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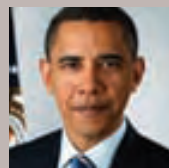
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*Is there anything left in the tank
for 2009-2010?*

By Raina Clark



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Assuming a New Leadership Role



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On January 20th Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States of America. Like all new leaders, he will encounter a wide range of challenges stepping into his new position of responsibility. Other than managing a very successful election campaign and relatively smooth transition, this is really President Obama's first executive leadership position. The world's eyes are on him.

When you join a new company or assume a new position in your current organization, all eyes fall on you. It doesn't matter if you are a lead deckhand, captain, yard supervisor or CEO. Your bosses, colleagues and others will all try to figure out if you are up to the responsibilities of your new job. For a new leader, it can all be rather daunting. In his bestselling book, *The First 90 Days: Critical Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*, Michael Watkins, a management consultant and professor of organizational behavior at leading international business school, INSEAD, in Fontainebleau, France, lays out some steps in establishing yourself in a new leadership position. Here are the keys:

Understand the situation

One of the most important things you can do as a new leader is to make the time and effort to understand organizational culture. This is especially important if you were hired to bring change to a company or unit. Culture can be a very subtle thing, so "getting it" might not happen right away. It's highly advised that you don't try to change it before you understand it.

Be realistic

New leaders can often feel isolated which in turn causes them to try to do too much too early. Avoid this tendency at all costs. Before you assume your new responsibilities take an honest inventory of your strengths and weakness. Whether you lead a company or captain a vessel, you can't do it all alone. Be aware that the skills that earned you

your new job may not be the same skills that will make you successful in your new leadership role.

Foster relationships

Building strong relations with everyone that you work with will yield long term benefits. Think of it like making deposits in a goodwill bank. Someday when adversity strikes, you just might need to make a withdrawal. Identify members of your team whose skills complement yours and work with them to make the organization stronger. However, be careful to avoid aligning yourself with any individuals too early, because this could lead to the development of unintended faction which is a threat to effective teamwork. Pay special attention to your relationship with your boss. If there are stylistic differences between you, assimilate and avoid conflict.

Create coalitions

As you move up the leadership ladder, you will find yourself interacting with more and more people, many of whom you will have no authority over, yet your success will be dependent on them. (Think Coast Guard as one example.) A significant part of leadership is working with and influencing people outside your sphere of authority. Fostering a relationship of mutual understanding will yield long term benefits.

Accelerate learning - The new leader "honeymoon" is always a lot shorter than you think. In many cases, it doesn't exist. This makes it critically important to find ways to accelerate your learning. Those strong relationships you've been building with your crew and colleagues will go a long way to helping you know what you need to know.

Build momentum

The first 90 days of assuming and exercising leadership are critical to what follows. Securing "early wins" is often one of the keys to long term success because they can have the effect of establishing credibility and building esprit de corps. The opposite can often lead to the beginning of a vicious career-threatening cycle. Everybody enjoys winning.

Now that we have the advice of a leadership expert, let's take a look at what some professional mariners have to say on the topic.

Captain Ken E. Beck (pen-name) blogs at Kennebec

Captain (<http://kennebeccaptain.blogspot.com>) and is a U.S. Coast Guard licensed Master, Unlimited, all oceans, currently sailing as master of a PCTC (Pure Car Truck Carrier) worldwide. "My first trip was a tough one. It took me about three times longer to take care of routine matters than it did on subsequent trips.

Things like port arrival documents, payroll, messages and reports. My advice to someone who plans to sail captain: see if you can get some experience at the required clerical work. Also it's very important to avoid making changes on your first trip, the captain you relieved is smarter than you think."

Jamie Hutton is Commissioning Chief Engineer for the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) NOAA, Maine Maritime graduate and USCG licensed Chief Engineer Unlimited Motor. "I worked on a few ships where the chiefs and captains were threatened by subordinates with better skill levels or abilities. I sometimes felt the same threat for the first couple of years that I sailed. Finally I realized the obvious, that shipmates will often have at least one skill set in which they excel and are more capable than you.

Don't discourage them. Let them run with it. With ships becoming more complex, you need crews who have passion, focus, and expertise in several directions. One man can't be an expert in all areas anymore with the growing complexity of equipment and systems. Enjoy having a highly qualified team. It will make you look good."

Captain Wendy Kitchell holds a USCG 500 Ton Masters license and has a wide range of maritime experiences from traditional tall ships, including Schooner America, to racing yachts in the Caribbean to building high-tech carbon race boats. "I believe listening and really paying attention to what is happening around you helps a leader. It's exactly what they teach you in Bridge Resource Management, situational awareness and utilizing the tools avail-

able which include the people whom you are leading. A lot of times I see these so-called leaders that always think their way is the only way to tackle a problem.


There are usually several different ways to solve situations that come up and it is valuable to have the flexibility to look at things from all angles. It is still important to be strong in your convictions.

However, to be receptive to new ideas and new ways to improve is what makes a true leader. This takes self-confidence and security in oneself."

Finally, the one piece of essential advice I have for all leaders is to find a mentor or confidant who can help you through some of the unanticipated challenges of the role. Leadership can be lonely business and sharing your experiences with someone you trust and respect will make it all a little easier.

Let's hope President Obama can do this, because he's going to need all the help he can get.


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