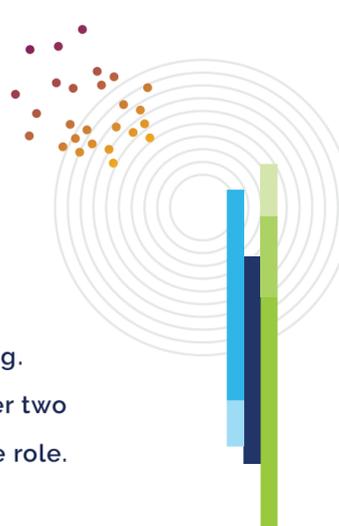


# 8 pieces of advice for new CEOs



Stepping into the role of CEO can be a daunting undertaking. Lockstep CEO, Rowan Belchers, has been advising CEO's for over two decades and shares some words of wisdom for those new to the role.

By Rowan Belchers

It's a title you've worked towards your entire career - Chief Executive Officer - and you're finally taking up the mantle. As CEO, you'll find your previous challenges when leading a team become vastly amplified. You have responsibilities beyond the immediate, your time is stretched like never before and, for the first time, the buck really does stop with you.

## The role of CEO is that of 'system leader'.

The 'system' that I refer to is alive, constantly evolving, a responsive organism that is a business, or a company. It's important to understand that this system has a very direct relationship with the CEO. In fact, a system mirrors the CEO's character traits - both the best and the worst - in a very direct way, which is a reality that is unique to the singular system leader: the CEO.

So, to the gist of this article: how should first-time CEOs think about this wonderfully challenging, complex position?

How a CEO kicks off their reign is important because their actions give permissions and non-permissions for their followers. For example, many CEOs choose not to move into expensive corner offices as a way of making it clear that access and transparency are important. Or a CEO might begin with a big town-hall type meeting to share a vision for the future and allow people a choice to align (or not) to the future goal of the business. Or, to issue an instruction to all senior leaders - as a CEO I'm working with recently did - to require them to all work from a 'zero base', meaning to start with a completely blank slate as a way of making a fresh start within a business that had become outdated and irrelevant.

## Below, I outline a few headline ideas for you to consider:


**1**

### DELIVERABLES

Make sure you understand clearly what the non-negotiables are that lie behind why you were hired. There is a hierarchy of deliverables that you have taken on and these need to be met first and foremost. Typically these are meeting revenue and profit goals; and maintaining a healthy relationship with your 'hirer' - generally a board or original founder.


**2**

### DEEPLY INTERROGATE THE BUSINESS

Work hard over the first few months of your tenure to get under the skin of your business and really understand the organisational personality that you're inheriting. This will require the asking of some hard questions, some deep inquiry into questions that remain unanswered and looking for organisational blind-spots, which can come back to bite you if they remain undetected. Essentially, know what you're working with.


**3**

### UNDERSTAND YOUR GOALS

Consider the goals you've been set. If they are overly ambitious and out of your reach, raise this and re-contract with your board as quickly as possible. These changes should be reflected in your ratified business strategy so the change is formalised.


**4**

### CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Be discerning about your change agenda: there are some aspects to the organisation that will need to shift and others that might be better left alone.


**5**

### TIMELINE

Don't be forced into an arbitrary timeline to make your mark on the organisation, i.e. the 'first 100-day' plans that some CEOs feel forced to make public. Your organisation might require quicker or slower action depending on the current state of the business, the market and your competitors.


**6**

### COMMUNICATE

Communication should be your number one priority. In the absence thereof, people will start forming their own stories and narratives. You need to get in front of the story - to quote a PR term - and take control of the organisational view that is forming around you.


**7**

### PERSONNEL CHANGES

Assess your leadership team and make the personnel changes that you feel are necessary to create a high-performing crack leadership team (which is every CEO's right to have). Invariably 25% of your leaders will need moving out, intense behaviour change or repositioning within the organisation.


**8**

### BELONGING

Make sure that you are absolutely comfortable wearing the CEO mantle - if you're not and you have imposter syndrome, arrange coaching for yourself. To not feel like you belong, or that you've earned this role is a sure-fire way to fail: you will be tentative and unconvincing and you'll find yourself with no followers.

High-performance CEOship is an always-on, refinement-by-inches type of work that requires high attention and the deployment of the full range of intelligence over a period of time. However, there is a 'going-round-the-first-lap' opportunity where a CEO must lay the ground for their future endeavours. There is competence to navigating this period and I hope the above pointers will elevate your performance should you be a recently appointed CEO.

If you are a new CEO and would like to learn more about what Lockstep can offer you, please visit our website or email us.

Website: [www.lockstep.co.za](http://www.lockstep.co.za) Email: [leadership@lockstep.co.za](mailto:leadership@lockstep.co.za)