
New Kid On the Block: How Leaders Smoothly Integrate Into a New Team

Series: Part 2

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The new kid arrives and immediately takes on a role in the pecking order. He or she is either a participating member of the group or the leader of the group. How is that role determined? Sometimes, as in organizational structures of any size, the role is determined before the new kid joins the group. But real leadership cannot be achieved by higher authority, it can only be earned.

All of us have been parts of teams whose leadership, while not official, is nonetheless real. The raw lieutenant with any brains at all knows that his success depends on having a good top sergeant. Sometimes that top sergeant is an assistant with exceptional social and administrative skills, sometimes it is a seasoned veteran with a deep understanding of the real way things get done. Whatever the case the new titular leader will gain respect and confidence from the team if that leader understands the internal dynamics of the team and utilizes them effectively.

On the other side of the coin is the team that is struggling, the one stuck in its ways, the one with talent but no cohesiveness or sense of pride. Or, perhaps, too much pride, which over time can degrade into arrogance; when it does its best characteristics are turned against itself and a sense of privilege and entitlement sets in. This kind of unit is toxic to the broader organization. The new kid on the block has a big job ahead of him or herself. This is the kind of situation for which the term “change management” is often used, except that the qualifier “change” seems redundant and unnecessary. What else does management manage but real or potential change?

Fortunately the new kid on the block has a legacy of solutions and approaches to the problems of organizational development. Indeed the richness of the heritage itself poses a problem – it is so vast and comprehensive it can be a daunting challenge. This is where a good coach can help, someone who has been around long enough to have lived many of the approaches and who has not only an intellectual appreciation of them but a visceral understanding as well. A good coach is one who understands that the casualties and the wounds of organizational battle are real.

Personal and organizational risk is not only impossible to avoid, it is undesirable to avoid. To lead, by definition, means to lead into new situations that entail risk. Some of that risk can be seen beforehand and anticipated. As it will always turn out, however, the anticipated risk will be as nothing compared to the risk that could not be foreseen. Managing that unknowable risk is where new leaders earn their reputations.

Alexander the Great was a brilliant young warrior general, the new kid on the block, but unless you are a history buff or scholar, you probably can't name a battle Alexander won. You know Alexander best by the single stroke of his sword that cut the Gordian Knot. His innovative approach to problem solving survives far more vividly than anything else about him.