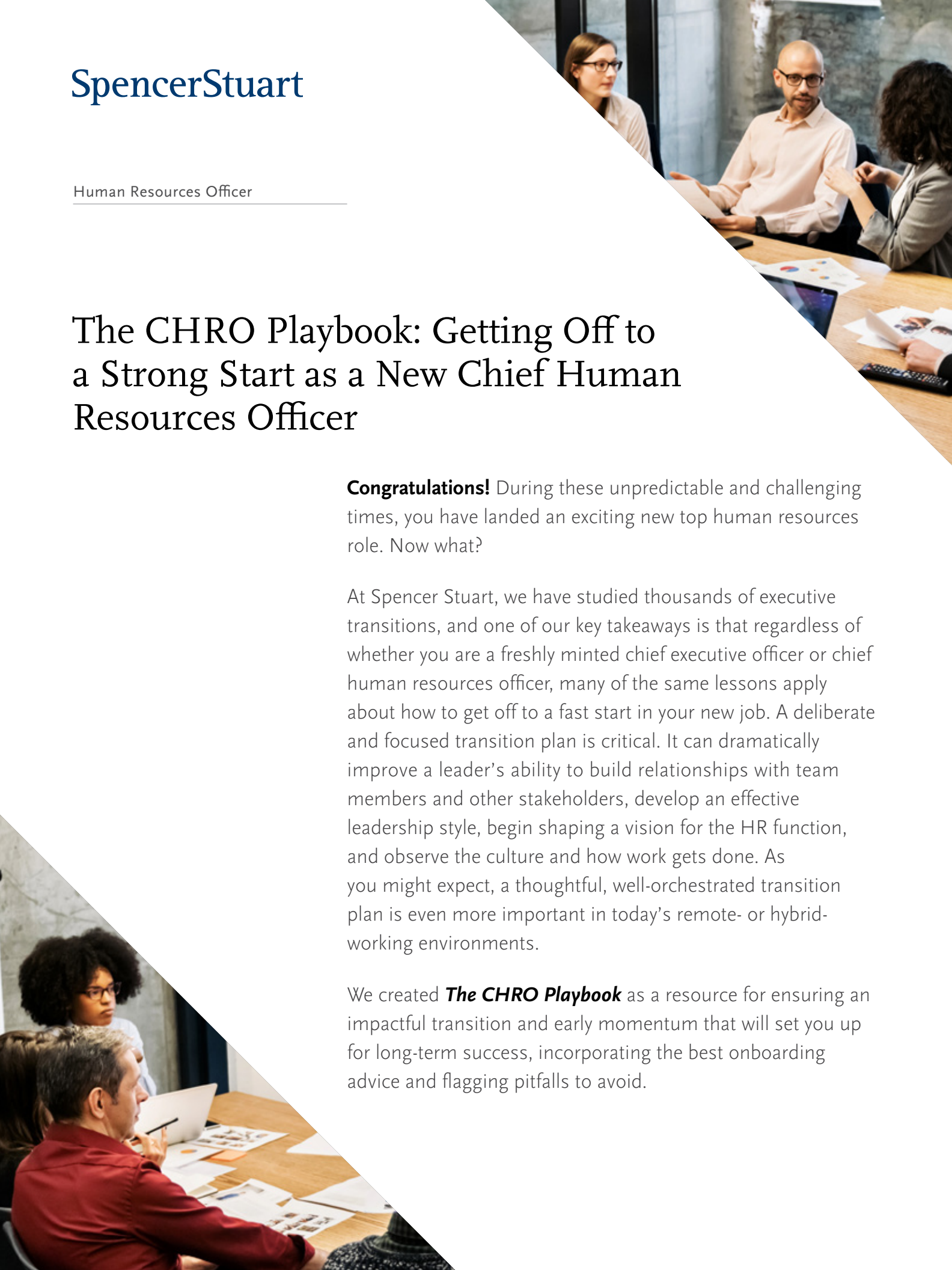


The CHRO Playbook: Getting Off to a Strong Start as a New Chief Human Resources Officer

Congratulations! During these unpredictable and challenging times, you have landed an exciting new top human resources role. Now what?

At Spencer Stuart, we have studied thousands of executive transitions, and one of our key takeaways is that regardless of whether you are a freshly minted chief executive officer or chief human resources officer, many of the same lessons apply about how to get off to a fast start in your new job. A deliberate and focused transition plan is critical. It can dramatically improve a leader's ability to build relationships with team members and other stakeholders, develop an effective leadership style, begin shaping a vision for the HR function, and observe the culture and how work gets done. As you might expect, a thoughtful, well-orchestrated transition plan is even more important in today's remote- or hybrid-working environments.

We created ***The CHRO Playbook*** as a resource for ensuring an impactful transition and early momentum that will set you up for long-term success, incorporating the best onboarding advice and flagging pitfalls to avoid.



The challenge

Talent continues to be at the top of the CEO’s agenda. Recent events have escalated the need for a strategic CHRO who can help shape the human capital agenda, especially around culture, retention and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Companies are increasingly relying on HR to lead the charge on return to office and manage the various complexities involved, while ensuring that people across the organization continue to have a positive employee experience. As a result, it has never been more critical to build momentum early and create a foundation for your (and your team’s) longer-term success.

The solution

Your first 100 days in a new position is a unique window of opportunity before you become fully entrenched in the demands of the role. Getting off to a fast start (and preparing before day one) can earn your CEO and organization’s confidence and give you the momentum to achieve great long-term performance.

We have seen many successful HR leaders follow this tried-and-true 8-point plan:

1. Prepare yourself during the countdown
2. Align expectations
3. Shape your human resources team
4. Craft your strategic agenda
5. Start transforming culture
6. Manage your boss
7. Communicate
8. Avoid common pitfalls

PLANNING FOR GREAT PERFORMANCE IN YOUR FIRST 100 DAYS



Point 1 — Prepare yourself during the countdown

- » Prepare yourself physically and mentally as your stamina will be tested. A rested mind and body will allow you to rise above the busyness that comes with starting any new job and help you maintain the perspective and mental space to ascertain what is most impactful vs. seemingly urgent.
- » Do your homework before you start — whether that is physically in the office or via Zoom. What are the most important questions you will need to ask your key constituents?
- » Begin your “listening tour” even before you start by speaking with other top management, your boss, other employees (including alumni), trusted confidantes and other critical stakeholders.
- » As many of these initial meetings are likely to occur virtually, you will miss out on some of the natural small talk that occurs when meeting in person — offers of coffee, comments about a personal photo or other element of the surroundings. To put people at ease during these virtual conversations, consciously take a few minutes at the start of these discussions for a personal warm-up and to demonstrate humanity.
- » Recognize what “polishing” any of your skill areas may need — and consider a coach for any specialized training that may help close these gaps. But also know that if you are like many, your own self-assessment may not accurately reflect what the rest of the world sees, so getting an external perspective is useful, including asking for feedback from your interview process. Remember, there is a reason that the world’s best athletes leverage personal coaches. You too could benefit from one.
- » Draft your 100-day plan with specific tasks and rough timing so that you have a foundation from which to iterate when you start. Maintain a journal and makes notes of everything you learn.
- » Develop an overt plan to cultivate relationships with your peers in the C-suite. Think about how best to get to know them, building a bridge for the future. Spend quality time with them. Ask questions, be vulnerable and ask for their advice.
- » Test drive some of your early hypotheses regarding the organization with a trusted ally, recognizing the perspective that your “fresh eyes” offer during your early days.
- » Ask for and review any recent communication or internal documents that can be shared about the company’s strategic vision, history, culture and employee engagement.



Point 2 — Align expectations

- » Learn from your boss about what he/she specifically expects you to get done and how success will be measured so that you can effectively cascade that to your team. Make sure you find common ground about these expectations and put them in writing.
- » Leaders transitioning in the current climate should push for an explicit conversation with their boss about how the context and priorities for the role have changed due to the pandemic. Have there been layoffs? Are people feeling too stretched? Do they have too much time on their hands? Has the crisis made it possible to accelerate planned changes to certain processes or ways of working?
- » Think about how you introduce yourself to the team. Be candid about who you are, what motivates and excites you about this opportunity, what they can expect from you and what you hope the team can accomplish together. Spencer Stuart can offer valuable assistance in crafting a well-structured, facilitated team session as a great way to jump start your entrance.
- » Continue to share your leadership philosophy to set the tone for your change agenda and align with your team on important norms and behaviors.
- » Engage in one-on-one meetings and pose key questions in order to ensure your strategic agenda reflects the institutional knowledge, insights and perspectives of your team. Ask questions like:
 - What are the top five most important things to preserve about the company and why?
 - What are the top three things we need to change in our people approach and function and why?
 - What should we change in the department? What about in your specific area?
 - What do you most hope I do? If I could change one thing for you, what would be most important?
 - What are you most concerned I might do?
 - What advice do you have for me?
 - How can I help you be more successful?



Point 3 — Shape your HR team

- » Use your one-on-one meetings with team members to quickly determine whether you have a strong enough team to reach your aspirations. Establishing a strong team is the best first step one can take towards implementing and executing the strategic agenda.
- » Strive for a diverse team, including people from underrepresented groups, that matches the company's challenges. Remember that diverse teams have been shown to yield better results.
- » Determine what motivates each individual on your team and uncover if they are spending their time in ways that make best use of their abilities. And like the conversation with your boss, align on clear expectations with each team member and put them in writing.
- » Think about how to shape the interface with your team. What is the right cadence of meetings? Are there sub teams that you should meet? How often should you have one-on-one meetings and what should they cover? Do NOT just cut and paste the previous CHRO's approach.
- » Be aware of how you show up in the virtual world to make sure your messaging and behavior align. Be mindful of your communication style, tone and articulation as people will be less able to read your non-verbal cues on video.

Point 4 — Craft your strategic agenda

- » Build your strategic plan as a team. Find the right balance between the compelling picture of where you want to lead the group but leave wiggle room to adapt as you go.
- » Diagnose the HR team's opportunities by listening to constituents. Use this diagnosis to build your short-term strategic agenda, making sure to under-promise and over-deliver.
- » Expect some level of pushback on your agenda but, rather than resist, coalesce that input in a positive way to maximize buy-in.
- » Ensure that the PURPOSE and mission of your company is reflected in everything you and your team do.
- » Use your strategic agenda, which is by definition a work in progress, to help you and the HR organization make decisions, see what's working and what's not, and adjust as needed.



- » Secure some early wins. Look for flaws in the organization and fix them quickly to establish your credibility as a leader and change agent.
- » You will need the support of your peers to be successful. Questions that may prove useful with this important group might include:
 - How can HR help the company be more successful and thrive?
 - How can HR help your area be more successful and thrive?
 - What are the most important areas where we can collaborate?
 - How can HR help you be more successful and thrive?
 - How do you think my experiences or perspective could be most useful to our management team?

Point 5 — Start transforming culture

- » Work to understand the culture of the company and the HR organization, identifying how “things work around here.” Diagnose how significant of a change is required. Look across other functional areas within the culture to see how your HR team will need to lead or follow others that may be working well.
- » Search for the knowledge networks, key influencers, decision-making protocols, and the unwritten and unspoken conventions that are the central nervous system of any organization. Look for clues about how things get done at the company, then listen and learn; within most appearances and generalizations there lies an inner core of truth.
- » Solicit views on the culture from a wide of range of people. Then create the conditions within your team for cultural transformation: Adapt measures of success, expectations and operating processes; empower change leaders; and lead by example.
- » People are the most receptive to change early in your tenure, so make your first moves count. You may need to make structural and people changes but do so with the bought-in support of the key power center (along with your CEO).
- » Establish a concerted program to address the cultural legacies of the organization. Pace yourself, continually assess the tolerance of the organization, get feedback and adapt along the way. Make sure that your boss is fully aware and aligned with your plan.

The checklist: 10 tips for building a strong team in a virtual and hybrid environment

- 1.** Increase the frequency of your communication and messaging through all available channels.
- 2.** Share with your team why you do what you do and ask your team members what motivates them about their work.
- 3.** Remember, your words are powerful. Ensure communication is deliberate, consistent and non-ambiguous.
- 4.** Create rapport in team meetings by starting with a personal check-in and sharing your experiences; be authentic.
- 5.** Identify opportunities for the team to collaborate and engage with each other. When hosting weekly town halls, provide the opportunity for questions so that employees feel heard.
- 6.** Overcome the “out of sight, out of mind” challenge. Balance organic relationship building with structured processes to ensure you are checking in, coaching and developing your leaders equitably. Schedule re-occurring check-ins and proactively evaluate your team engagement and performance metrics to understand if any specific cohorts of leaders are experiencing challenges.
- 7.** Encourage informal virtual interactions (coffee, lunch, happy hours, etc.) and join as a guest where appropriate.
- 8.** Alleviate anxiety around new working practices; ensure clear expectations around performance and what needs to be achieved.
- 9.** Get the most out of your meetings. Use the right forum for the right meetings. Staff updates and information sharing are better virtually, and interdependent work like decision-making and brainstorming can be more effective in person. Don't treat all meetings as the same and don't hesitate to ask yourself — do I need this meeting, or can it be accomplished in another way?
- 10.** Drive outcomes. Make sure your team metrics and incentives reinforce delivery of outcomes to ensure teammates don't over-value time spent working, which is sometimes more easily visible and quantifiable in a virtual setting.

Point 6 — Manage your boss

- » Share your onboarding plan with your boss to ensure alignment with your mutual goals. Given his/her broad mandate, be succinct in your communication about how your plan reinforces your boss' strategic priorities and how it will drive profitable growth across the enterprise, understanding the stated and unstated motivations.
- » Keep your boss aware of each phase of your initial plan. Many skilled CHROs have misstepped early on by not keeping their boss (presumably the CEO) involved during each phase of their initial plan. "Managing your CEO" requires a different approach from what you may have experienced previously.
- » Establish your credibility by having a sound strategic agenda, be on top of the details of the business and implement an effective communications protocol. Also remember your boss wants and expects you to have healthy relationships with your peers — particularly if the HR plan requires a change agenda.
- » Listen and learn from your boss and establish a discipline of collecting regular feedback. In the case of the board, encourage "executive sessions" where the board discusses your performance in your absence.

Point 7 — Communicate

- » Tailor your message and your style to your audiences' readiness and to what they care about. Stakeholders will want to hear your ideas, and it is key that you are consistent and continually reinforce your messages to get your plan embedded with your team.
- » Be conscious of the signals you are sending in the first 100 days. Every move you make is being closely watched — both explicit messages and implicit signals will have an impact.
- » Know the communications settings that you are most comfortable in and play to your natural strengths. Use new modern approaches in your communication, intimately intertwined with the organization's culture.
- » Having all the answers is usually the wrong answer. In your stories, quote other key leaders in the company or offer ideas captured from your customers or consumers. And while this requires significant time investment, it will pay back in enhanced credibility, trust and stakeholder engagement.
- » In a crisis, get the information out as quickly as possible. Acknowledge the challenges of the situation to establish credibility; act as a "shock-absorber" between uncertainty and employees desire for stability.



Point 8 — Avoid common pitfalls

- » Lacking a formal plan — the most successful CHRO transitions have a plan for the first 100 days and beyond.
- » Making rash decisions — new CHROs have more scope for taking action — beware of being overly cautious and doing nothing. Listen, develop a plan, test, communicate and commit.
- » Failing to connect with the board — the new CHRO should work quickly to connect with key board members, particularly around C-suite succession and your role in navigating this for the organization.
- » Living in the past — don't assume that what worked before will work in the new organizations
- » Becoming trapped in an ivory tower — CHROs who lack early visibility are often accused of being invisible.
- » Stifling dissent — smothering discord can cost you some of your most gifted team members.
- » Overplaying the CEO relationship — You have multiple constituents, make sure attention is appropriately balanced.
- » Misreading power sources — gauging the true source of power is critical in the early days, but it's also important to refresh your assessments as you move forward.
- » Picking the wrong battles — avoid focusing on issues that will ultimately have little impact on the CHRO role, pulling your attention away from critical priorities.
- » Not addressing your team — lay out clear expectations for the function; how your team executes your initiatives enables your impact as CHRO.



Today's CHRO jobs are big, complex roles, and we rarely see even the best leaders and thinkers ready to tackle them solo. Rely on a supportive peer group, consider hiring a coach and, most importantly, lean on your team. Remember, the leaders with the greatest impact and legacy are those who are able to work through and empower others.



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At Spencer Stuart, we know how much leadership matters. We are trusted by organizations around the world to help them make the senior-level leadership decisions that have a lasting impact on their enterprises. Through our executive search, board and leadership advisory services, we help build and enhance high-performing teams for select clients ranging from major multinationals to emerging companies to non-profit institutions.

Privately held since 1956, we focus on delivering knowledge, insight and results through the collaborative efforts of a team of experts — now spanning more than 70 offices, over 30 countries and more than 50 practice specialties. Boards and leaders consistently turn to Spencer Stuart to help address their evolving leadership needs in areas such as senior-level executive search, board recruitment, board effectiveness, succession planning, in-depth senior management assessment, employee engagement and many other facets of culture and organizational effectiveness. For more information on Spencer Stuart, please visit www.spencerstuart.com.

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