On managing a team you don't know

With Morgan Evans

Who am I?

1. Building web applications for about 12 years

2. Leading engineering teams for about 6 years

3. Sr Director of Engineering at Condé Nast

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A Disclaimer

I can't tell you what will work for you,

but I can tell you what has worked for me.

My process

[Mileage may vary]

1. Settle in
2. Listen and learn
3. Set expectations
4. Drive change
5. Celebrate success

#1 - Settle in.

Find out the expectations of the new gig

- How will success be measured by my boss?
- What are the cultural norms of the company?
- What is the context of my position within the organization?

The [somewhat] obvious stuff

- Don't come in like gangbusters
- Trust people until they give you a reason not to
- Be as clear about intentions and objectives as you can be
- Have thorough initial 1:1s

#2 - Listen and learn.

So what would you say you do here?

- Start as a passenger to your team
- Ask many questions
- Observe everything
- Take the time to understand *why* things are the way they are
- Avoid rushing to action or judgment

Building relationships

- Time spent getting to know the team is key
- Focus on building rapport
- Everyone should feel like their voice matters

#3 - Set expectations and lead by example.

On setting expectations

- People want to understand what is expected of them

- Overcommunication is good communication

- Being consistent will help build trust

- Explicit expectations makes giving feedback and course-correcting easier

Leading by example

- My behavior sets the tone and pace
- Everyone is watching
- Living my values inspires others

Establishing dominance

- Sometimes people will be weird about getting a new boss

- Not everyone welcomes me with open arms

- Focus on togetherness, not hierarchy

- Subtly reinforce leadership as needed

#4 - Drive change and give feedback.

Find the inner circle

- Treat ideas like hypotheses: test them!
- Figure out who to trust
- Figure out who my team trusts

Dry-run ideas on trusted people

Ask: What do you think about _____? Has the team ever tried something like this before? What issues do you think we might have?

Ask: How do you think _____ is doing? How do you think the team sees the situation? What do you think needs to be done?

Don't

- Jump to conclusions
- Play favorites or have lower expectations for people in equivalent roles
- Expect to be able to make everyone happy all the time
- Expect to be "part of the gang"

#5 - Celebrate successes.

Thank you.