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You Got The C-Suite Title—Now What? 5 Questions To Ask To Succeed At The Top Of The Organization

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You just got promoted! That's great! Or is it?

I remember one executive I worked with telling me that his CEO responded to his acceptance of the C-suite position with a firm handshake, a meaningful look into his eyes and the ominous words, "Let's see what you can do."

If it's your turn to take a seat at the table, let's give some thought to what it will look like for you to *show* what you can do. With some strategy and intentionality, you can not only deliver on the CEO's expectations; you can enter your new role with confidence.

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What's Changed?

The biggest change from a leadership position to a C-level role is the commitment to the company. You now represent the company and its vision and mission in a new way. You are focusing on the future and using your strategic mindset to achieve the vision as a very active participant. That's different than aligning to the CEO's vision and building a team to support it; it's still that, but it's also supporting the CEO directly in the group effort to achieve success.

For that reason, in this article, we're going to focus on your CEO and how to use them to orient you to your new position.

5 New Questions To Ask

4. What does your CEO need?

CEOs hire executives to be their right- and left-hand lieutenants. If they didn't need the executive team, they would just go it alone.

So, what does your CEO need from you, and how have they expressed it, either directly or indirectly? Are there guiding principles they have shared publicly that you can use as a guide?

What are your CEO's guiding principles, and how do you align to them, deliver on them and express those principles?

2. What does your CEO expect and require of their executive team?

Some CEOs bark orders and expect them to be delivered on; others want their executive team to bring them ideas. Some want sounding boards to help them get to clarity; others want well-researched, well-read executives who come to the table with their recommendations.

What does your CEO expect and require of you? What do they value most from members of the executive team?

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3. What do you need to know about your CEO?

New C-level executives who are newly experiencing the culture of the executive leadership team can inadvertently (as I've heard it indelicately put) "step in it." It can be embarrassing and demoralizing to make a rookie mistake as the newest member of the team. What do you need to know about your CEO and how they want to interact with you? What makes the group interaction functional, productive and valuable from their perspective?

4. Where are your concerns and opportunities?

You will show up as the calm, competent, confident executive you are when you have prepared for the occasion with some behind-the-scenes reflection. **Try these prompts:**

- What are you concerned about?
- Where do you struggle?
- What are you apprehensive about, feel you need to learn or do better or feel a little uncertain about?

Identifying these areas will sharpen your clarity about where you need to develop your skills. That's very different from either worrying or simply hoping for the best.

Also consider:

- What do you know you have to offer?
- Where are you confident?
- How can you bring something new to the table that is uniquely and powerfully you?

Again, reconnecting to what you know about yourself will help you be your best and bring your best to your new role.

Finally:

What are you going to do to address those concerns and take advantage of those opportunities? This is a great time to engage an executive coach to ensure you're delivering your best.

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5. Where and how can you best serve?

The most successful executives I know align all of the things they know about the CEO and their expectations, the culture of the executive committee and their own strengths and opportunities. This is how you come to know your own value.

Each and every executive on the CEO's team serves two roles at once: the formal title and responsibilities they own for the organization (COO, CFO, CHRO, etc.) and the informal roles that help lead the organization into the future (the innovator, the straight shooter, the confidante). Where and how can you best serve, given what the CEO and the rest of your colleagues count on you for?

Final Thoughts

Throughout their careers, leaders at every level frame their own success and achievement in terms of being promoted. Then one day, that big promotion comes, and it's time for a new focus: being the very best you can be and delivering in a way that only you can. At no level is that more critical than on the executive committee.

By asking these questions and giving thought to how you're going to rise to the occasion, you make it obvious to yourself and others that this is a promotion you deserved.



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