Gone are the long summers of our childhood where we would say “I’m bored” and we looked for things to do. Instead, as a leader we have learned to multi-task, juggle multiple priorities, and somehow wedge a personal life among the multiple demands of the “doing more with less” life we lead in health care. And then the opportunity for a promotion to an executive position comes along and you wonder how you could possibly do the new job. You apply and are offered the position, but you then have second thoughts. You are concerned about “timing” because your personal life is very busy with many responsibilities.

But you also realize there is never a perfect time for anything. You really want the promotion and you are afraid that if you skip this one, there won’t be other opportunities in the near future. You are already aware through the information learned in your management classes from authors such as Goldsmith (2007) that a promotion to the executive ranks requires many different skills than the ones that made you successful in your last position. You are also aware that promotion to an executive position is not without risk and you don’t want to fail. You ask yourself what you need to do to make this happen. You explore what is known about promotions to the executive level. You start to see through the fog and envision what you will need to do to make this transition. You find there is help for developing a roadmap to direct you during the first weeks and months that would simplify your journey if you choose to be promoted.

**Searching for the Roadmap: The First 90 Days**

You find there are many books with advice on what the new leader must do in the first 90 days to create the best transitions for the employees and for the new leader (Bradt, Check, & Pedraza, 2009; Robinson, 2004; Watkins, 2003). The “how to do it” of the new position provides a good technical roadmap for guiding the first few months. These publications help to make sense of what the first few months should be like.

**Searching for the Roadmap: Six Skills**

However, you realize there is more to the position than the tasks of the first few months. You look further and find that Beeson (2010) notes that people are promoted because of an intuitive sense the person can succeed in a higher level of the organization. Unfortunately, when the person is promoted, the leadership development is often lacking and one must take charge of one’s own development. Beeson submits people are chosen for (a) demonstrating strategic skills, (b) the ability to build a strong team, (c) potential expertise in managing implementation, (d) the ability to innovate and change, (e) building relationships to work across boundaries, and (f) demonstrating the executive presence necessary for the position. These characteristics then become the expectations of the organization for the newly promoted person. Beeson (2010) also notes the skills that made you successful in your previous position are not the skills that will make you successful in the next position. These six skills provide an opportunity for self-assessment and reflection that can provide the direction for the transition into the new position. These six skills are strategies only the new leader can do. But in order to accomplish these goals, the leader must let go of old behaviors and make room for the transition to this new world of leadership.

**Searching for the Roadmap: Doing What Only You Can Do**

Looking further you find the work of Eblin (2011) who writes about transitioning to doing what it is that only you can do as you move into an executive position. He notes that many newly promoted people fall back on the old practices that made them successful and do not realize these practices are not what is needed in the C-suite. The most important question for the newly appointed executive is to consider the
The transition to an effective executive is a continual journey, not a destination.

things only you can do and develop a team to do the things you can not do. Eblin (2011) makes the point that many leaders have an internal competitive drive that pushes them to achieve more than their peers. Expert clinicians are comfortable with being the “super nurse” and the go-to person who gets things done. But in an executive position, the team must be accountable for holding the technical expertise, not the leader. In an executive position, you can’t compete with your team. Instead you must let go of your reliance on your functional abilities and build the expertise of the team and then develop reliance on your team. The accolades can no longer be centered on your achievements. The accomplishments of the team must be recognized and the leader must take a back seat instead of taking the credit for the outcomes.

Eblin (2011) also counsels that the executive must develop the skill of telling what needs to be done and let go of telling how the project must be done. This frees up much valuable executive time and also supports the development and self-reliance of the team. The accountability for the results always remains with the executive, but creating the options for the team to learn the “how” results in a team that will become highly developed and able to function well. The quicker the executive can transition the team to take this level of responsibility, the easier that person’s job will be.

Searching for the New Roadmap: Making Room for the New You

After your search skills, your next concern is the stamina needed for juggling the many roles and priorities in your personal and professional lives. The concepts of hardiness and resiliency apply to the person who can be successful in an executive position. People aren’t necessarily born with these abilities, but life’s experiences create people who learn well and develop a strong sense of resiliency to resist melting under pressure. Just as marathon runners and triathlon athletes learn gradually over time to handle the emotional and physical stress on their bodies, successful executives also continually learn how to examine their self-beliefs and, over time, develop helpful ways of looking at themselves and planning for personal development.

Jones (2010) provides helpful lessons for leaders to develop a sense of mental toughness to support them through difficult times. This author advises executives to continually examine their self-beliefs because self-confidence will mirror self-beliefs. Jones also advises controlling your focus to simplify your life. By focusing on targets, and compartmentalizing the areas of your life such as work, family, and friends, stress will be reduced and effectiveness increased. This ability to toggle between work and personal life can be a challenge, but is absolutely necessary for a successful life as a person and as an executive.

Murphy (2010) describes the process of evaluating self-beliefs as adjusting your mental filter. He tells stories about people who have changed their mental model from continually feeling overwhelmed and unable to see endless opportunities in themselves, of living in a world of abundance and possibilities, and developing confidence in body and mind. So when one is considering a promotion, it is a good time to do a check of personal mental filters and readjust your thinking to that of exciting endless possibilities that will enrich your professional and personal lives by eliminating the viruses of negative thinking.

Summary

Now the promotion to an executive position seems to be reasonable because the skills can be mapped out and developed as a professional and personal journey to a fully competent executive and rewarding personal life. And the necessary mental toughness to do the job is in reach. Eblin (2011) also encourages the emerging executive to create an executive success plan that will continually develop this roadmap to excellence and to revise the journey continuously based on information from mentors, feedback from peers and staff, and personal development experiences. The transition to an effective executive is a continual journey, not a destination. The transition is now clearer and is starting to make sense. The transition will be very successful with a well thought-out journey that will result in you becoming a remarkable executive and an actualized person.

REFERENCES


