Purpose by W.

PRACTICAL GUIDE

STRATEGY & LEADERSHIP

When your leader leaves.

A board's guide to the first 90 days of a leadership transition

> A CEO or executive director leaving is one of the riskiest moments in an organization's life. It's also one of the best chances to reset. Boards that handle it well keep three things steady: purpose, people and money. Here is the practical sequence I use with boards.

1 Week one: steady the ship

- Confirm the departure date, terms and what the outgoing leader will hand over.
- Name one board spokesperson so the message stays consistent.
- Tell staff first, then funders, partners and key clients. Keep it short, honest and calm.
- Make sure the board can reach bank accounts, key systems, contracts and passwords.

2 Weeks 1 to 4: decide on interim leadership

Choose an acting leader from inside, a board member for a short gap, or an external interim leader. Whoever it is needs a written mandate covering what to keep running, which decisions they can make and what to leave for the permanent hire.

3 Weeks 2 to 6: revisit purpose before the job posting

The next leader should fit where you're going, not where you've been. Before you write a job description, ask: Why do we exist? What must the next three years deliver? What does that mean for the role, the skills and the culture we need?

4 Weeks 4 to 12: run a fair, focused search

- Form a search committee of three to five people with a clear chair.
- Agree the profile, compensation range and timeline before you advertise.
- Use the same structured questions for every candidate, and check references properly.
- Plan the new leader's first 90 days before you make the offer.

5 Throughout: look after your people

Staff watch closely during a transition. Check in often, protect the relationships the outgoing leader held with funders and partners, and thank the people carrying extra load.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT BOARD MEETING

- [ ] Who speaks for us, and what are we saying?
- [ ] Who is in charge on Monday morning, and with what authority?
- [ ] What can't wait, and what can?
- [ ] What must the next leader accomplish in their first two years?
- [ ] How will we know the transition is working?

Need a hand with this?

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