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101 days to succeed

Chemical industry production is still a long way from achieving its pre-recession levels, currently around 8% lower in the EU than prior to 2007. Unfortunately, with austerity measures having an unwanted side effect of increasing unemployment whilst depressing demand, predictions from the European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic) for chemical industry growth in the EU for 2013 are minimal: around 0.3%.

The chemical industry attracts highly skilled and trained personnel, creating a productive workforce. However, as unemployment within the industry has increased so have labour costs per employee. Combined with the continued lack of growth, this means that staff promoted to a new role at a senior level within the industry, from research to sales, need to make a great impact, fast.

So, if you are taking on a new position, is it possible to produce amazing results in just 101 days? Emphatically, yes – but it does take planning, preparation, the right attitude – and hard work. No matter how successful you have been in the past, taking on a new role is, and should be, a challenge – isn't that part of the attraction?

However, when the pitfalls of the unknown are combined with high expectations and a pressure to prove your worth fast, it can prove too much for many newly appointed executives. In fact, the figures from a range of well researched reports speak for themselves. For example, 58% of the highest-priority hires fail in their new position within 18 months (Source: Michael Watkins, md of Genesis Advisers) whilst an internal study of 20,000 executive searches performed by global company Heidrick & Struggles found that 40% of

executives hired at senior level are no longer in post 18 months later.

This failing is an expensive one for industry: the cost of an unsuccessful appointment is reckoned to be around 2.5 times the executive's annual package. The hope that senior managers will 'pick it up as they go along' simply isn't good enough in an age of new technologies and demanding customers. And, whilst many businesses have on-boarding and induction programmes, these often follow a set process rather than focusing on

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the individual and the delivery of real bottom-line results. This means that highly qualified, experienced executives go through all the processes, tick all the boxes before and after appointment, but are out of a job within a year.

At executive coaching company The Results Centre, I work with senior personnel across a range of industries to help them be effective in their new role within 101 days or less for this very reason. Whilst 101 days may seem like a random figure plucked from the air, evidence suggests that the first three months are a reliable indicator of long term performance. Experience has taught me that the key to hitting the ground running and delivering great results in an unfamiliar culture is to focus on certain key areas and define specific business objectives that are directly relevant to your new role and organisation.

For example, if you are aiming to deliver bottom-line results fast, you need to identify what these are from the outset. What are the critical knowledge performance indicators (KPIs)? What results should you expect from your team? Get these communicated and agreed. Be clear what these results will deliver, ie a new product, increased sales, breakthrough research, greater productivity. Such focus is crucial – but often overlooked.

Similarly, past experiences can be a powerful tool in achieving results. Use experiences of having delivered fantastic results in the past as well as taking inspiration from others. The best managers create stretch goals even if they have no knowledge of how to actually 'do' something. John F. Kennedy did not 'know' how to get a man on the Moon in the 1960s, Richard Branson did not 'know' how to run an airline before setting up Virgin Atlantic. We are all capable of setting such stretch goals; the difference is that many of us choose not to take the risk.

In the chemical industry, we recently worked with a newly appointed European technical group for a global client. They set goals as a team that they did not actually 'know' how to deliver. They were facilitated to stretch the boundaries of what they thought was possible, delivering results far beyond their own and the business's expectations.

The *Working Futures* report by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills predicts that UK industry will need 544,000 new managers by end of this decade. The chemical industry needs managers who can offer strong, decisive and effective leadership – and that challenge starts from the first moment that you accept the position at interview. ●