



# CEO AND EXECUTIVE ON-BOARDING

## OVERVIEW

Corporate culture is a double-edged sword for human capital. When it is distinctive and well-aligned, there is no more powerful force in attracting and retaining key talent; at every level from CEO to engineer. It can also serve as a powerful repellant: the infamous ‘white blood cells’ of the distinctive culture that attack ‘foreign bodies’ and reject them. Here is the real challenge: The hiring company is too close to its own culture to clearly articulate it, and the incoming executive has no previous experience – blind leading the blind. Dawson Consulting Group has conducted research with over 50 companies in the last 20 years on this **question:** *How best to accelerate the integration of incoming CEO’s and senior executives into an entrenched, legacy culture that is in transition?* The **answer:** *Create an ‘Assimilation Roadmap’ for the executive that identifies unique requirements of the role, business circumstance in relation to unique leadership style and competency elements of the incoming executive.*

## Research Highlights: On-Boarding Best Practices



1. Ensure culture and position fit through pre-hire assessment
2. Establish an On-Boarding support team: External coach, Hiring executive, HR business partner
3. Create an ‘Assimilation Roadmap’ that identifies landmines and accelerants for the executive
4. Both incoming executive and the team they come to, must accommodate each other
5. There are no ‘one-size’ challenges or ‘100-day’ clocks: Every On-Boarding is unique

## APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK

Dawson Consulting Group has developed proven tools and methods, based on this research, that are customized for every engagement. There are four ‘universals’ – though specifics are always unique.

**I – Understand the Challenges.** There are consistent and predictable elements of the organizational culture that can be explained to new executives, but the biggest challenge is in mapping unique style and capability characteristics of the incoming executive, to equally unique expectations of key stakeholders in the role. Partnered with the Board or hiring executive and HR, Dawson conducts an assessment of:

- **The role as defined by key stakeholders:** What are critical success factors and deliverables?
- **An individual leadership assessment:** Ideally as a selection tool before the hiring decision
- **Unique elements of the circumstance:** Historical, team and key business elements

**II – Create & Implement an Assimilation Roadmap.** The Assimilation Roadmap identifies key challenges for the On Boarding team of boss, HR and executive coach to focus on with the executive. The specific content of this roadmap will vary with every individual and circumstance, though invariably address challenges in these areas:



- **Stakeholder misalignments:** Are expectations of boss, partners, team aligned and realistic
- **Personal blind spots:** What enduring development needs of the executive might need special coaching attention given the unique triggers and challenges of the culture and circumstance?
- **Priorities, pace and timing:** What are the most important first priorities? What can wait?

It is through this customized *Assimilation Roadmap* that Dawson creates high value. The *Assimilation Roadmap* determines how, when and where to focus on accelerating and optimizing the executive's entry into the organization. Certainly, there is a checklist of predictable activities: meet key stakeholders, orient to systems/processes – but these are not the landmines that will derail an incoming executive. Newly hired executives derail because they fail to recognize some aspect of how their leadership is being experienced by a social system that is probably not itself aware of its own impact.

**III – Reality Check.** It is important to have an objective assessment of how the executive is doing after a few months. Whatever rhythm is established in this execution phase, it is important to 'take a temperature' right before 'Handoff' – usually somewhere in the 3-4 month range.

**IV – Handoff.** An explicit 'Handoff' to the HR business partner and boss – usually in a 3-way meeting - is an important milestone. The goal of the On-Boarding process is to accelerate integration and avoid early mishaps, not to create coaching dependency. This might be at three months or seven months, though the mean average for executives in our research, from first date of employment to Handoff, is four months, with a standard deviation of 22 days. The success of any On-Boarding process is measured ultimately by tenure and business performance of the incoming executive.



In our research on newly-hired executives that have had the benefit of an Assimilation Roadmap, not a single one has left the company in less than 5 years. The **lesson:** *a thorough and customized approach that relies on an experienced, executive coach is an inexpensive way to avoid the enormous expense of newly hired executives who do not stay, or worse, stay and fail.*

Dawson Consulting Group is an organizational effectiveness firm, founded in 1989, focused on helping organizations align culture with strategy through optimization of executives, leadership teams, and the key processes and structures they are responsible for. The firm is composed of senior professionals with background in psychology and human resources. Office locations in Honolulu, Silicon Valley and New York.