

## **CEO SURVIVAL: THE FIRST 100 DAYS (PLUS 800 MORE)**

Recently, I found myself sitting in a corporate boardroom helping a large company and its newly named, soon-to-be CEO revise its strategic plan (something of an oxymoron, actually). When the discussion turned to doing a five-year plan, I raised the question of how long the last three CEOs had lasted. The average was 23 months. In fact, as a consultant, I had outlasted them all. I suggested to the recently elected CEO that it might be wise to develop a new strategic approach that more closely matched his probable tenure rather than to revise the current plan by establishing an optimistic set of principles and ideas that wouldn't pass the straight-face test, no matter how sincerely they were developed. The meeting immediately got down to business. This is the memo I sent to him following that meeting.

TO: Our New CEO

RE: Your First 100 Days (and the next 800 days after that)

There are important, urgent *Executive Actions* you need to take immediately to assure your success as CEO. Focusing on these actions will help you move through the first few months and speed your mental transition to chief executive (you aren't there yet... it takes a little time... you won't "get it" down cold until you have the job... you'll see).

Your perspective will change. Your problems will be different. Just how success-ful you will be, in my judgment, will be determined in your first 100 days. It will take about nine 100-day periods before you know things are truly moving in the direction you expect, or that you will survive, perhaps for another 900 days. By that time, you will have survived longer than any of your predecessors, if that matters to you.

Before we get to those important actions, there are some interesting realities, some of which you are already experiencing. These are the expectations and realities that flow – with you – from your first day as CEO:

1. ***People Want Action From Day One.*** They expect you to walk in the door and begin making changes and making things happen.
2. ***People Expect Change Even Though They Fear It.*** Everyone is well aware of the tension during transition. Tension increases apprehension. Employees cannot understand why the people at the top of the mountain can't work everything out. They actually believe there is a plan. You can't take the time to worry about this now because the clock is ticking on your own performance and on the future.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, [www.e911.com](http://www.e911.com), is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."