

ADVISORY

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION ACTION PLAN

by Christina Drouin

A head of school leadership transition is both a challenge and an opportunity, whether the departure is planned or sudden. To minimize the challenges and maximize the opportunities in a planned departure in particular, a leadership transition team serves with overarching responsibility for the entire leadership transition, from initial announcement stage to the 18-month onboarding period following the new head's arrival on campus.

Guided by a written plan of action based on ten key steps the Leadership Transition Team will have a sense of purpose and tangible evidence to the community that governance is taking seriously its responsibility to ensure stable leadership during times of change.

Step 1

Form a Leadership Transition Team (of trustees, head, and incoming head) to identify issues, set transition goals, and support the successful leadership transition of the new head of school into internal and external stakeholder communities and local professional educational network.

Suggested Approach

Complete the following charter for the Leadership Transition Team:

1. Purpose
2. Scope
3. Term
4. Leadership
5. Team Composition
6. Reporting Responsibilities
7. Meeting Frequency
8. Decision-making
9. Final Output/Outcomes

Sample Transition Action Item Checklist

- Transition Team Formed**
- Transition Support Team Formed**
- Transition issues identified**
- Leadership transition goals set**
- Responsibility Matrix and Timeline completed**
- Key employee retention strategies executed**
- Briefing Book assembled**
- Communications Plan completed**
- Incoming head's personal action plan completed**



Step 2

Form a Leadership Transition *Support Team* (of staff, students, parents, alumni) to identify and coordinate opportunities to welcome and introduce the new head of school to the campus community, important local leaders, and key supporters.

Suggested Approach

Complete a charter for the Leadership Transition Support Team. (see STEP 1 Suggested Approach)

Step3

Identify leadership transition issues.

Suggested Approach

An issue is an issue if it is an opportunity or a threat that can positively or negatively impact the school's ability to deliver its mission and core competencies. While many issues have already been identified and addressed, some of the identified issues may be open yet, and some are perhaps 'undiscussables.' Brainstorm a list of open issues and give yourselves permission to discuss the undiscussables. Develop action steps to address all direct impact leadership transition issues.

Step 4

Set goals and performance measures for the leadership transition.

Suggested Approach

Discuss the following template. Adopt, modify, or remake.

Transition Goals		
1. Stable leadership: perceived and actual		
2. Belief and trust in the continuity of the values, mission, identity, and confidence in and excitement about stimulating future progress		
Strategies	Critical Tools and Tactics	Outcomes
Support the new head in setting first year goals in key areas: mission and identity, board relationships strategic planning, resource management, and continuous improvement	Transition Team Briefing Book Responsibility Matrix Key employee retention strategies Head's Personal Action Plan Institutional Strategic Plan	Continuity of mission and identity Continuity of operations Continuity of any special projects Stimulation of progress
Invest in supporting the new head in building strong interpersonal relationships and establishing a leadership presence	Transition and support teams Briefing Book Communications Plan Calendar	Positive board/head relations Growing number of positive relationships across constituencies Campus sense of connectedness
Thoroughly communicate core messages using a broad range of technologies; communicate successes	Transition and support teams Communications Plan Core Messages Calendar	Constituency awareness, understanding and belief in the future of the school and the capacity of new leadership
Develop and implement an exit strategy for the interim head	Communications Plan	The institution honors the contribution of the outgoing head and constituents recognize that the institution has been respectful of the outgoing head's role in advancing mission.



Step 5

Develop a Responsibility Matrix and Timeline that lists *who will do what by when* with regard to the key administrative leadership tasks that require decision-making and/or action over the remainder of the current academic year.

Suggested Approach

Set the parameters for the development of this critical tool by making decisions in the following key issue areas:

- Who should be on this team?
- What parameters should be used to determine the items listed in the matrix?
- What will be the key approaches?
- What will the final product look like?

Step 6

Ensure that retention agreements have been made with any key employees who are critical to the success of the transition through the first year of the new headship.

Suggested Approach

Use the following chart as a guide:

Key Employee	Retention Strategy	Action/Outcome

Step 7

Develop a comprehensive document that transfers to the new head essential information about people, process, and product that will enable success in the first year and/or until a personal cache of knowledge is developed.

Suggested Approach

Here is a draft table of contents as a guide:

1. People (Valuable Resources List)
 - Leadership roster (with roles and contact info, including Board of Trustees, administrative team, department chairs, student leadership, parent groups)
 - On campus organization membership list (with contact info)



- Off campus community partners and/or liaisons (with contact info, including accrediting and professional membership associations)
 - Funders
 - Media
2. Documentation
- History, Constitution, Bylaws
 - Core Values Statements, Mission Statement, Educational Philosophy
 - Organizational chart
 - Job descriptions (including Head of School)
 - Annual goals and objectives by department
 - Evaluations (direct reports and methodology)
 - Calendar (deadlines of major events and projects, organizational milestones (enrollment, faculty contracts, fundraising)
 - Admission recruitment materials, including demographics of student population, three years' admission and retention history
 - Development information, including campaign and current annual fund material, giving societies, and three years of annual reports documenting annual fund and capital giving history
 - Administrative policies and procedures handbooks, manuals
 - Most recent accreditation reports/assessments
 - Budgets and accounting information
 - Advertisements and previous press
 - Grants and other funding
 - Miscellaneous forms
 - Minutes and records
3. Projects, Events and Activities
- Major projects (materials and assessment)
 - Major events (materials and assessment)
 - Major professional events (materials and assessment)
 - Curriculum and/or activities (materials and assessment)
4. Personal Notes and Observations
- Best practices: leadership qualities and skills
 - What worked; what didn't work
 - Challenges and successes
 - Personal Reflections
 - Personal SWOT

Step 8

Develop an integrated communications plan and core messages to welcome and introduce the new head.

Suggested Approach

In creating an integrated communications plan, keep in mind the following goals of all strategic communications (written, electronic, and face-to-face) during times of change:



1. Make certain that everyone's answers to the following questions are being addressed frequently and consistently:
 - How will the transition affect me and my ability to accomplish my work, achieve my interests, and maintain my relationships?
 - What will change (why and when)?
 - What won't change?
 - What is expected of me and what are the consequences of not complying?
 - What is the vision of success for the leadership transition?
2. Establish the core messages and repeat with frequency and consistency.
 - What do you want people to know during this leadership transition?
 - What do you want people to think about the institution during this leadership transition?
 - How do you want people to feel about the institution during this leadership transition?
3. Increase the frequency of face-to-face communication.
4. Engage and empower a core group of influencers who will carry the message to their own affinity groups.
5. Be clear about 'voice.' Every effort should be made to support the new head in establishing voice and demonstrating its alignment with mission and vision and a unique ability to 'reserve the core while stimulating progress.'

Step 9

Collaborate with the new head in setting Year 1 goals and negotiating performance measures in addition to a written plan for the First 100 Days. Establish ongoing review and feedback structure(s) and processes to meet support the new head and manage board expectations.

Suggested Approach

Use the following template as a guide:

Goal	Key Action Steps	Performance Measure(s)
1. Preserve values, mission, and identity and become lead vision bearer		
2. Build positive board relationships		
3. Manage resources to ensure institutional stability		
4. Lead institutional strategic planning and thinking processes		
5. Continuously improve the educational experience offered by the school		

