

SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

EPISODE 121 · WORKSHEET

EPISODE 121

Your First Thirty Days Start Now

What if the most important part of your next big promotion is already over before your first day even begins? Drawing on Michael Watkins's The First Ninety Days and the research on executive transitions, Maya and Marcus show why the real job of the first thirty days is learning, listening, and diagnosing — and how a preparation list drafted now keeps your first action landing the first time.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. The Leapfrog Risk
Harvard Business Review research found that fifty to sixty percent of executives fail within eighteen months of a promotion or a hire — and leaders who leapfrog a level or two, skipping the rehearsal level, are called out as especially at risk.

2. The Action Imperative
Watkins's first trap: rushing to act quickly to prove you belong there. You launch something visible just to show momentum. It feels like leadership, but it is usually anxiety with a calendar invite.

3. Arriving With Questions
Arriving with questions beats arriving with conclusions. A learning agenda, a relationship map, and five drafted conversations let you diagnose the situation you actually inherited before you act on it.

4. Negotiate Success in Advance
Agree the situation, expectations, resources, style, and your development with your boss — plus what good looks like at thirty days — so you build credibility on shared terms instead of guessing.

The proof: Henry was promoted two levels up to lead a division he had only ever seen from the outside, and people expected him to arrive with a bold launch plan. He did the opposite, because he had prepared before day one. He arrived with a learning agenda, a relationship map, and questions for his boss already drafted. In his first thirty days he listened and diagnosed — and when he did act, his first early win matched exactly what he and his boss had agreed success would look like.

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ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- [ ] **Step one — draft a learning agenda.** For the role two levels up from yours, write the questions you would need answered about its past, its present, and its future. The ones you cannot answer are your study list.

Questions I cannot answer yet:

- [ ] **Step two — sketch the relationship map.** Who would the boss be, who would the peers be, who holds the role today, and who else wants it? Then ask which relationships you need to start building now.

A relationship to start building now:

- [ ] **Step three — write your stop doing list.** Name the tasks that belong to your current level, and practice handing one of them over this week.

One task to hand over this week:

- [ ] **Step four — draft the five conversations.** On one page, write what you would ask a future boss about the situation, expectations, resources, style, and your development. Keep that page, so you never start from a blank sheet while everyone watches.

- [ ] **Reflect on this:** if the offer arrived right now, what would you wish you had already built? That is where your preparation starts.

- [ ] I have drafted one page of the five conversations for the role two levels up.

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus

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