

SMART Start™ **The First-time CEO's Guide**

You just learned that you have been awarded a coveted leadership role. Decades of hard work has paid dividends. You're excited to take on this next challenge, but you also realize that it's a big leap in responsibility. You've landed the job and now you must prove you're worthy of it by living up to the high expectations of the people you will lead and your stakeholders. Feelings of joy and accomplishment are tempered by pressure and anxiety. It's time to get busy preparing and planning for the journey ahead so you can hit the ground running.

Many new CEOs assume that what got them here will get them to where they want to be. But your growth journey should not plateau just because you've reached the top of the ladder. The best leaders have an insatiable growth mindset, and they lean on trusted external advisors to augment their strengths and weaknesses. They understand that it can be hard to achieve 100% objectivity regarding their behavior and performance from the inside only.

A coach can make a big difference. But not just any coach will do. The executive coaching industry has blossomed over recent years, but many of these coaches have only studied what they are practicing rather than lived it. You need a coach who has run many miles in shoes like yours and has the courage to be brutally honest with you about your strengths and shortcomings. Just as importantly, a trusted external advisor can provide the broader perspective you need to anticipate and navigate future challenges and achieve your full potential.

After 11 years as a CEO and 9 years coaching many CEOs, I created a playbook for new leaders to get off to a great start in their new role. It's an original blueprint grounded in the principles and lessons I learned from many outstanding leaders, coaches, advisors, and teammates with whom I have been blessed to work with over the past four decades.

SMART = Strategic + Momentum + Aligned + Results + Teamwork

Strategic

Some leaders are promoted to expanded roles because they delivered results by being action oriented, but not necessarily strategic. Sustained profitable growth requires a strategy that fuels market-meaningful uniqueness executed with excellence over the long haul. Execution matters most, but long-term strategy becomes increasingly important the higher you climb up the leadership ladder.

Momentum

Whether leading a turnaround or sustaining a growth engine, new leaders need to accelerate progress sooner than later. The more momentum a team or organization has, the harder it is to stop.

Aligned

Even the best strategies are worthless if they are not executed by a team that is fully aligned and committed to the vision and the plan to make it reality.

Executive Summary

Results

Results matter most. Strategy, innovation, talent, culture, communication, and execution all matter only in their role to deliver results. Certainly, how they are achieved matters, but at the end of the day you will be evaluated based on the results you deliver.

Teamwork

A leadership team can be much more powerful than the sum of its parts if it is led and cultivated wisely. To make it happen, team members must collaborate respectfully, proactively engage in constructive contention and be secure enough to embrace diversity of thought and talent that are complimentary.

7 Steps to JDR’s SMART Start™ Process

So, how does a new leader achieve a successful start? Of course, different challenges require different approaches and postures so I’m careful to avoid over-generalizing. For example, a new CEO stepping into the leadership role of a company growing aggressively will have a much different posture than a CEO taking the leadership reigns of a financially distressed business. But the seven steps in JDR’s SMART Start process are applicable to any new leadership role.

These 7-Steps are somewhat sequential initially but should increasingly run in parallel as momentum is gathered. For each step I provide guidance, context, and questions to provoke your thinking and actions that lead to tangible results.



If you are taking on a bigger leadership role and you have a growth mindset, I’d love to help you get off to a great start and exceed expectations. To learn more about the value I bring to the table, you can read client testimonials [here](#).

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