“Chief Communications Officers: First 100 Days” is Weber Shandwick’s second mini-book in its Thought Leadership series.

Companies of all types, sizes and regions are facing unprecedented and complex communications challenges. The chief communications officer (CCO) is fast becoming a significant member of the executive team as globalization melts borders, new media accelerates missteps, and crises topple our finest companies.
“We’re all ‘type A’ personalities, but that can be your downfall in the first year. You need to slow down and get aligned with the culture, vision, strategy and objectives of the new organization before you can make any assumptions on changes or actions. Don’t compare to your old organization—embrace your new group fully and get ready to change your perspective.”

This book is a compilation of tips and anecdotes volunteered by veteran CCOs around the world. In their own words, CCOs reveal “lessons learned” early in their tenure. They share “if I could do it over” laments, likely challenges for newcomers and, importantly, invaluable advice for a smooth First 100 Days.

We hope this mini-book serves as a helpful guide for new corporate communications professionals taking a “seat at the table” and is an enjoyable reflection for veteran CCOs who have been in their seat for some time.

Thank you to all the busy CCOs around the world who took the time to provide us with valuable insights.
BE PATIENT -
you have MORE THAN 100 Days.
CCOs say they have 7.6 MONTHS, on average, TO PROVE THEMSELVES.

Source: The Rising CCO II conducted with Spencer Stuart and KRC Research
PREPARE before YOU START.

“YOU CAN’T DO ENOUGH DUE DILIGENCE.

The toughest and most vital information to find about a prospective job isn’t available online. You must figure out what kind of behavior is valued, how the senior team interacts, what the CEO demands of direct reports, why the previous communications VP failed, and what the political landscape is like.”

(Don Spetner, Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Korn/Ferry International)
LISTEN & LEARN

(“and appreciate what was already done”).

“The first 30/60/90 days are all about listening and learning. By Day 100, a strategic plan is forming.”

“Don’t make people come to you. Meet them on their turf.”

“Ask the same questions over and over so you start to get a picture of the diversity of views/opinions on the same subject.”
Lesson 04

Evaluate your team from day one.

Expect to make changes and fill key gaps.

There’s no consensus on how long it should take to assess the skills of your new team – CCOs report anywhere from 30 days to one year!
“LET THEM VENT and listen to their issues.”

“COMPLETE 1:1 MEETINGS with each direct report.”

“TAKE THE TIME TO MEET YOUR TEAM which can be dispersed all over Asia.”

“GAIN THEIR RESPECT by involving them in the transformation.”

“REORGANIZE AFTER you get to know the key players in management.”

“Make the necessary changes SOONER rather than LATER.”
DON’T CRITICIZE your predecessor.
“Understand the communications activities conducted over the past three years.”

“Keep an open mind towards change, no two companies share the same communications strategy.”

“Acknowledge the good work already being done.”

“By too urgently showing folks what you know, you can alienate key people.”
“Patiently build an agenda that you can drive, or you will quickly become a ‘doer’ reacting to the necessary ebb and flow of business rather than the change agent they hired you to be.”
Get to KNOW the BUSINESS OPERATIONS.

58% of CCOs WISH THEY HAD SPENT MORE TIME WITH THE BUSINESS UNITS during their early tenure.

Source: The Rising CCO II, conducted with Spencer Stuart and KRC Research
“Attend monthly business unit meetings.”

“Ask, ‘Tell me about my team.’”

“Meet individually with business unit leaders and let them talk as much as possible.”

“Take lots of notes and thank them for their time.”
Lesson 07

Develop Internal Advocates – both professional & personal.

Forging new organizational relationships is the #1 Action CCOs take during their first six months.

Source: The Rising CCO II conducted with Spencer Stuart and KRC Research
“IT DOESN’T MATTER HOW GOOD YOUR IDEAS ARE if you don’t have a constituency.”

“BUILD A CONSTITUENCY across the enterprise.”

“Find one initiative where you can achieve a good, quick result to GET PEOPLE ON YOUR SIDE.”
Lesson 08

Figure out the SHADOW ORGANIZATION.

“Identify internal leaders with real influence and meet with them over lunch or dinner – THAT’S WHEN PEOPLE OPEN UP.”

“Find out as much as you can about the internal power structures. WHO HAS INFLUENCE ON WHAT KIND OF ISSUE?”

“Once you KNOW THE INTERNAL STRUCTURES, you have a much faster grip on everything and can position yourself more confidently.”

“Your peers ARE WATCHING YOU. They know what they need most from your function.”
DON’T LOSE SIGHT of what’s outside the organization.

“Become familiar with reporters.”

“Get to know/understand customers.”

“One tends to see things from an internal point of view. Look at things 80% from outside of the company.”

“Conduct an external audit of key stakeholders regarding the company’s reputation.”
BE PREPARED for some SURPRISES.

The job is close to what you thought it would be...
...but NOT ENTIRELY.

On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is “not at all different” and 10 is “extremely different” from what he/she initially expected, THE AVERAGE CCO RATES HIS OR HER SURPRISE LEVEL “4,” suggesting fairly well-prepared CCOs.
“Lack of understanding on how strategic communications can help drive business success globally.”

“How the skills of many long-time employees had atrophied.”

“Very low understanding (and regard) for the business role the Corporate Affairs department could play.”

“Little support for the region.”

“Lack of collaboration with other functions.”

“It takes time to win confidence in China of peers and people reporting to you.”

“Difficulty of getting other communicators to cooperate when they report outside your organization.”

“The level of legal intervention.”
Gain the CEO’s RESPECT.

Prepare a business plan during those first 100 days and ask the CEO if it aligns with company strategy.
“You serve at the pleasure of your CEO. Understand how he/she prefers to receive counsel (especially pushback).”

“Ask your CEO for names of five people outside your team to meet early on.”

“Work towards a quarterly strategic plan.”

“Agree on a timeline with your CEO.”

“Most CCOs say that the CEO was their best mentor in their early months starting out.”

“CEOs are looking for leaders and strategic thinkers in this function; people with vision and strong execution skills. It’s important to be seen simultaneously as a SOURCE OF UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON THE EXECUTIVE TEAM & A WELL-ORGANIZED LEADER WHO CAN DELIVER TANGIBLE RESULTS.”

(George Jamison III, Corporate Communications Practice Leader, Spencer Stuart)
What were your early wins?
WHAT WERE YOUR EARLY WINS?

"A KEY MESSAGE DOCUMENT for the coming year – a company first!"

"Development of a DEPARTMENTAL PLAN."

"Assessing BRAND HEALTH."

"Focus on SOCIAL MEDIA practices."

"As simple as launching an INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PRACTICE consisting of a pan-Asian e-newsletter and AP corporate intranet."

"COMMUNICATING THE NEW CEO’S VISION for the organization.”

"Shape understanding at a senior level as to WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE."

"SORT THROUGH a demoralized staff."

"A NEWS ITEM on national news on day three."

"DEFINING ROLES and responsibilities."

"Coordination of INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS."
Closing Remarks:

What are the GREATEST CHALLENGES facing new CCOs?
WHAT ARE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FACING NEW CCOS?

“Building credibility for the function.”

“Knowing where and when to push and where and when to be patient.”

“Being seen as a business driver.”

“New media.”

“Assimilating rapidly into a new culture.”

“Deciphering my CEO’s vision.”

“24-hour news cycle.”

“Building and protecting reputation.”

“You are a cost-center, not a revenue-producer.”

“Thinking you have already proven yourself.”

“Manage NIH (not invented here) locations – how do you win them over?”

“Measurement.”

“Maintaining your stamina.”
The **THREE GREATEST CHALLENGES** facing new CCOs are

(1) **REPUTATION MANAGEMENT** in an era of deterioration of traditional media,

(2) **INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS** of voices of OUTRAGE,

(3) **LIGHT SPEED** evolution of SOCIAL MEDIA.”
If I had it to do over again, I would...

“Spend MORE TIME LEARNING about the corporate culture.”

“LISTEN even more.”

“TRAVEL MORE to the businesses.”

“SLEEP MORE. After a point it’s just diminishing marginal returns.”

“Develop MORE PERSONAL RELATIONS with CEO directs.”

“Work MORE CLOSELY WITH HR.”

“Make MOREDRAMATIC CHANGES to department.”

“Take CULTURAL DIFFERENCES more into account.”
If you had to give one piece of advice to new CCOs, what would it be?

“Read the Arthur W. Page Society’s ‘Seven Proven Principles’ of public relations management. Those are hard to top.”

“Seldom is there consensus among management in crisis. Your ability to drive decision-making on challenging or sensitive issues will be key to your success.”

“Try to withstand temptation to immediately score.”

“Listen to your gut-feel.”

“Find a network of other CCOs.”

“Make use of your emotional intelligence and signals.”

“Treasure your PR agency and work hand in hand with them.”

“It’s okay to be in the listening and learning mode first, it really is.”
“Hang on to your hat. It’s going to be bumpy. But it will never be dull.”
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