# harvard management update

# Get Your New Managers Moving

*by Lauren Keller Johnson*

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WHEN JACQUELINE LOPEZ, a new program manager at Intel's Mobile Platforms Group, arrived for her first day on the job, Jessica Rocha, her boss, handed her a calendar bursting with already-scheduled meetings. These meetings had nothing to do with the usual employee-orientation process, through which new hires learn about Intel's values and HR procedures. Rather, Rocha had scheduled face-to-face interviews with people across Intel who had the technical expertise, cultural lowdown, and political "juice" Lopez would need to accomplish her work.

Thanks to Rocha's foresight, "I ramped up quickly," Lopez says. "I accomplished strategically important work"—such as developing key training initiatives—"and provided my deliverables faster." Lopez also swiftly built trust and established credibility with people throughout Intel. "My boss set me up for success," she says.

## A vital new tool

As Lopez's story reveals, new managers who are rapidly "onboarded" are poised to generate value for their organizations much more quickly than colleagues who follow a slower or more casual orientation path. Rapid onboarding has become particularly vital as workplace turnover rises. Citing the U.S. Department of Labor, Keith Rollag, Salvatore Parise, and Rob Cross write in "Getting New Hires Up to Speed Quickly" (*Sloan Management Review*, Winter 2005) that "more than 25% of all workers in the United States have been with their company less than one year." In addition, internal restructuring, new competitors, and technological advances are reshaping workplace roles and responsibilities—further pressing new managers to learn the ropes quickly.

But despite the increasing importance of a fast start, new managers face daunting obstacles in getting connected. For one thing, many senior executives assume that new managers have the social skills and understanding to tap the organizational network themselves, so they invest little time in introducing new managers around. But without some initial support and a framework for learning, many managers find it difficult to reach out to new colleagues themselves.

Greater cultural and generational diversity in the workplace often presents additional challenges, says Vincent Brown, a managing partner of Global Lead Management Consulting in Cincinnati. For example, "an older manager who's just starting out at a new company may hold the traditional belief that you only go to higher-ups for advice and information." Thus she misses out on making connections with knowledgeable peers and subordinates. And managers of all ages "worry that by asking certain questions, especially about [things such as] marketing processes, accounting practices, and budgeting, they'll be seen as incompetent," Rollag says.

Many new managers feel they simply don't have time to cultivate a broad network of contacts—forging relationships with their direct reports is time-consuming enough.

Stymied by these obstacles, new managers often don't establish the networks they need to excel. To address this problem, senior executives must play a more active role—accelerating new managers' onboarding enough to get them started, with the understanding that they will build on those early contacts themselves later. The most effective executives apply these rapid-onboarding practices:

## Provide jump-start coaching

One way to get managers off and running is by providing intensive feedback and coaching, says Leigh Branham, author of *The 7 Hidden Reasons People Leave* (American Management Association, 2005). During the manager's first week, executives should provide detailed expectations for the first 90 days and ask him to summarize these objectives and measures in a performance agreement.

In a similar vein, Branham suggests conducting "entrance interviews" with new hires to help uncover their strengths and learn which talents they are most interested in developing.

## Map out your new manager's network

"Managers' effectiveness derives directly from their web of relationships," says Rollag. With that in mind, "map out" your new manager's network before she starts the job. Ask yourself whom she needs to know to carry out her responsibilities. Think about work processes: From whom will
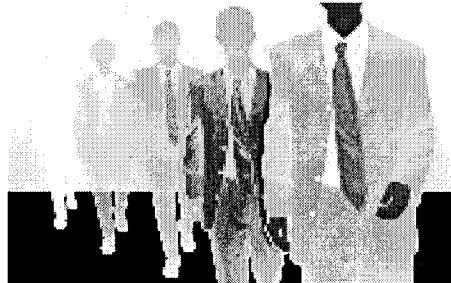
she need certain types of information? To whom will she need to provide information? Also consider organizational history: Who has always known how to move projects forward and solve thorny problems?

Some executives also emphasize company values when mapping out a new manager's network. For example, retailer Limited Brands (Columbus, Ohio) holds understanding the customer experience as a central value. To that end, newly hired leaders get assigned to educational stints in retail stores and call centers. There, they see how merchandise flows through the system and how cross-selling works, as well as other aspects of the customer experience. "These assignments immerse our executives in our corporate culture," says Sandy West, the company's executive vice president of human resources. With this immersion, executives can better formulate strategies that support those values.

Also consider network members' tenure as you build your map. The best networks comprise a blend of long-standing and newer employees, explain Rob Cross and Andrew Parker in *The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations* (Harvard Business School Press, 2004). Why the blend? You want new managers to benefit from seasoned employees' wisdom and recent hires' fresh perspectives.

Finally, set the stage for meetings between your new manager and network members. For example, while scheduling Lopez's meetings, Rocha explained to the in-

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### THE CULTURAL TRANSITION

Biotechnology firm Genentech's workforce ballooned 23% during 2004, and the company plans to add approximately 1,500 more people this year.

To better address the needs of all these incoming employees and to make sure every new hire would have a positive experience, Genentech overhauled its onboarding process. "We used to be pretty informal," says Learning and Development Director Steve Kowalski, "but with so many new hires, we needed some standardized policies and procedures."

On Day 1, new hires attend an orientation session focused on nine key areas critical to onboarding, one of which is how to succeed within the company's culture. "We advise them to listen and look, to get to know people and learn as much as they can from them before suggesting changes too soon," says Kowalski. "The message is, 'Go slow to go fast.'" Newcomers receive helpful tools, such as worksheets for partnering with a buddy or peer adviser, and are encouraged to explore links to the company's history on its Web site.

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terviewees what Lopez most needed to learn from them. She also explained how they could benefit from Lopez's background and expertise. For instance, Lopez had extensive experience in developing retention initiatives, which Rocha encouraged her network members to leverage.

### Follow up

Once the new manager has met all the people you've recommended, reinforce these relationships through follow-up. "Build discussion about the network into regular conversations and status updates," Rollag says. "Ask, 'Who have you talked to? What have you learned from these people? How have you helped them?'" If the manager has failed to sustain a connection with an important network member, ask why and develop a plan for restoring the link.

During Lopez's first weeks on the job at Intel, her boss sat in on her networking meetings—making formal introductions and observing. Then Rocha suggested that Lopez begin meeting one-on-one with interviewees. Rocha followed up on these early meetings, regularly recommending additional people for Lopez to contact and asking her to document what she learned from each meeting in monthly status reports.

As another follow-up strategy, invite the new manager to meetings outside his work responsibilities. Through these encounters, he'll gain a sense of the organization's political dynamics and see how the company operates as a whole. "Encourage him to notice who gets mentioned most often during these meetings," advises Patti Hathaway, CEO of The Change Agent, a consultancy in Westerville, Ohio. "These are often the doers—the people who make things happen but who aren't on the org chart."

### Take advantage of technology

In global organizations, ensuring that your newly hired manager forges connections with the right network members can be especially difficult. Technology can help. When you bring on a new manager, use e-mails to announce his expertise and interests to others. Sign him up for the online discussion groups and mailing lists he'll need as he ramps up. Show him how to use expertise locators. "Sure, face-to-face meetings are magic moments," says Chris Newell, vice president of knowledge and learning at Boston-based IT solutions provider Keane. "But in a global company, you also need technology to connect people."

Keane has 57 locations in the United States and more overseas. To sustain conversations among newly hired managers and geographically dispersed members of their networks, Keane uses a "high-touch, high-tech" strategy. For example, new managers will soon use an online discussion forum and expert locator link to find individuals whose insights they need to solve a problem or move a

project forward. People who have met face to face or on-line soon after starting their jobs—and who might hail from any of Keane's locations—can use online forums to be reminded frequently of one another's existence and share their knowledge.

## Use social bonds to fuel collaboration

When new hires discover that they share interests with others in the organization, they often collaborate more effectively on professional matters. For that reason, when introducing your new manager to members of her network, consider including some personal information about her that she's comfortable sharing, advises Rollag. "Emphasize outside interests or hobbies that might interest other people who aren't in her group and who do very different jobs."

San Francisco–based biotechnology firm Genentech created cross-functional "diversity groups"—each focused on a specific interest—to encourage socializing among staff at all levels. At quarterly networking gatherings for new employees, it encouraged participants to join one or more groups that were of interest to them.

The social bonding in Genentech's diversity groups has inspired valuable work-related collaboration. For example, when participants in one group learned of an innovative mentoring process developed elsewhere in the company, they implemented a similar process in their own team.

If you're tempted to assume that the sharp manager you just hired can handle his own onboarding, remember the unique obstacles he'll face. Though he should—and will—eventually shoulder the responsibility for his own networking, you can vastly accelerate the process. Your reward? A leader who generates better business results faster—and who can strike out on his own sooner. ✦

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