



HEIDRICK & STRUGGLES

GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES PRACTICE

How to Leave a Job Gracefully

A Heidrick & Struggles survey collects the advice of more than 700 human resources officers and transitioning executives on how best to move into a new role.

Advice about how to secure a position at a new company is plentiful, but little has been said about how to leave your current company the right way. Even less has been done in the way of research. To close that gap, we undertook a national survey of more than 600 senior executives who have voluntarily left their employers and more than 100 senior human resources officers who manage such transitions. We asked respondents about best and worst practices in voluntary resignations, the career consequences of the manner in which someone exits, and best practices in preparing for a new job. The results of this research, detailed here, can help transitioning executives make their exit with forethought and tact, enhancing their reputation and their career.

Key findings include the following:

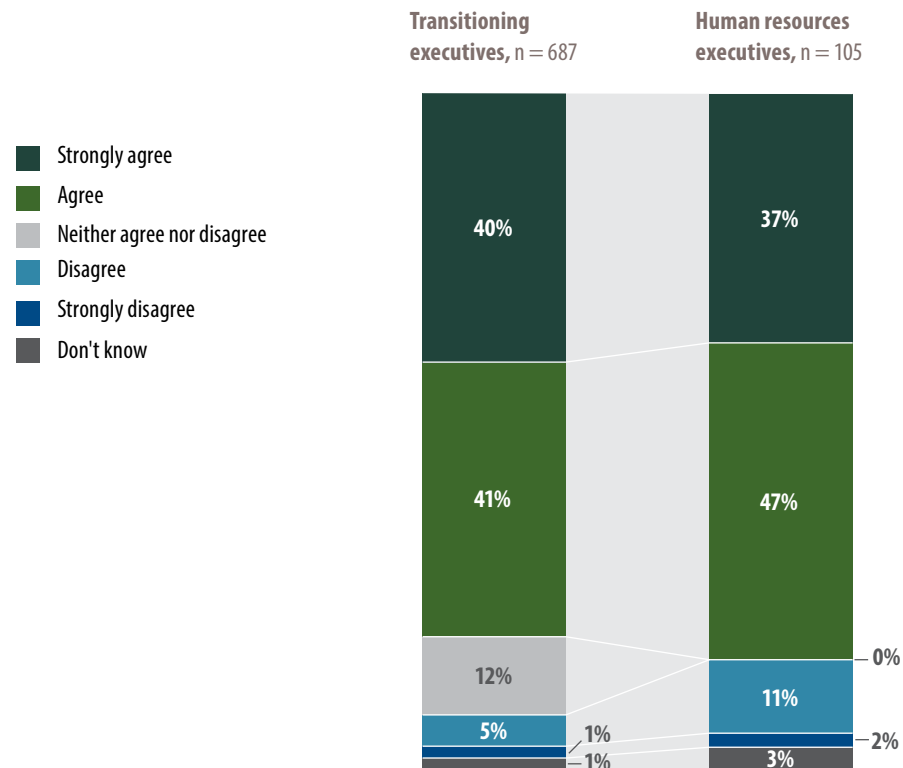
- The overwhelming majority of respondents (84% of HR leaders, 81% of transitioning executives) agree that leaving one's job poorly will adversely affect one's future career.
- The chief adverse consequences of a clumsy departure, say HR leaders and transitioning executives alike, are a damaged reputation and strained relations with former mentors and colleagues.
- Among the worst mistakes that people make in transitions, the most frequently cited was "criticizing the company, the boss, management, or colleagues during the transition."

Study results

A great majority of respondents indicated that they believe a clumsy exit would likely damage one's career.

Figure 1: The impact of leaving poorly

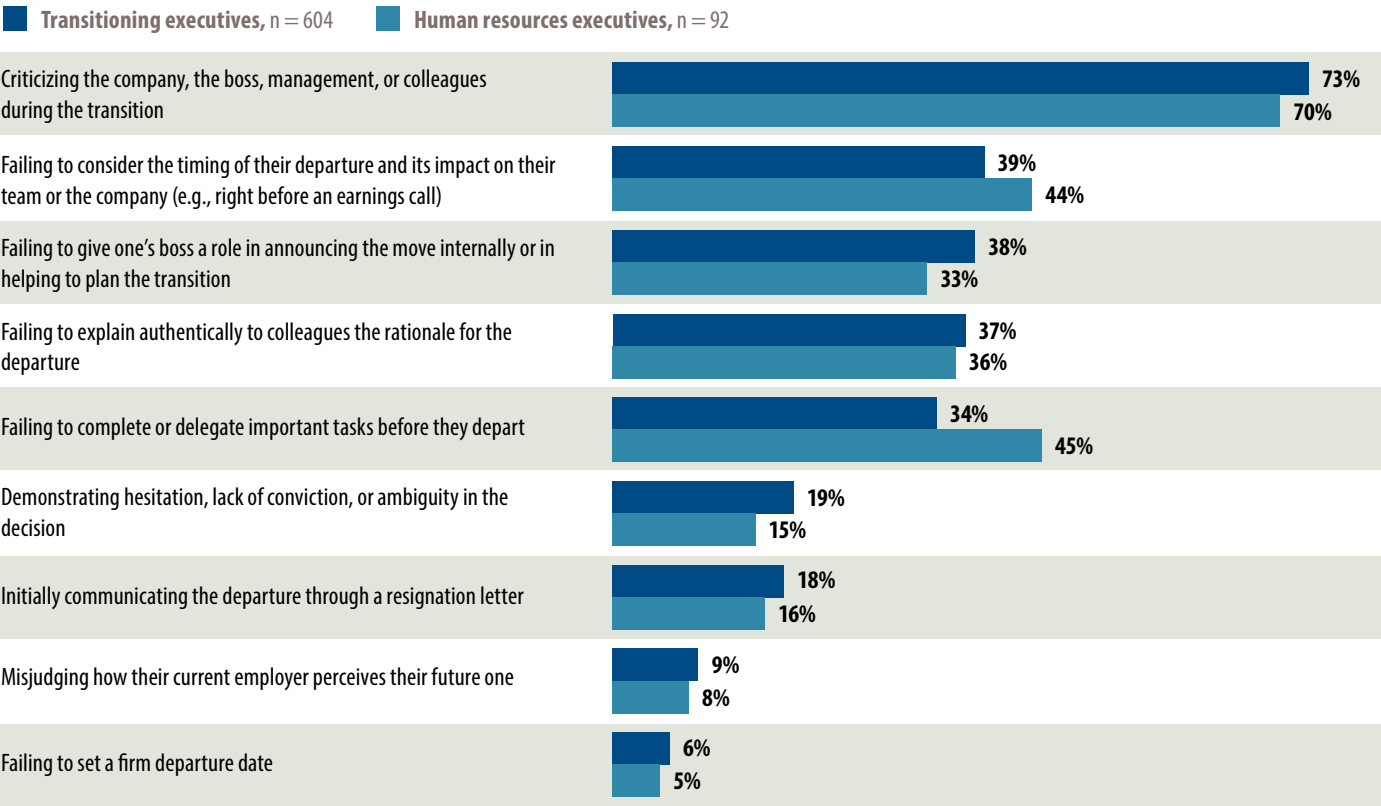
Leaving one's job poorly will adversely affect one's future career.



When it comes to moving from one company to another, otherwise astute executives often make fundamental mistakes that cast a cloud over their leaving. By a wide margin, survey respondents identified criticizing one’s current company, managers, or coworkers as the most common mistake made by departing executives.

Figure 2: Departing executives’ most common mistakes

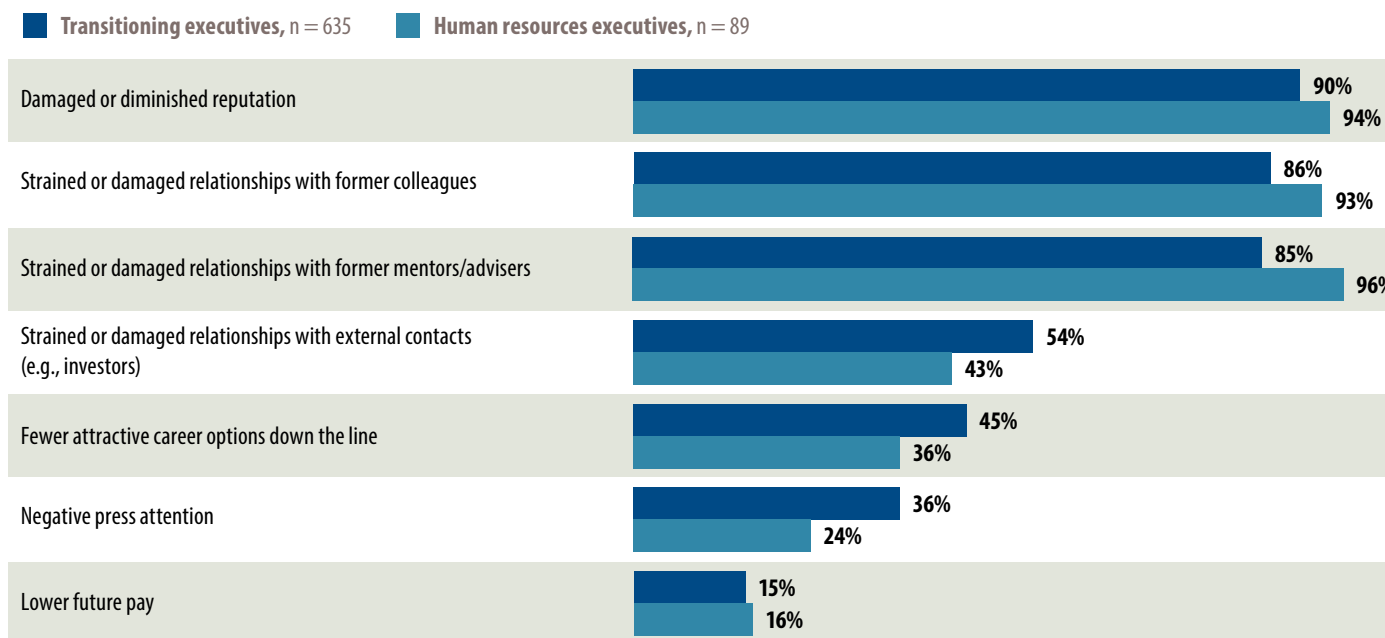
In your experience, what are the three most common mistakes people make when transitioning out of a job? Please select up to three of the following.



The consequences of a clumsy exit can include hurt feelings, resentment from former colleagues, blame for harming the company, a protracted and painful exit, and more.

Figure 3: The negative consequences of a poor exit

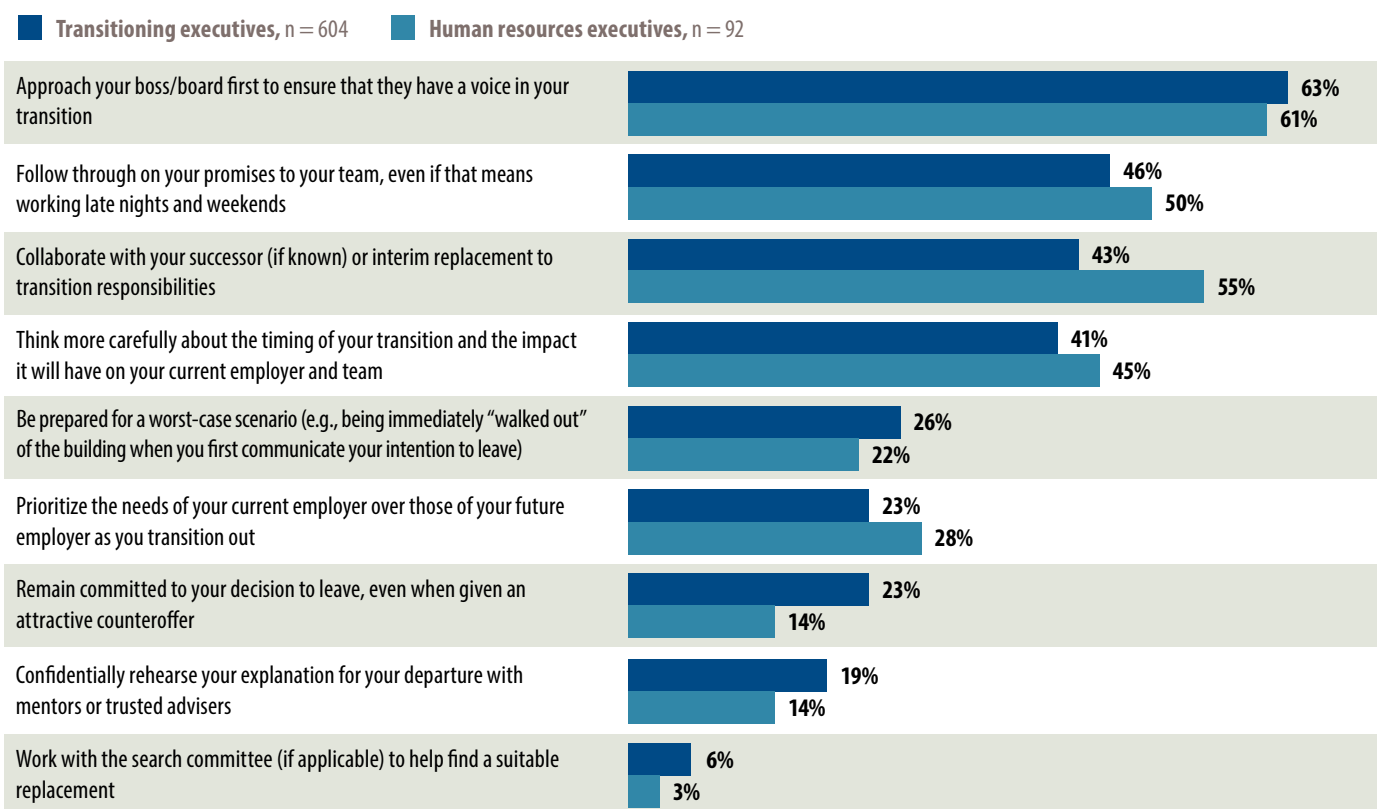
What are the adverse effects of leaving one's job poorly? Check all that apply.



The number one tip for transitioning out of a job gracefully, cited by 63% of senior executives and 61% of HR leaders, was first speaking with your boss or board.

Figure 4: Recommendations for leaving gracefully

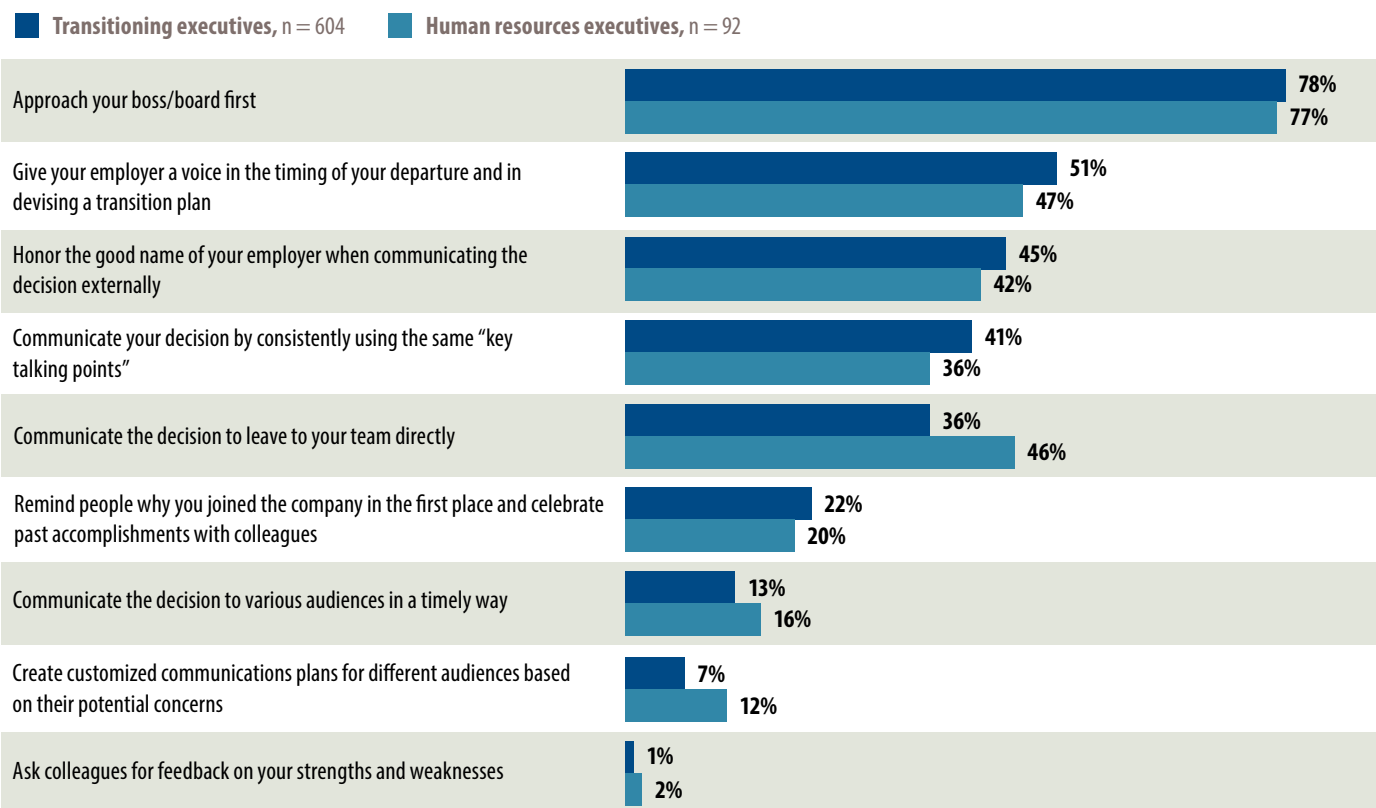
What tips or techniques have you observed to be most helpful for transitioning out of a job gracefully? Please select up to three of the following.



Approaching the boss or board first with news of the departure also emerged as the top piece of advice about communicating the intention to leave.

Figure 5: Advice on how to share news of the transition

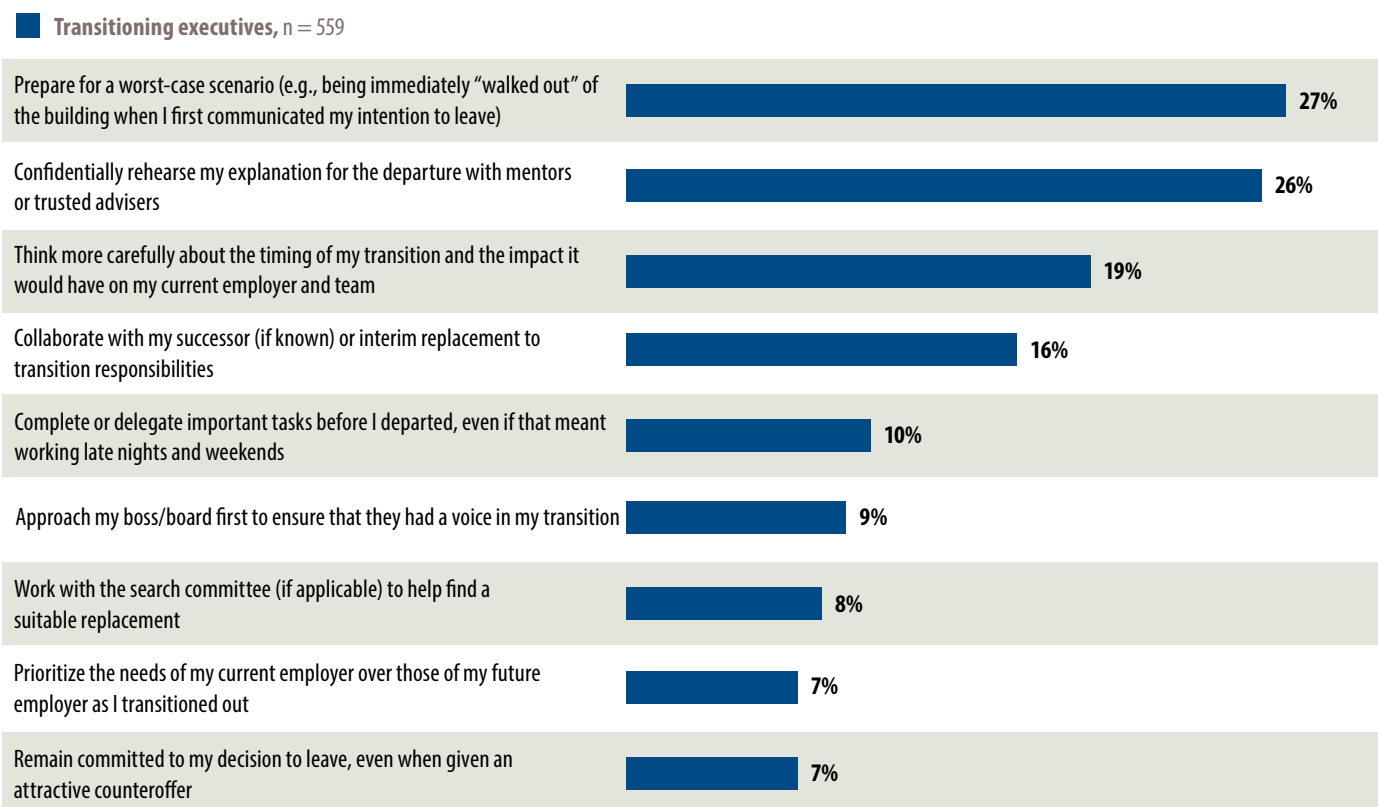
What are the most helpful tips you would give to a colleague about communicating the decision to leave? Please select up to three of the following.



Only 16% of executives reported that they would have done nothing differently the last time they voluntarily resigned. Figure 6 shows regrets expressed by other departing executives.

Figure 6: Lessons learned from past transitions

If you had your transition to do over, what would you do differently? Check all that apply.

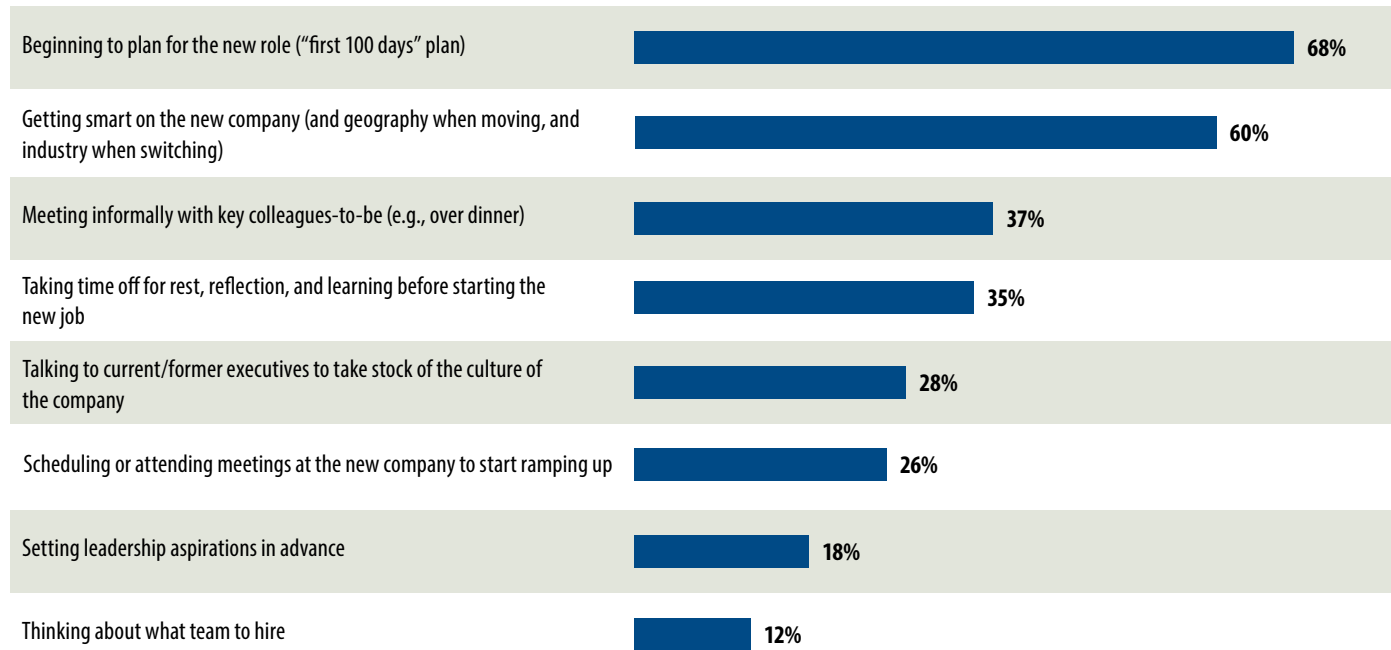


Asked to select up to three best practices in preparing for a new role at a new company, more than two-thirds of respondents advised transitioning executives to work on a “first 100 days” plan.

Figure 7: Best practices for transitioning into a new role

Reflecting on the last time you transitioned into a new job, what were the top practices you followed to prepare for the new role? Please select up to three of the following.

■ Transitioning executives, n = 556



About the author

Kelly O. Kay (kokay@heidrick.com) is a partner in Heidrick & Struggles’ San Francisco office; he leads the firm’s global software group.

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Global Technology & Services Practice

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