (months one-three), the "Reality Phase" (months four-six), the "Adjustment Phase" (months six-12) and "Integration" (after one year).

Reality: Did I make the right decision?

By the third month, the initial glow has worn off. You have a much clearer picture of the company and your role in it — the good, the bad and the ugly. And your colleagues have a much clearer picture of you. The positive feedback isn't flowing quite so freely any more, in either direction. You may be thinking, "Oh my gosh, what have I done?"

Because women leaders are often under special scrutiny, this phase can be particularly challenging for women. You may find your self-confidence dwindling, and you may not yet have established supportive relationships to help you work through this. Besides relying on your personal network, it's critically important to continue building strong workplace relationships. This is the time when you're figuring out how things really get done in your company. It's also when you must begin the shift from learning to doing. You aren't the new kid anymore.

When the reality phase hits, remember it is only a phase. Your doubts about the company, the job and yourself are a normal part of the integration process, not an indicator that you, or they, have made a terrible mistake.

Adjustment: Do I really want to do this?

You're into your seventh month, and by now you have more realistic expectations of the job and yourself. The hard work you've done to build relationships is paying off and your self-confidence is rebounding. Other people are seeing you as part of the landscape. But under the surface, your questions are still there. This is when executives typically decide whether they'll

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stay long term or leave, and commitment to the job is often at its lowest point. Over the next six months, you'll make your decision. Which way you go depends on the quality of your work relationships, your fit with the company culture, your progress toward your goals and deliverables, and your ability to get useful feedback. For women, part of the adjustment phase is figuring out whether you can be a leader in this company without giving up your authenticity, your sense of being true to who you are. It's also about finding mentors and champions, people who'll advise and support you as you make your mark.

Integration: I'm in the Right Place!

Some time between 12 and 18 months, you start to feel you really belong. For many leaders, the completion of a fiscal cycle brings a sense of, "Now I know what this place is about." You have a better understanding of what is going on under the surface. You have friends at work. And although you know you still have a lot to learn, you feel useful and effective.

How do you know if you have successfully completed your integration process?

1. You have established your **credibility**. Others seek you out, respect your opinions and listen to you.
2. You are **aligned** with the organization. Your goals and actions are consistent with the company's strategy and objectives.
3. You are **accepted**. The people around you feel a connection to you, and you to them.
4. You are making a **contribution**. You know how to get things done and are achieving measurable results.

What's Next?

Integration is only the beginning. Ahead lay the challenges of continuing your own development as a leader, preparing for the next phase of your career and building the strengths of your team, so a successor will be ready when it's time for you to move on. Women leaders often find they are in-demand as role models and mentors for more junior women. Balancing your commitment to those women with your own development, while still getting your job done, is one of the many challenges of being a high-profile woman leader.

The demanding executive integration process is similar for men and women. But women face some unique challenges, especially when most of their colleagues are male. Critical tasks for women (and for members of other minority groups) include being a trailblazer, handling the higher visibility and building effective business and personal connections with peers who are unlike you. The good news is the talents and capabilities that got you where you are will be the very ones that will enable you to find your place and make your mark. ■

Dr. Gail Golden is a consultant with Chicago's RHR International and coaches Chicago female executives on how to be more effective in the male-dominated executive setting.

contributors

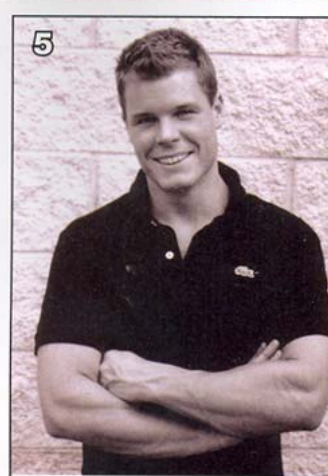


Photo by Luis H. Hernandez

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2. **MARLA CICHOWSKI** currently works as a field producer for Fox News Channel's national bureau in Chicago. Prior to joining the #1 rated national cable television network, Fox News Channel, Marla worked as a general assignment television reporter and fill-in anchor for local television affiliates in South Carolina, Missouri and Wisconsin/Minnesota. She's a graduate of the top ranked journalism school, University of Missouri-Columbia. This month, Marla profiled our cover girl, Melody Hobson. Read her insightful interview on page 38.

3. **TERRA COONEY** is a freelance writer who lives in Chicago and doesn't plan to leave anytime soon. She has written for magazines, newspapers and online publications such as Associated Publications, Inc., Pioneer Press, The Nurses Lounge and UnRated Magazine. If all her time was free time, she would go to concerts as much as she could, because music, along with writing and Chicago summers, are a few of her favorite things. Terra shares her beauty expertise with TCW readers by uncovering travel beauty essentials (page 72).

4. **DR. GAIL GOLDEN**, a consultant with Chicago's RHR International—world leader in executive and organizational development, has more than 20 years of experience in consulting and clinical psychology in multiple arenas, including a stint as the Chief Psychologist of Golden Psychology Services in London, Ontario. Currently, Dr. Golden coaches Chicago female executives on how to be more effective in the male-dominated executive setting. Read part two of her three-part series on new female executives on page 42.

5. **DUSTEN NELSON** is the president of Core Fitness, a fitness and wellness company specializing in genetic nutrition and functional strength. (To learn more about your Core Fitness, contact Dusten at dusten@corefitnessenhancement.com.) This month, Dusten offers up great tips on keeping the fun in your fitness routine throughout the nutritional minefield that is the holiday season. Check them out on page 74.

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7. **ANGELA ROMAN** is the Wine Director at the Signature Room at the 95th. Her interest in wine began when she was as young girl helping her father make homemade wine in the basement of their family suburban home. Since then she has devoted her time and energy to writing the Signature Room's award-winning wine list, hosting tastings around Chicago and studying for her Master Sommelier Certification. This month, she breaks down the ins and outs of every woman's favorite libation – champagne – on page 78.

8. **EVA YUSA**, shopping expert for Chicago-based comparison shopping site ShopLocal.com, has a talent for spotting what's hot and a gift for helping people find the best deals. Eva maintains a national shopping blog and appears on TV and in online videos under the moniker "Eva the Shopping Diva" (evatheshoppingdiva@shoplocal.com). See what Eva's got in store this month on page 44. ■