

No 5 - Gorjan Lalchevski, Global Go-to-Market and Revenue Director, Reckitt Benckiser: From euphoria to the abyss and up again

Transition to general management is a challenging process that could be a life changer for most.

There are many additional and different competences a general manager needs to have in order to be successful: stakeholder management, governmental relations, investor relations, cross cultural leadership, organizational behavior, strategy, global economy understanding, technological trends, long term value creation, etc. These competences are not easy to get because there is very little specific training for these for line managers.

To be responsible for the success of a company or the lack of it without being possible to control most aspects that determine it is not an easy task... Just imagine how delegation has to change.

Besides, there are important differences and pressures on a general manager whether they promote from within the organization or they come from the outside.

Through this series of articles, we want to help first time general managers to learn from others' experiences hoping the insights presented here to accelerate their integration process and optimize their success rate in this totally new role:

This month's discussion is with Mr. Gorjan Lalchevski, Global Go-to-Market and Revenue Director, Reckitt Benckiser and former GM Philips Romania and Commercial Director Philips Consumer Lifestyle South East Europe.

For me it started with an executive search, while I was in Serbia. I wanted to come back to Romania, but was planning to do so with P&G, for whom I was working as a sales director in Serbia. I had a very interesting experience being sent to Vienna to spend a full day with an elderly gentleman and his wife at their house. I was assessed from all aspects: table manners, world history, geography, diplomacy, opera, musical instruments. After lunch, which included wine (should I have a glass or politely refuse - but they were having one) I was invited to the attic. The attic had a lovely table with about 1,000 printed, unsorted documents thrown around. My task was to figure out my task, solve it, and come with a 1 page recommendation.

When I signed the dotted line this great feeling of euphoria, excitement, recognition - a flow of extreme positive energy engulfed me and everyone around. You've done it - you've proven yourself to the world, to your parents, your loved ones! Even the bad guy on one of your shoulders smirks and pokes you to go and call that old boss of yours that told you you're not cut out to get that far. You call him, at least in your mind, and act out your play. You get your good friends out - have a cigar in an elegant bar, and discuss how you will change the world. It feels good, until you enter the office the first time and panic hits in.

As with any major promotion - you go through the enthusiastic phase, then the big drop into the abyss, followed by a structured progress or adaptation to your new role.

The biggest difference is that the sounding board you used to have with every other promotion - is gone. You are, for all practical purposes, alone. Everyone smiles politely, but people stop talking the way you would expect. There is no pro-active lunch invitation. If you join a big group on a table - they stop talking and ask about the weather. If you crack a joke, no one even listens but laughs politely. All of a sudden, you are exactly

the person you said you would not be, if you were in his shoes. The posh cigar restaurant now yearns for a local pub, where everyone treats you equal and a beer is a beer.

The most difficult part of the transition happens during the first 100 days. Not only are you alone, and have zero access to the buzz in the office, you are expected to draw up the new company strategy for the following 3-5 years. That's why you were hired after all, wasn't it?

There are many mistakes I made in hindsight, some that I believe are part of the inherent learning process of any new role, and others that are better avoided. Based on those experiences, here are my thoughts on what is important.

1. Don't be overly friendly. You don't have to be liked by everyone.
2. Self-discipline becomes crucial. You are your only judge until after the jury comes out.
3. Invest in professional coaching. If your company won't, fork out the money.
4. Treat stakeholder management like a science, not an art.
5. Pay for external views on your business - your management team is biased.
6. Get rid of the bad people right after your 100 days. All of them.
7. Don't doubt yourself publicly.
8. Don't be too democratic.
9. Reward the really good people. Give them a raise way above policy. Showcase them!
10. You still have a boss (who has a boss). Everything you learned on that note still applies.

What is most important however, is that you have a unique opportunity to help shape people. You have the power and resources to enable people to be the best they can be. For some of those people, you will remain one of the biggest levers of change in their life.

Don't lose that opportunity!