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Your first 100 days leading supply chain: what to commit to, and what to renegotiate

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In brief: In a new supply chain role, the costly mistake is not a slow start. It is committing, in the first weeks, to numbers the operation cannot deliver. The first 100 days are for deciding which promises you will stand behind, and which you will renegotiate while being new still buys you that conversation.

The targets arrive before you do

You take the role with a mandate to transform. By the end of the first week you also hold a set of targets you did not set: a service level promised to the commercial team, an inventory reduction already in the budget, a cost line the CFO has presented to the board.

None of these is unreasonable on its own. Together, they are a set of commitments made in your name, on a baseline you have not yet seen.

The instinct is to show momentum: accept the targets, launch initiatives, be visible. It feels like leadership. In practice it ties your credibility to numbers nobody has tested against the operation as it really runs. Three months later the gap shows, and the conversation you could have had on day 20 becomes much harder on day 120.

Days 1 to 30: get the real baseline

Start with six numbers, taken from the source systems rather than from the last board deck:

- **Service level**, by channel and by key customer, not only the average.
- **Forecast accuracy and bias**, because a consistent bias tells you more than a good average.
- **Inventory and working capital**, split into what is healthy, what is slow and what is at risk.
- **Cost to serve**, at least for the largest customers and routes.
- **Capacity use**, with the real constraints rather than nameplate figures.
- **Supplier risk**, starting with the single-source items that would stop a line.

Then make a second list: every commitment already made in your name, with whom, and by when.

Mark each one as solid, at risk or unknown. Most new leaders are surprised by how long this list is, and by how many entries no one in the organization actually owns.

This is not an audit to find fault with your predecessor. It is the ground you will stand on when you start making promises of your own.

Days 31 to 60: commit, renegotiate or defer

With the baseline in hand, sort every commitment into one of three groups. The table below is the one we use.

	COMMIT	RENEGOTIATE	DEFER
What belongs here	Targets the baseline supports, with a credible path and an owner	Targets that matter but rest on a wrong baseline or an unrealistic date	Initiatives that compete for the same people and do not move this year's results
Typical examples	Service recovery on the top customers; one or two cost actions already in motion	An inventory cut that ignores a service promise; a savings target that assumes capacity you do not have	A new planning tool, a network redesign study, a broad "digital" program
Who you talk to	Your team, to set owners and milestones	The CFO and the commercial leaders, with the numbers on the table	Your manager, to agree that waiting is a decision, not a delay
What you say	"This is what we will deliver, and how you will see it."	"This is the real starting point. Here is what we can deliver, and what it would take to reach the original number."	"Not yet. Here is when we will decide, and what we need to know first."
The risk if you skip it	Your first results arrive late and unexplained	You inherit a miss and own it	The team spreads thin and nothing lands

Renegotiate early. In the first two months, a new leader can say "the baseline was not what we thought" and be heard as rigorous. After six months, the same sentence sounds like an excuse.

Renegotiating is not lowering the bar. It is replacing a number that cannot be delivered with one that will be, and making the trade-offs visible to the people who will live with them.

Days 61 to 100: one forum, first trade-offs

A new leader's plan usually collides with the other functions in the third month. Sales wants availability, finance wants cash, manufacturing wants stable runs. Each position is reasonable. Without one table where the trade-offs are made, each function keeps defending its own.

Bring the functions to one monthly forum, run on one set of numbers, and use it to take two or three visible decisions before day 100. Choose decisions that matter but can be reversed if they prove wrong:

a change in the service policy for a group of customers, a reset of safety stocks on a product family, a capacity choice between two plants.

The point is not the decisions themselves. It is showing the organization that this table changes things. We wrote about the difference between a meeting calendar and a decision system in When IBP Is Just a Better Calendar.

The 100-day plan on one page

By day 100, you should be able to put your plan on a single page that your manager, your peers and your team all recognize:

01 **Three to five priorities** for the next twelve months, in order.

02 **The three commitments you will stand behind**, each with a baseline, a target, a date and an owner.

03 **What you renegotiated**, and what the organization agreed instead.

04 **What you deferred**, and when it will be decided.

05 **What you need from your peers**, in plain terms: decisions, people, data.

If the page needs a slide deck to explain it, it is not finished.

From experience

At a global consumer goods multinational, I took charge of an operation whose numbers were moving in the wrong direction. I spent the first weeks on the baseline and on a clear view of which commitments could be kept. The result was a 90-day plan that stabilized the operation's KPIs in under 60 days.

What made it work was not speed for its own sake. It was choosing early which promises to make, protecting a few of them by saying no at the start, and giving the team a short list it could deliver rather than a long one it could not.

Ten questions to answer by day 100

01 Do I have the six baseline numbers from the source systems, and do I trust them?

02 Which commitments were made in my name before I arrived?

03 Which of them does the baseline support?

04 Which ones have I renegotiated, and with whom?

05 What have I deliberately deferred, and have I said so?

06 Does every commitment have one owner?

07 Is there one forum where cross-functional trade-offs are decided?

08 Which two or three decisions has that forum taken?

09 Does my team know the three things we will deliver this year?

10 Could I present my plan on one page, without a deck?

The mandate

The first 100 days are not a test of how much you can launch. They are your best window to set expectations you can meet, with the credibility of someone who looked before committing.

Every target you accept in that window, you will be measured against. Choose them with the baseline in hand.

New in the role?

See where your supply chain stands before you commit to targets. Take the Readiness Assessment or book a 30-minute conversation.

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