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Context to the nugget

Michael speaks about how the various elements of transition that get addressed over a 6-12 month period. He talks about the fact that even in well-meaning organizations, there is a risk of overloading the leader's calendar with "stuff" to do and not really solving for what the leader wants. He speaks about the criticality of elements such as communication, arrival posture and alliances and the timing of when these elements matter.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In your experience what's your sense of the transition time line? Give us a sense of how we should think about in terms of time?

Michael Watkins (MW): It's a great question Deepak because obviously I wrote a book called the First 90 Days where on occasionally people say well Michael Watkins says transition in 90 days and of course I never say that. The first 90 days is about how to use that critical first few months well. Now how far you get in those few months is going to depend very greatly on the situation. I want to do turnaround situation you may be meant to be very hard choices very quickly out the team very quickly. You are going to be in a different place after 3 months with someone who's command and work ... success for realignment kind of scenario. So, I told people don't get hung up on the first 90 days. But I would say and I think it gets to your point it is, I think a year is a good time frame because there are still learning to be done far beyond the first 90 days and unfortunately organizations often do sort of provide a lot of support and ... upfront and then it's nothing and so it like ohh you are not ... support that was great and fantastic... good luck and god blesses you etc. So, when we structure for example our transition coaching engagements, they are always at least 6 to 9 months. And for me I'm in that couch pretty much exclusively CEO's these days they are 9 to 12 months. Because it really is that long before someone is fully seated if you are willing in the new role.

DJ: What are the headline themes other queue sort of address over the duration is there is there certain seasonality to the way you address different themes at different point in time?

MW: Right now, again the specifics the time frame vary but I love getting engage with people before they are in the new role. So another example another CEO I'm working with this was an external hire coming into a 10 Billion revenue, 60 thousand employee organization he had been a CEO before and previous organizations but they have been smaller so this was a bigger leap in scale for him and I got to work with them before he actually and I got to work with them before he actually got into the new job and so what did you do when you are working with someone happy with the new job. You are helping plan their learning process what's the technical culture and political learning you can do. How can you jump start that learning right to the end to you know get up to speed with your

organization? What sort of connection you can make with the key stake holders beforehand I often do interviews in some of those peoples that help in kind of deepen that understanding and then there is a critical piece about how you are going to arrive in the organization? What's your key messaging coming in? How are you going to begin to connect and communicate? It gets down to the level of detail let's look at your calendar for the first 6 weeks and just talk about where you are going to be and how you are basically arrive and show yourself arrival posture that's the term when I use when I work with leader. What's that gone be? With this particular CEO we spent a lot of time doing that. That's critical or not Deepak sometimes it was very much the case with this the CEO the organization was very trying hard to support his arrival and with the very best of intention they had completely this calendar for the first month with stuff and over the ... he had a calendar full of stuff and I said... your calendar and we are going to rip this up and start over. I mean with due respect to the organization and with the need by the way we can talk about this later if you want to do partnership with people in the organization to support those transitions main for CEO's its communication, it's HR it's the Board. You need a support team but you also need to really be a somewhat forceful about deciding how about person is gone as you know stand out first critical you know few weeks in a row I should decide to work with them to really proactively define what they need to do and take control of it early. And I think the early months are often about initially about learning and connecting right but again it depends a lot on how seriously issues are and team assessment becomes very critical early why didn't so will be the transition quickly emerges and thinking about the team transition and the critical roles and people and you have to make some changes personnel and there is so what kind of timing is that gone be and how are you going on board new people into the executive team. How do you want to run the executive team is it different then what you did before so this isn't big piece of that was a big pieces about strategy and vision because typically new leaders coming ... mind put them plays to do and put in place a new strategy and a vision. I specially take coming from the outside so not to believe or this right but there is absolutely logic and as the person gets more comfortable I generally transfer the transition into the conversation about leadership development right one of the skills and ability you need to build to become fully effective as the CEO of the organization. So it's sort of that sort of thing Deepak and I don't have you know it's day 32 you know where are gone be in Houston, Texas kind of you know logic to it but there is to your point there is a seasonality to the process typically.

DJ: I was curious about a couple of things of the various things you have said Michael one was the notion of arrival posture I was quite curious about what he had in mind when you said that and second was about putting a team together on the client side when you come in to enable your transition could you double click on both those?

MW: Sure so when I say the arrival posture what that mean is that the organization is straining to try and understand to who this new leader is and what they represent and so you as new leader should be helping them do that which means thinking through what are the key messages you want to send about yourself and your leadership you know its first critical few week what's signals I talked about signalling and symbolism I am just giving an example what the CEO I was just talking about there were small facilities in the organization that probably no CEO in the history and the company that would have visited or there would be mid night shifts and production facilities that no CEO would have been showed up. So people want to send a signal ... without being to being perceived to be too manipulative about it you want to be thinking about what's the maybe I am gone be show up you know or maybe I'm gone get out in the field and visit some places that haven't normally got attention and in doing so you can send some signal about yourself and about your leadership and I'm not saying two things that are inauthentic by any means right but help people understanding and that's something you can do very early knowing almost nothing really about the organization.

DJ: And yeah that's exactly what I had in I think that clarifies of I guess rather than just showing being thoughtful and deliberate about how you want people to see you as you arrive.

MW: Absolutely not on the transition support team side within the client you know I hate ... But it takes ... to support and makes a year coming on board right there is gone be key people, key communication that with whom you need to engage. But I find pretty consistently is rare that even the best communication people in organization have had experience with the communication associated with you know under CEO and sometimes the current CEO departed intend and then had to sort of manage that so you can add some value there. Although sometimes it's funny there is another CEO I'm working with his head of communication just blew me away recently because she didn't evolve with like 6 or 7 CEO transitions she just had absolutely ... and was just like woo this is wonderful because they really thought about ok how are we going to kind of manage the outgoing CEO transitions, recognition of him, celebration of his accomplishment and then the incoming CEO and going this was an internal promote and so that's an example right you want to forge an alliance with the communication people you are not telling how to do their jobs. But you are bringing a set of experience about CEO transition communication that they may not have. The HR people that they you want to be engage because often there are the focal point for on boarding. It's a little funny sometimes because you know of course the CHRO or head of HR is part of the leadership team there being assist by the new CEO and some circumstance so it's much easier you know it's clear then the CHRO is going remain the CHRO. But then you really want to be forge an alliance with those people right so because they aren't often helping the structure the on boarding plan right the board but you want to have the alliance with the board I mean there is recent example here were you know I was really working with the board to help convince them that they didn't want much long an overlap between the outgoing CEO and the incoming one as they were planning because in general I'm not a huge fan of overlaps and they can create a lot of complexity. So forging those alliances having it you know seeing this as a team sport Deepak I think is kind of part of how I think about the process.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Few pieces that struck me here.

- First is the point that Michael makes about the transition timeline. It takes anywhere between 6 to 12 months for the leader to be fully on the saddle with the relationships, understanding of the business, buy-in of the stakeholders and a nuanced understanding of the org culture. Interestingly enough, when organizations think about transitions, they have an on boarding plan for 1 week or 2 weeks and then the leader is thrown into the deep end. The divergence between what is required and what is offered in most contexts is quite jarring to say the least

- Second is the criticality of relationships and the influence that the transition advisor has in the organization; unlike in a coaching context where the coach is working with one individual, here you are often operating in a complex context that includes the hiring manager, the HR leader, the Board and other key executives in the organization. There are always things that come up along the way and one needs to be in a position to influence the outcomes. In one particular situation, when I was working with an entrepreneur who hired a CEO to scale up the business, I found that it was critical at one point for me to give feedback to the entrepreneur because he was not providing the space for the CEO to take charge of his team and move forward. I couldn't have done that if I hadn't built that relationship with the entrepreneur before the leader came on board

Given the number of moving pieces, transition coaching often feels like playing improvisational jazz where one needs to see where the other players are going with the music and adapt to the context.

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End of nugget transcription

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Michael Watkins - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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