



Mentoring Matters

How do you proceed when you've taken over a new team, only to find a lot of performance issues left behind by the old boss—who is a friend of your new boss? What if your instincts are telling you to take actions that you're worried might offend your new colleagues?

Gabriella O'Rourke is one of three Executive Roundtable members that Founder and President, **Glain Roberts-McCabe** asked to share their strategies with us for taking on performance issues in a new team when it feels like the old manager still in the picture.

“I've just been promoted into a new division and the person who was in that role previously has been promoted up and into a new part of the business. It has become apparent that this previous manager left behind a lot of performance issues within the team and played favourites with certain employees. I feel like I need to do some significant restructuring but I'm concerned that the former manager (who is a good friend of my new boss) will view my actions negatively. Some of the people who I feel are underperforming were the former manager's favourites. How should I handle the changes?”

*In keeping with her characteristically pragmatic approach to leadership, **Gabriella O'Rourke** shares her leadership survival kit to successfully navigate the drama minefield.*

Congratulations on your new role, and for recognizing the potential minefield that lies in front of you as you navigate this transition.

The #1 principle to keep in mind is that leaders are *expected* to make decisions. Right now, everyone will be watching to see how you handle this transition, especially your new direct reports who have had to live with the frustration of underperforming colleagues. Yes, you should be aware of and sensitive to the views of your predecessor and your current boss, but you should also conduct your own due diligence and make decisions accordingly. This is not about keeping everyone happy. This is your moment to show that you are focused only on the best interests of the company and building a team that will deliver results.

Before you charge in and start firing people, take some time to learn from and listen to all stakeholders. If possible, have an informal chat with the old boss about the team they have left behind and the potential they saw in those they favoured. Schedule a meeting to talk to your new boss about the increase in performance they would like to see from the team under your leadership. Ask other stakeholders around the organization (internal clients, other department heads) what strengths and weaknesses they see from your group and what performance improvements they believe possible under new leadership.

Perhaps even more importantly when inheriting a team, take some time to get to know your people and what drives them. Even if you have worked alongside them before, there is a great deal you won't yet know about their goals, aspirations, motives and behaviours. Make your own mind up about their respective performance capabilities based on current and up-to-date information, not hearsay or the sour grapes of those who were not considered "teacher's pet."

Take a few weeks, observe, absorb, and then make your decisions as you see fit, based on objective evidence. Use every opportunity you have to build trust with your new team members and show them that you are interested in gaining a full and complete sense of everyone's potential before making any changes. If there is an underperformance issue, it must be dealt with decisively

to regain the team's trust, morale and show them that you are committed to a high-performance environment. With their former manager out of the way and your adopting an open and listening approach, the problem performers will either step up to the plate or make it very clear that it is indeed time for them to move on to other opportunities.



As a hands-on executive and line manager, **Gabriella O'Rourke** has been transforming the business development culture and capabilities of complex matrix-led professional service firms and their leaders for over twenty years in Canada and the UK. With deep and practical expertise in front-line sales, business development, marketing, communications, business strategy and change management, Gabriella has built and managed successful teams; driven execution of leadership best practices and coached some of the most accomplished executives to achieve their targeted development goals.

Gabriella served as the Director of Marketing and Business Development for WeirFoulds LLP from 2010-2015. Prior to that, she served in National Marketing leadership roles at KPMG LLP and Grant Thornton LLP. She is a committed relationship builder, blogger, speaker and guest columnist for *The Globe and Mail* Small Business section, where she writes about winning business, networking and building your professional profile. Gabriella was a founding member of The Executive Roundtable and was a mentee in the original Leadership Accelerator program.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Executive Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.