SAFEbuilt®

Building Connections

Start Strong, Stay Aligned

Building relationships with your staff is one of your most important and rewarding responsibilities. This guide will help you connect with your team, establish clear expectations, and create a positive culture where everyone can thrive.

How To Use This Guide

Think of this as your roadmap for successful team leadership:

- First Connections: Take it one step at a time—build initial relationships
- Setting Clear Expectations: Establish how you'll work together effectively
- Building Team Culture: Create a positive environment for your department
- Managing Key Relationships: Connect with important stakeholders
- Continuity & Change Management: Balance existing practices with improvements
- Transition Timeline: Adapt the timeframes to fit your specific situation

Use the checkboxes throughout to track your progress as you implement these strategies.

FIRST CONNECTIONS

Your early interactions set the tone for your entire leadership journey.

Plan Your Initial Meetings:

- ☐ Schedule a 30-45 minute whole-team introduction
- ☐ Arrange 20-minute one-on-ones with direct reports
- ☐ Create informal opportunities to connect (coffee chats, walking meetings)
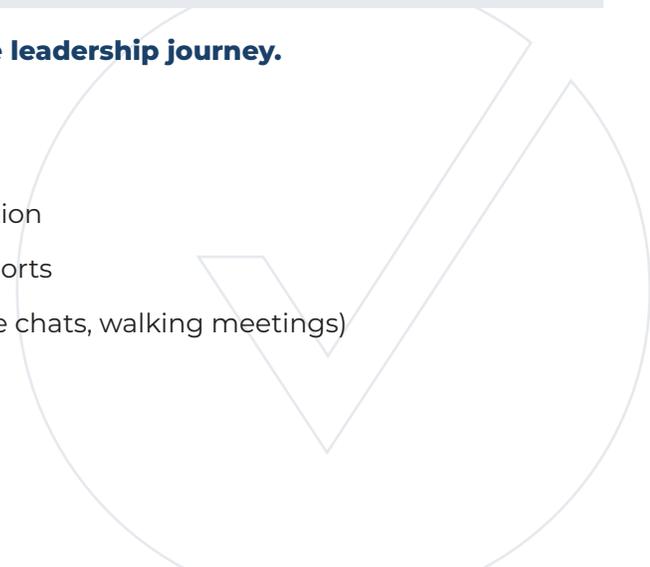
Prepare a Thoughtful Introduction:

☐ Share relevant experience that builds credibility

☐ Acknowledge the team's valuable institutional knowledge

☐ Explain your "listen-first" approach to the transition

☐ Clarify how you'll communicate important decisions

Learn About Team Dynamics:

☐ Understand the current reporting structure

☐ Ask about recent events that have shaped the department

☐ Identify key relationships with other departments

☐ Discover team traditions and meeting formats that work well

Quick Tip: People remember how you make them feel more than what you say. Approach early meetings with genuine curiosity rather than an agenda to "fix" things.

SETTING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS

Help your team understand how you'll work together successfully.

Share Your Leadership Style:

☐ Explain your communication preferences (how and when)

☐ Describe your decision-making approach

☐ Outline how you'll provide feedback

☐ Let them know when and how to reach you with questions

Department priorities for next 90 days:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Meeting schedule:

- [ ] Team meetings: _____ (frequency)
- [ ] Individual check-ins: _____ (frequency)

Address Immediate Needs:

- [ ] Review critical deadlines in the next 30 days
- [ ] Identify current projects where your support is needed
- [ ] Confirm upcoming events requiring your participation

BUILDING TEAM CULTURE

Create an environment where your team can do their best work.

Understand Your Current Culture

Team strengths: _____

_____

Values: _____

_____

Preferred appreciation methods: _____

_____

Create Shared Goals:

- [ ] Review your department's mission
- [ ] Identify 3-5 key success measures
- [ ] Prioritize processes that need improvement
- [ ] Discuss professional development opportunities

Develop a Recognition Approach:

- [ ] Create ways to acknowledge individual contributions
- [ ] Plan how you'll celebrate team accomplishments
- [ ] Establish methods to share successes with stakeholders

Quick Tip: Ask your team, "What does success look like from the perspective of our residents?" This question often reveals insights that transform how you approach your work together.
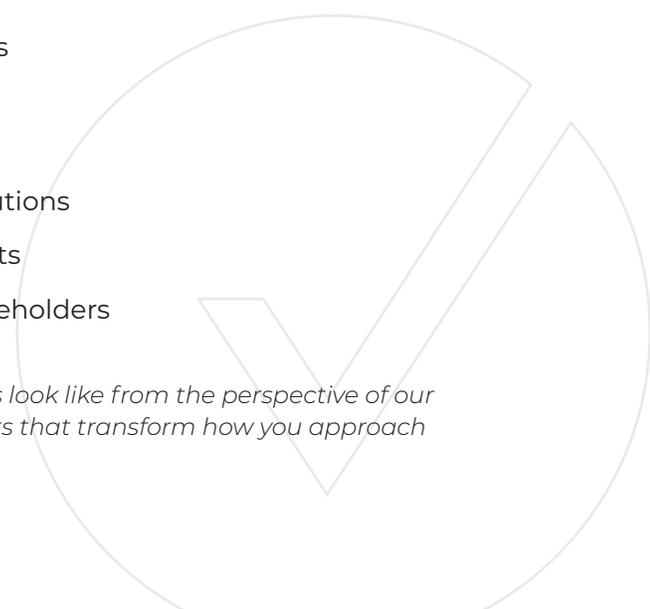
MANAGING KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Build productive connections with stakeholders who impact your department.

Map Your Important Relationships			
Stakeholder Group	Key Contacts	Their Priorities	Connection Frequency
Internal Partners			
Community Groups			
Regulatory Bodies			
Audit & Compliance			

Develop Your Engagement Strategy:

☐ Determine the best communication method for each group

☐ Schedule regular check-ins with critical partners

☐ Create feedback channels for stakeholder input

☐ Establish protocols for addressing conflicts

Assign Relationship Responsibilities:

☐ Decide who manages each key relationship

☐ Create a system to track commitments

☐ Set response time expectations

CONTINUITY AND STRATEGIC GROWTH

Balance existing practices with strategic improvements.

Learn Your Department's History:

- [ ] Major accomplishments and challenges
- [ ] Previous change initiatives and their outcomes
- [ ] Recurring issues needing attention
- [ ] Legacy projects to continue

Identify Improvement Opportunities

Areas for potential modernization: _____

_____

_____

Quick wins to build momentum: _____

_____

_____

Plan for Thoughtful Change:

- [ ] Create a process for evaluating potential improvements
- [ ] Develop a communication approach for introducing changes
- [ ] Establish clear milestones and success metrics

Quick Tip: When implementing changes, engage your team's informal influencers early—their support can significantly impact adoption and enthusiasm.

TEAM INTEGRATION TIMELINE

A structured approach to your first weeks of leadership.

Week 1: Connect

- ☐ Hold initial team meeting
- ☐ Complete individual staff meetings
- ☐ Learn names, roles, and responsibilities
- ☐ Address any pressing issues

Weeks 2-3: Understand

- ☐ Explore operations and challenges
- ☐ Review performance data
- ☐ Meet key stakeholders
- ☐ Identify improvement opportunities

Weeks 4-6: Align

- ☐ Share leadership approach
- ☐ Facilitate goals discussion
- ☐ Establish meeting rhythm
- ☐ Address urgent issues

Weeks 7-10: Activate

- ☐ Launch improvement initiatives
- ☐ Create feedback mechanisms
- ☐ Begin strategic planning
- ☐ Celebrate early wins

Reflection Questions

Consider these questions throughout your transition:

- What's working well in my approach to team leadership?
- Which team members are emerging as key contributors?
- What barriers am I noticing that weren't visible initially?
- How can I better balance respecting existing processes with making improvements?
- What additional support does my team need to excel?

Build a High-Performing Team

Effective staff transitions create the foundation for departmental success. At SAFEbuilt, we understand the challenges of building and maintaining high-performing municipal teams.

Our community development services provide flexible staffing solutions that complement your existing team, bringing specialized expertise exactly when you need it—without the overhead of full-time positions.

We'd love to share how our approach has helped other new leaders build effective departments while managing resources efficiently.

Let's bring your vision to life.

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