

The First 90 Days

A Practical Leadership Checklist



Helping new school leaders build confidence,
credibility and clarity during their first
90 days in leadership.

DES O'CONNOR

Founder | Elevated Leadership

WELCOME

The First 90 Days

A Practical Leadership Checklist

Congratulations on your new leadership role.

The first three months in a new position are pivotal. They set the tone for the relationships you build, the trust you earn and the impact you will have in the months and years ahead.

It can be tempting to act quickly, introduce change or try to prove yourself straight away. The most effective leaders take a different path. They listen intentionally, observe carefully and seek to understand the people, culture and context they are now part of.

This checklist is designed to guide you through the key priorities and actions that will help you lead with clarity, build credibility and create the foundation for lasting impact during your first ninety days.

Use it as a companion, revisit it often and adapt it to your own leadership journey.



THE FIRST 90 DAYS

Your 90-Day Roadmap

The first 90 days set the foundation for your leadership impact. Use this simple roadmap to guide your focus and actions across three essential phases.



DAYS 1–30

Build Relationships

Focus on people first. Listen, learn and build trust with your team and key stakeholders.

- Listen more than you speak
- Understand the culture
- Build credibility
- Get to know your team
- Learn the key priorities



DAYS 31–60

Develop Understanding

Dig deeper, analyse the opportunities and challenges and clarify what matters most.

- Analyse strengths and gaps
- Clarify expectations
- Seek feedback
- Identify key opportunities
- Align with strategic goals



DAYS 61–90

Lead with Purpose

Translate your learning into action, set direction and begin creating momentum for the future.

- Set clear priorities
- Communicate your vision
- Introduce improvements
- Build momentum
- Review and adjust



Remember: Great leaders don't rush to make an impact. They first understand the people, culture and context before leading meaningful change.

Before You Begin

PREPARE FOR A STRONG START

The best leadership transitions begin before your first official day. Use this checklist to prepare yourself, understand your new environment and build confidence as you step into your leadership role.



READ AND REVIEW KEY DOCUMENTS

Familiarise yourself with the School Improvement Plan, recent reports, policies and any key strategic documents.



UNDERSTAND SAFEGUARDING AND DUTIES

Ensure you understand your safeguarding responsibilities, procedures and key legal obligations.



LEARN THE SCHOOL'S VISION AND VALUES

Understand the mission, vision, values and culture that underpin the school community.



UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLE AND STRUCTURE

Clarify your job description, reporting lines and how decisions are made in the organisation.



IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Identify key staff, leaders, governors and external partners you will need to build relationships with.



PREPARE YOUR INTRODUCTION

Plan how you will introduce yourself and communicate your commitment to the school community.



REVIEW RECENT DATA AND PERFORMANCE

Look at attainment data, attendance, behaviour and other key metrics to build your initial understanding.



SET YOUR PERSONAL LEADERSHIP GOALS

Take time to reflect on what you want to achieve in your first 90 days and beyond.



REMEMBER: Preparation builds confidence.

The more you understand before you start, the more effectively you can lead from day one.

Days 1–30: Build a Strong Foundation

Your first month is about people, understanding and trust.
Use this planner to guide your focus and track your actions.



MY THREE PRIORITIES

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



PEOPLE I NEED TO MEET

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



NOTES & REFLECTIONS

Key insights, observations
and reminders for myself.



1 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Your priority is people.

- ☐ Meet every member of your team
- ☐ Learn everyone's name
- ☐ Get to know support staff
- ☐ Listen more than you speak
- ☐ Be visible around the school community



2 OBSERVE AND LEARN

Resist the temptation to judge too quickly.

- ☐ Visit classrooms and learning spaces
- ☐ Observe daily routines and systems
- ☐ Attend key meetings and events
- ☐ Understand how decisions are made
- ☐ Ask questions before offering solutions



3 BUILD TRUST

Credibility comes from consistency.

- ☐ Keep your promises
- ☐ Follow through on actions
- ☐ Recognise and celebrate good work
- ☐ Communicate openly and clearly
- ☐ Show humility and approachability



4 AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

Small mistakes early on can have lasting consequences.

- ☐ Don't introduce unnecessary change
- ☐ Don't compare to your previous school
- ☐ Don't try to solve every problem
- ☐ Don't over-promise
- ☐ Don't isolate yourself



The quality of your first month
will shape the quality of
your first year.

Listen.
Learn.
Lead.

Days 31–60:

Deepen Your Understanding

You've built trust and gained valuable insights in your first month. Now is the time to dig deeper, ask bigger questions and strengthen your understanding of what really drives your school.



DAYS 31–60

Learn deeply.
Think clearly.
Act intentionally.



1 ANALYSE AND REFLECT

Look beneath the surface to understand the real issues.

- ☐ Review key data and trends
- ☐ Identify strengths and areas of concern
- ☐ Look for patterns before jumping to conclusions
- ☐ Reflect on what this means for your priorities



MY LEARNING FOCUS

What do I most need to understand better about my school?



2 DEVELOP COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Invest in people and build a culture of growth.

- ☐ Hold one-to-one conversations with key staff
- ☐ Ask open questions and listen actively
- ☐ Provide feedback that is specific and supportive
- ☐ Encourage reflection and professional development



3 UNDERSTAND PERFORMANCE AND PROCESSES

Know how things work so you can lead them well.

- ☐ Map key processes and systems
- ☐ Identify what is working well and what isn't
- ☐ Spot inefficiencies and areas for improvement
- ☐ Engage with governors and key stakeholders



LEADERSHIP NOTES

Key insights, patterns and actions I want to remember.



4 STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

Broaden your network and deepen collaboration.

- ☐ Build strong relationships across departments
- ☐ Connect with parents and the wider community
- ☐ Work closely with your leadership team
- ☐ Look for opportunities to collaborate



LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

Understanding deeply is the foundation for leading effectively.
Take time now to learn, connect and reflect.



Days 61–90: Lead with Purpose

You've listened, learned and built strong foundations.
Now is the time to lead with clarity, make purposeful decisions
and create momentum for lasting improvement.



DAYS 61–90

Take action.

Create momentum.

Lead with purpose.



1 SET CLEAR PRIORITIES

Focus on what will make the biggest difference.

- ☐ Identify 2–3 priorities that align with your school goals
- ☐ Discuss and agree priorities with your line manager
- ☐ Define what success will look like
- ☐ Communicate priorities and expectations clearly



2 TURN UNDERSTANDING INTO ACTION

Introduce change thoughtfully and with purpose.

- ☐ Introduce one or two meaningful improvements
- ☐ Assign ownership and clarify next steps
- ☐ Remove small barriers that slow progress
- ☐ Follow through and keep your commitments



3 BUILD MOMENTUM THROUGH OTHERS

Empower your team and celebrate progress.

- ☐ Delegate and empower others meaningfully
- ☐ Recognise and celebrate early successes
- ☐ Involve your team in decisions and solutions
- ☐ Develop leadership capacity across your team



4 REVIEW AND LOOK AHEAD

Reflect, learn and prepare for the next 90 days.

- ☐ Seek feedback from your team and stakeholders
- ☐ Review progress against your priorities
- ☐ Adjust your approach where needed
- ☐ Set priorities for your next 90 days



LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

Sustainable impact does not come
from doing everything yourself.
Set direction, create clarity and
enable others to move forward.



MY THREE LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

The 2–3 priorities I will focus on
over the next 30 days.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



ONE IMPROVEMENT I WILL TAKE FORWARD

The one improvement I am
committed to leading and
driving forward.



Your First 90 Days: Review, Reflect & Continue

You have spent your first 90 days building relationships, deepening your understanding and beginning to lead with purpose.

Before moving forward, take time to recognise what you have learned and decide what deserves your attention next.



YOUR 90-DAY REVIEW

Pause. Reflect.

Learn. Plan.

Then lead on.

1 What am I most proud of from my first 90 days?

2 What have I learned about myself as a leader?

3 Which relationships do I need to continue strengthening?

4 What are my three priorities for the next 90 days?

1.

2.

3.

THE ELEVATED LEADERSHIP 90-DAY CYCLE



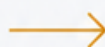
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Listen. Connect.
Earn trust.



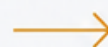
DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

Analyse. Learn.
See the bigger picture.



LEAD WITH PURPOSE

Set direction.
Take action. Create impact.



REFLECT & BEGIN AGAIN

Review. Adapt.
Keep growing.



CONTINUE YOUR LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Leadership development does not end after your first 90 days.
Continue building your practice through the Elevated Leadership Library.



EXPLORE MORE FREE RESOURCES

Practical guides, tools and templates to support you in your leadership.



JOIN THE MAILING LIST

Receive new resources, reflections and leadership insights straight to your inbox.



DISCOVER ELEVATED LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMES

Coaching, mentoring and programmes designed to equip and empower leaders.

VISIT THE LEADERSHIP LIBRARY

More resources.
More growth.
More impact.



desoconnorleadership.com



Leadership is a journey, not a destination.
Keep learning. Keep leading. Keep making a difference.

