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The New Hire 90-Day Blueprint:

A Political Navigation System for
Reentry Professionals

Ken Willis

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The New Hire 90-Day Blueprint

A Political Navigation System for Reentry Professionals

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The 90-Day Blueprint Series – Volume 1

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Letter to the Reader: Reentry Is a System, Not a Guess

If you are reading this, you are likely in one of three places: You've been laid off. You're about to start something new. Or you're advising someone who is.

As a business consultant with more than four decades of experience – including senior leadership roles at Quaker Oats and PepsiCo, where I managed billion-dollar revenue centers and hundreds of employees – I have watched a recurring pattern play out with troubling consistency. Highly capable professionals leave one organization, often involuntarily, and reenter another with real optimism, only to struggle within months. Not because they lack talent. But because they underestimate the invisible dynamics of reentry.

I have seen it in clients. I have seen it in executives. I have seen it in my own family. From 2023 into 2026, layoffs have affected millions of professionals across industries. Technology, finance, media, and consulting sectors continue to experience successive waves of workforce reductions, deeply impacting hundreds of thousands of mid-career professionals as organizations structurally shift toward artificial intelligence and efficiency-driven models.

Layoff is not just a financial disruption. It is an identity disruption. Reentry is not just employment. It is political navigation. This is not theory. It is pattern recognition – distilled from forty years of building things, breaking things, and helping others navigate the difference. This book exists to close that gap.

How to Use This Book

Treat the next pages as an operating manual for your first 90 days. You will learn a ***reconnaissance-first approach***, the ***power map*** that actually governs outcomes, the ***alliance formula*** that converts isolated effort into momentum, and a structured ***expansion play*** that stops corporate antibodies from kicking in. Each chapter concludes with a concise Advisor Insight to lock in the pattern.

You will not be asked to become someone else. You will learn how to match your strengths against the reality on the ground. The difference between thriving and stalling is rarely competence; it is context fluency, boundary respect, and narrative clarity.

Read linearly if you are in your first 30 days. Jump to the Action Plan if you start on Monday. Share the Appendix with your manager to compress your political learning curve. Begin.



A Word of Honest Warning: The Fine Print Nobody Puts in the Fine Print

Let's be straight with each other before we go any further. This book is a system. A good one – built from forty years of observation, refined across dozens of client engagements, and grounded in the kind of pattern recognition that only comes from watching enough organizations to know that the human dynamics inside them rhyme, regardless of industry, regardless of size, regardless of how many ping-pong tables are in the break room.

But no system – not this one, not any other – guarantees a perfect outcome. And I would rather tell you that now, clearly, than have you discover it in month three and conclude that either you failed the system or the system failed you.

Here is what the system cannot fix:

It cannot fix a manager who has quietly decided that your success is a threat to their own. It cannot fix an organization where credit routinely travels upward and stops there – where your work arrives in a senior meeting wearing someone else's name tag (with no forwarding address for the attribution). It cannot fix a culture so calcified that even the most politically intelligent new hire would need eighteen months just to locate the invisible fences, let alone navigate around them. And it cannot fix the occasional colleague who would defend genuinely bad behavior from above by insisting, somehow, that the flowers just needed watering.

These situations exist. I have watched brilliant, well-executing professionals do everything in this book correctly and still get passed over, undermined, or uncredited. It happens. The organization is not always fair. The system is not always meritocratic. The loudest voice in the room is not always the most ethical one, and sometimes the person taking credit for your work has a title that makes the taking very easy and the challenging very risky.

When that happens – and at some point in a long career, some version of it will – here is what I want you to hold onto:

The professionals I have watched thrive over long careers are not the ones who never encountered a broken system or a bad actor. They are the ones who refused to let a bad chapter convince them the book was over. They kept executing the principles. They kept building alliances. They kept narrating their impact and documenting their contributions – not as ammunition, but as memory. And when the environment they were in proved genuinely unworthy of their continued investment, they made the strategic decision to find one that was, carrying their credibility and their network with them.

Your reputation is portable. Your skills are portable. The relationships you build executing this framework are portable. The organization is not the destination – it is a chapter. Execute the principles with integrity, play the long game, and trust that the arc bends toward the people who keep showing up and doing the work.

Now. With that said – and meant – let's talk about how to win in the organization you're actually in.



Chapter 1: Why Smart People Fail in New Roles

Marcus Sykes, a senior product manager with twelve years of experience and an impeccable track record in fintech, thought the layoff was the hardest part. He'd been cut in the second wave of a tech sector restructuring, had landed a strong new role within four months, and walked in on Day One with real momentum. It wasn't the hardest part. The hardest part came six weeks later, when he realized that competence alone would not carry him through reentry.

When Marcus joined his new company, he overcorrected. He moved fast. He proved value aggressively. He volunteered for visible projects before he understood the terrain. Within weeks, something shifted. Doors that had been open became slightly less open. A peer who had been warm became politely neutral. A project he expected to lead was quietly assigned elsewhere. Nobody said anything directly. Nobody needed to. The resistance formed without a memo. (There is never a memo. If there were a memo, at least you'd know what you were dealing with.)

Most professionals misread this moment. They assume the system is broken, or biased, or slow. What they're actually experiencing is the predictable result of skipping a step.

The Failure Loop: Layoff → Reentry → Moving too fast → Resistance → Confusion → Exit

The missing variable is context. When you enter a new organization, you don't just join a team. You inherit history, alliances, invisible hierarchies, and scar tissue from prior change attempts you weren't there to witness. Moving without reading that terrain is not drive. It is disruption. Well-intentioned, highly competent disruption – but disruption nonetheless.

The formula that governs reentry outcomes is simple:

Success = Skill × Context.

Your skill is a given – it got you hired. Context is the multiplier. And a zero in the context column cancels every point of skill you bring. All of it. Twelve years of fintech expertise, zeroed out because nobody explained that Finance was the real gatekeeper and the third Tuesday of every month is a terrible time to propose anything.

What 'Context' Actually Means

Context is not soft. It is structural. It answers questions like: Who actually sponsors the strategy you were hired to execute? What scar tissue exists from prior change attempts – what failed before you arrived and why? Which metrics on the dashboard are a genuine scoreboard versus a political shield? What does “fast” mean in this culture – calendar speed or consensus speed?

The professionals who thrive in reentry are the ones who treat their first 30 days as intelligence-gathering, not as a performance. They resist the urge to solve problems they haven't fully decoded yet. They ask questions that reveal the system rather than questions that showcase themselves.

This feels unnatural if you've spent twelve years being the person with the answers. Sit with it anyway.

Narrative Discipline in the First 30 Days

In your first one-on-ones, resist solutioning. Ask three questions repeatedly: What would success look like in 90 days from your seat? Where have prior initiatives stumbled? Whose input will we need before we move? Capture patterns, not quotes. Convert patterns into a reconnaissance memo that frames your early moves as alignment, not disruption.

Marcus eventually learned this. By month two, he had stopped leading with solutions and started leading with questions. The doors opened again. The peer warmed back up. The project that had moved away from him came back with a larger scope. Nothing about his skill had changed. His sequencing had. (The organization had not suddenly become smarter. He had become harder to misread.)

Advisor Insight: Your first 30 days are reconnaissance, not redemption. The system you walk into is older than you are. Read it before you rewrite it.

