Your First 100 Days as a Chief Competitive Officer: 7 Things You Must Get Right
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FDR's "First 100 Days" were legendary: they established the tone and the strategies that defined his presidency. U.S. Presidents and corporate CEOs have since used the "First 100 Days" as a leadership model to share their vision and galvanize their constituents, stakeholders, and employees.

If your company's leadership has had the foresight to elevate the competitive intelligence function to a seat in the C-Suite – or even if you are still climbing the corporate ladder, and are helping to define the CI role as you do it – your first 100 days in your position are crucial for signaling the steps you will take to show value and get your tenure off to a strong, early start.

Success in the first 100 days is crucial. Remember that "you never get a second chance to make a good first impression." In your first critical days and weeks in an elevated CI role, your words and actions will send messages that define the directions for the CI position. The key to success is to have a systematic plan. Based on almost 20 years of interviews, experience, observation and research, we believe the following seven fundamental principles can fuel the momentum that will help a CI Manager create the broad vision necessary to succeed as a Chief Competitive Officer – or in any other CI position on the corporate ladder.

1. Identify Your Key Stakeholders and Constituents

A common misconception is that the CCO role has the whole weight of the organization on its shoulders, serving everyone and anyone having competitive issues. Wrong! This very issue happened with a West Coast biotech company whose CI director did not do an adequate job defining who their core constituents were within the organization. As a result, the CI function was pulled down into a quagmire of relentless tactical competitive pursuits that involved practically all levels of the organization. The group spent most of its time dealing with urgent, but not necessarily important,

engagements, putting out one fire after another, eventually suffocating under its own weight. Sun Tzu perhaps summed up this situation best: "In serving so many masters, the humble servant satisfies none."

Conversely, when a CCO identifies core constituents that his or her function will serve, this allows for focus and calculated movement. For most CI professionals, core constituents are going to be the individuals whose job it is to move the entire organization forward. For example, an East Coast QSR (Quick Serve Restaurant) that has become a legend in its space recently embraced the importance of CI as an essential component of its business. To kick off the process no one shouted from the headquarters roof top about the function. Instead, the group quietly identified its five core principles. To take this effort to the maximum the group then took the time to understand its internal clients' high pay-off activities and annual objectives, goals, and critical success indicators, for which they were to be held accountable.

2. Develop a Robust Operating Plan and Set Clear Mandates for Managing Expectations

The CCO must provide clarity on what the function can realistically provide and what is out of reach. For example, a short time ago a well-known pharmaceutical company's VP of Research and Development requested a quick project that, in his words, was very urgent and extremely important. The results could potentially affect the direction of new product development for one of the company's five therapeutic areas. Unfortunately, the project came during the busy holiday season. The objective of the request was fuzzy, timelines were compressed, and the intelligence needed was complex (akin to trying to find a needle in a haystack).

These types of projects illustrate why it is a fundamental principle to set mandates that help

outline the procedures and processes that are required to commission a project for ultimate success. These elements include:

- Clear parameters on what is needed for the project's success
- Clearly defined objectives
- Appropriate timeframes
- Appropriate budget and resource appropriations

The mandates all play a part in ensuring a successful CI engagement. Setting clear expectations is necessary and should be established at all costs on all projects. Otherwise it is too easy for the function to fall victim to an unhappy client's discontent when things don't go according to plan. If the mandate is not followed, dire consequences may result that can make the situation even worse. Tackling projects with no clear parameters and expectations set on the probable output rarely have a successful ending and could leave both the company and the CI function in a vulnerable position – never a good idea, and particularly perilous in an uncertain economic climate.

3. Get the Right People on the Team

To paraphrase the book *Good to Great* by Tom Collins, "Get the right people in the right seats on the bus and get the wrong people off the bus." This applies to both internal and external CI teams. Most world-class CI teams should be composed of analytical types – creative people who grasp an overall big picture, but are able to take disaggregate pieces of data, information, and intelligence that may be provided by numerous media and make sense of it.

But even with a fistful of the right CI people, any CCO worth his or her salary is going to have the good sense to know the risks of using "home grown" intelligence only. Great CI requires unbiased views and insights, an unlimited playing field (meaning a maximum human-source contact pool), quantitative research skills, solid reach and frequency, multi-tiered triangulation, and intelligence accuracy. When developing your internal CI team, you need all of the above – but to round out your capabilities, you'll need to be aware of when it's time to "team up" with a veteran external CI

firm that can assist in providing skills, resources, and capabilities that you may not have.

Whether internal or external, your team must possess a variety of attributes that help the CCO position every commissioned project for success. In any CI engagement, whether you're staffing it with your internal team or teaming up with an external firm, you need to ensure the following:

- Depth of research and analytical bench
- Subject matter expertise
- Well-defined, rigorously followed CI research processes, policies and methodologies delivering consistency and accuracy
- Transparency in project effort and product deliverables
- Well trained and highly talented CI personnel
- Ability to illustrate and/or demonstrate ROI for each engagement

4. Lay the Groundwork for Effective Communication

As part of understanding your principal constituents, clearly defining their priority CI needs and setting clear mandates in which to operate from is critical, but it means nothing if there is communication break-down. Therefore, laying the groundwork for effective communication with key stakeholders is vital. The important elements are 1) getting the intelligence in executives' hands quickly and easily and 2) having a feedback mechanism that allows for questions and next step discussions.

A small, up and coming technology firm has refined the art of communication with their fast moving executives by downloading intelligence briefs to executives' cell phones. These briefs are provided in a standard format, are easily identified and provide only the most critical intelligence affecting their plan and execution of stated objectives, goals, and critical success indicators. The feedback or response mechanism is a button push away. For inquiries, response, or next steps a speed dial number connecting the constituent directly with their CI team engagement lead is conveniently listed at the top and bottom of every transmitted intelligence brief. It's a beautiful thing.

Ask your core clients what mode of communication they feel most comfortable with

and act accordingly. Don't be afraid to be creative – and to ask for feedback. Although your communication framework can result from many streams, simplicity – coupled with consistency – is many times the most brilliant solution.

5. Secure Early Wins

It is important to demonstrate the value of the CI function early on with quick wins. What often kicks off the initial efforts of a new CI function is a project that is hot (important and urgent) and must be addressed immediately. These projects may be fast and furious; however, setting up protocols to manage expectations, securing the right inside and outside CI talent, and setting up clear communications lines can all help to manage these projects into big wins.

Furthermore, to ensure success, often the CI group proactively recommends such quick-win projects. Rather than having projects forced upon them during a rushed or stressful situation, for their first engagements the CI group often makes suggestions for these initial projects, allowing the group to have ample time to structure and organize the intended engagement. The CI group should not avoid "fast and furious" projects, because inevitably these situations will arise. However, don't lose sight of the maxim that what builds success is when preparedness meets opportunity.

6. Identify Critical Alliances within the Company

The divisional president of a well-known spirits company commented at a recent CI conference, "My CI guy is the guy I talk with most." And within the company, her CI guy talked most to his "intelligence centers of influences" within the company. These hidden intelligence nodes provide a consistent flow of internal information and additional insight that assist in both forming CI projects as well as enhancing the intelligence team and the CCO's perspective.

It is important to begin developing key nodes of intelligence within your company during the early months of any CI function. These nodes of intelligence can be people who have worked for the company or industry for many years or someone with a propensity to gather, or be in a situation to gather, key intelligence. These key contacts can not only supply you with internal intelligence, but may also be recruited to run functional or department intelligence taskforces for deeper and more thorough information gathering.

7. Refine Your CI Vision

A natural occurrence often happens in CI called the "kid in the candy store phenomenon." This means that once people feel the power of great intelligence, they want more of it. From many aspects, this is a positive situation; the only downside occurs when the phenomenon results in projects that don't run parallel with the purpose statement of the CCO's CI function.

If the CI purpose statement is "to help the company's leadership team more easily reach their strategic goals and objectives by being one step ahead of the competition," and assignments begin running contrary to this purpose statement, the CCO has a much easier time pushing back for more concrete and relevant projects that help the function fulfill its purpose. What is your CI purpose statement? Define it and make sure your internal constituents know and understand it as well.

What Will You Do in Your Next 100 Days?

Your first 100 days are full of risks – and opportunities. Why not dedicate the first 100 days of the New Year – the next 100 days on your business calendar – to engaging in a powerful re-launch of your organization's CI function, and your leadership role in it?

Need help developing the core ingredients that will set the baseline for your success in the next 100 days – and well beyond? Contact Gary Maag or David Kalinowski of Proactive Worldwide for an arsenal of principles and strategies to guide yourself and your team to establish a successful CI function that delivers mind-bending results for your company.