

CHECKLIST

What to Do in Your First 90 Days as a Startup People Leader

Joining a startup as a people leader is exciting: There's an enormous opportunity to help shape the company culture and build workplace processes from the ground up. But how do you even know where to begin? The first 90 days are critical, and this checklist can help you determine the best areas to focus your energy for maximum impact.



01

Review your people data



Get to know the in's and out's of what your organization looks like. **The best way to really dig into the data is with a people analytics platform.** If you don't already have one, it should definitely be on the top of your list to implement, as the insights a people analytics platform provides will be critical to any initiative you take on in the short and long term.

02

Collect “new leader effectiveness” feedback about your role



Survey the company to understand what they need from you most. Four questions to ask are: What are you excited about for this people leader role? What are your concerns about the role? What advice do you have for the person in this role? What questions do you have for the person in this role? Once you've collected responses, **summarize the information and present your findings back to the company within your first two weeks.**

03

Meet with everyone



One of the benefits of joining a startup is that you'll have the opportunity to not only meet, but also get to know everyone in the company. Take the time early on to do this. As you do so, really listen to everyone's stories and ask about their hopes and concerns. **This will help you get to know the people in your company and understand what they're looking for during their time there.**

04

Spend a lot of time with your CEO



As a people leader, you and your CEO need to be deeply aligned on the company you intend to build. **Spend time with your CEO to understand their goals.** For example, what is the CEO's vision for the employee experience? How do they want their leaders to lead? What are the hard lessons they've learned previously that they don't want this company to repeat?



05

Send an engagement survey



Send an engagement survey to employees **to get a pulse on where the organization stands**. Once you have results, share them with all of management and then with the whole company. When you share results with each of these groups, be clear about what can be tackled quickly and what will be part of your long term strategy. This clarity is important for setting expectations about what will change and when.

06

Consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs when prioritizing



You'll likely identify several areas that need attention, and the reality is you won't be able to tackle them all right away. You'll need to prioritize. As you do so, consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This usually means fixing benefits first and then using the engagement survey to **identify the most pressing needs of your employees that are currently not being met**.

07

Talk to investors



Investors are critical members of any startup. They also bring a unique, highly experienced perspective to the table. Take the time to talk to them and really **understand why they chose to invest in the company and what their vision for its future looks like**. Ask questions like: Why do they believe in the company? Why do they believe in your CEO? What do they hope the company will become?

08

Lay out your strategy



Everyone always has millions of ideas for what the people team should do — the options are truly limitless. You need to prioritize those ideas and then **communicate your plan to management and the business as a whole**. Importantly, one of the first steps you should take here is to ensure your executive team understands how the people plan is a part of the business strategy.

09

Build a hiring and onboarding machine



Growth is key to any startup, and you need to make sure your team is well positioned to support that growth. First, hire a recruiter (or several depending on your hiring plans). Don't pretend you can juggle both or allow recruitment to sit solely with hiring managers — you need to invest in recruitment to compete effectively.

Two efforts in this area that are low hanging fruit with big impact are to introduce a referral program and to update your careers page on the company website. Second, pair the recruiting experience with an onboarding machine. Streamline your onboarding processes as much as possible, implement a new hire buddy program, and get a recurring orientation schedule in place. Remember: **all of these efforts will set the tone for the employee experience for everyone who joins the company.**

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Define your employee value proposition (EVP)



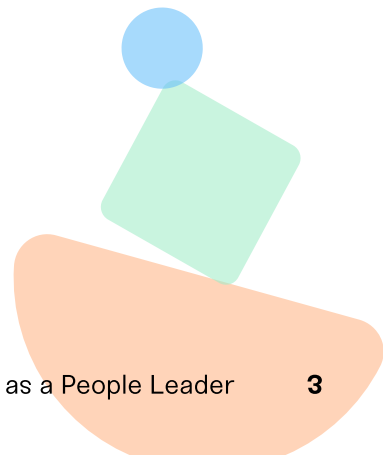
Your EVP is the unique set of benefits employees receive in exchange for the work they do. It's important to **clearly define what this is for your company, share it widely, and then live by it.** To start, ask people to share their recruitment pitch for the company as part of your engagement survey. Then, summarize the responses into your EVP, get the executive team to sign off, and put the final result into action.

11

Run focus groups to define values



In your engagement survey, **ask people for the top three words they'd use to describe the company culture.** You'll likely end up with a variety of sentiments, but a handful of them should reappear often. Present those trends to the executive team to see if they agree. Once the executive team aligns, lead focus groups with small subsets of employees to create definitions for each new value word. Once you finalize the words and their definitions, share them with the company and start living by them.



12

Implement a Diversity Council



Implement a Diversity Council to serve as **a safe place to discuss what's happening across the company**. Ideally, the members will volunteer, with most (if not all) coming from any already established employee resource groups (ERGs). Have the Diversity Council meet bi-weekly and bring back key themes from each discussion to the executive team.

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Align the executive team on performance management



Lead discussions with the executive team about how everyone wants to lead and manage performance across the company. It's important to align on this as early as possible so that you can **set expectations and start building programs accordingly**. These discussions may not be easy, and it's up to you to be the champion for having any difficult conversations.

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Schedule trainings



Some training, like harassment and inclusion, are critical for all employees, and you should schedule these as soon as possible. In addition to these mandatory trainings, you should also **think through what a schedule looks like for manager training and other efforts** that can help elevate what everyone is doing across the board.

15

Develop a handbook



Get your policies in place as quickly and thoughtfully as possible and compile them into an easily accessible handbook. **Important policies to start with include PTO, parental leave, and harassment**. For remote working, it's simplest to apply the most employee-friendly policy to people across all states.

16

Find your community for support and ideas



There's a lot of gray area and things are always changing when it comes to being a people leader. That means **you should never have to go at it alone**. Build a village of HR friends to lean on! Whether it's having people to support you as you have difficult conversations or being able to bounce ideas off others, having a community to tap into can go a very long way.

17

Never stop communicating and connecting



Even after your first 90 days, communication and connectivity remain critical for every people leader. Tap into company-wide meetings for this connectivity and **find ways to communicate with people in everything from large groups to small or 1:1 forums**, especially as your company grows.





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