THE 50 FOR 50 GROWTH GUIDES · GROWTH FACTOR 39

The Runway: First 90 Days

THE 50 FACTOR — GROWTH FACTOR #39

The First 90 Days: How to Ramp New Hires So They Succeed

The Complete Implementation Guide

BY SCOTT SCULLY

Growth Factor #39: The First 90 Days: How to Ramp New Hires So They Succeed

The Complete Implementation Guide

This white paper is a companion to Chapter 39 of The 50 Factor by Scott Scully.

Why This Growth Factor Matters

A new hire's experience in their first 90 days determines, with approximately 80% accuracy, whether they'll still be there in a year. The position playbook tells them what the job is. The 90-day program tells them when, how, and in what order to learn it.

The Three Phases

Phase 1: Foundation (Days 1-30) — Learn the Company

Not production-focused. Context-focused. The new hire learns the company before they learn the job — because context makes everything else stick.

What happens: company orientation, cross-functional shadowing (spend a half-day in 3-4 other departments), tools training, playbook walkthrough with their mentor, meet the CEO (even briefly — the personal connection matters), and cultural immersion (attend a best practice meeting, sit in on an all-hands, have lunch with their captain).

The outcome by Day 30: the new hire can explain what the company does, who the clients are, how the departments connect, what the Company Number is, and where they fit in the picture.

Phase 2: Ramp (Days 31-60) — Learn the Job

Real work begins, but with a ramp scorecard — a modified A-Player Score with lower targets that increase weekly. The new hire produces output, but expectations are graduated: Week 5 target might be 50% of the full A-Player Score, Week 8 at 75%.

A peer mentor is available for real-time questions. The captain provides daily feedback (the Daily Feedback Rule — 10 minutes per day, specific, behavior-focused). This daily feedback cadence is the #1 predictor of successful ramping. Companies that give daily feedback during Phase 2 ramp new hires in 55 days on average. Companies that give weekly feedback take 120 days.

Phase 3: Full Speed (Days 61-90) — Own the Role

Full A-Player Score activated. Training wheels off. Weekly feedback rhythm (no longer daily). Independent execution. The new hire is expected to perform at the standard — and knows exactly what that standard is because the scorecard has been visible since Day 31.

Day 90: formal review. On track to be an A-player, or not? This is a binary decision — not a rating, not a scale, not a "shows promise." Either they're performing at or near the standard, or they're not. If not, you need to decide now — not at month 6 — whether additional coaching will close the gap or whether the fit is wrong.

The Day 1 Experience

Desk set up. Laptop ready and configured. Welcome kit on the desk (Principle #17 — branded gear, handwritten note from the captain, printed 90-day plan). Captain meets them at the door. Peer mentor introduces themselves. Company orientation in the morning. Lunch with the team (captain organizes this). End-of-day check-in with the captain: "How was your first day? What questions do you have?"

The new hire should leave Day 1 thinking: "This company was waiting for me. They prepared for my arrival. They're glad I'm here." That emotional imprint carries through the first 90 days and beyond.

The Daily Feedback Rule (Phase 2)

10 minutes per day. Between the captain and the new hire. Specific. Behavior-focused. "This call went well — your discovery questions were strong. On the next call, try pausing after the pricing question instead of jumping to the discount. Let them sit with it."

Not a performance review. Not a formal meeting. A 10-minute coaching conversation. Daily. For 30 days.

The research is clear: the frequency of feedback during the ramp period is the strongest predictor of long-term success. Daily feedback builds skills faster, catches mistakes earlier, and creates a relationship between the captain and the new hire that becomes the foundation of trust.

The Three Formal Checkpoints

Day 30: "How's it going? What's confusing? What do you need?" This is a listening conversation. The new hire should do 80% of the talking.

Day 60: Progress against the ramp scorecard. On track, behind, or at risk? If behind: what specifically is the gap, and what's the plan to close it?

Day 90: Full performance review. A-player trajectory — yes or no. If yes: celebrate and transition to the standard operating rhythm. If no: make the decision now. An additional 30-day extension with specific milestones if the gap is closable. Separation if it's not.

Quick-Start Checklist

- ✓ ☐ Read the full white paper
- ✓ ☐ Identify the most relevant action items for your stage
- ✓ ☐ Pick the single most impactful first move and implement it this week
- ✓ ☐ Review progress in your next leadership meeting

This is Growth Factor #39 of 50. Part IV: The Machine ($25M-$50M).

Get the book: The 50 Factor by Scott Scully

The Day 1 Experience

Desk set up. Laptop ready and configured. Welcome kit on the desk — branded gear, handwritten note from the captain, printed 90-day plan. Captain meets them at the door. Peer mentor introduces themselves. Company orientation in the morning. Lunch with the team. End-of-day check-in with the captain.

The new hire should leave Day 1 thinking: "This company was waiting for me. They prepared for my arrival. They're glad I'm here." That emotional imprint shapes the next 90 days.

The Daily Feedback Rule (Phase 2)

10 minutes per day between the captain and the new hire. Specific. Behavior-focused. "This call went well — your discovery questions were strong. On the next call, try pausing after the pricing question instead of jumping to the discount."

Not weekly — daily. The difference between daily and weekly feedback during ramp is the difference between a 55-day ramp and a 120-day ramp. Daily feedback builds skills faster, catches mistakes earlier, and creates trust between captain and new hire.

The Three Checkpoints

Day 30: "How's it going? What's confusing? What do you need?" Listening conversation. New hire talks 80%.

Day 60: Progress against the ramp scorecard. On track, behind, or at risk? If behind: specific gap identified, specific plan to close it.

Day 90: Full performance review. A-player trajectory — yes or no. If yes, celebrate and transition to steady state. If no, decide now. An additional 30-day extension with milestones if the gap is closable. Separation if it's not.

Warning Signs Your Onboarding Is Failing

- • New hires take 4+ months to become fully productive.
- • First-year turnover exceeds 30%.
- • Exit interviews cite "never felt like I knew what I was doing."
- • Day 1 involves a laptop that isn't set up and a manager in meetings all day.
- • There's no formal checkpoint until the annual review.

The Ramp Scorecard

The ramp scorecard is a modified A-Player Score with graduated targets. In Phase 2 (Days 31-60), the new hire isn't expected to perform at the full standard — but they are expected to perform at a ramp standard that increases weekly:

- • Week 5: 50% of full A-Player Score target
- • Week 6: 60%
- • Week 7: 70%
- • Week 8: 80%

By Day 60 (Week 8), the new hire should be at 80% of the full standard. By Day 90, they should be at or near 100%. The ramp scorecard makes progress visible and coachable — the captain can see exactly where the new hire is tracking and where the gaps are.

The ramp scorecard also protects the new hire. Without it, the new hire either feels no pressure (because there's no standard) or feels overwhelming pressure (because the full A-Player Score is too high for someone in their first month). The graduated ramp gives them a target that's challenging but achievable — and the daily feedback from the captain ensures they never drift too far from it.

The Peer Mentor

In addition to the captain (who coaches performance), assign a peer mentor — someone in the same role who's been there 6-12 months. The peer mentor answers the questions the new hire is embarrassed to ask the captain: "How does this system actually work?" "What does the manager really care about?" "What are the unwritten rules?"

The peer mentor isn't formally trained. They're selected for two things: competence (they know the role well enough to guide someone) and approachability (the new hire will feel comfortable asking them anything). A 15-minute daily check-in between peer mentor and new hire during Phase 2 supplements the captain's coaching with ground-level practical guidance.

The Cost of Bad Onboarding

First-year turnover for new hires with no structured onboarding: 35-45%. First-year turnover with a structured 90-day program: 15-20%. For a company hiring 20 people per year at an average replacement cost of $15,000 per person, that gap is 4-6 departures per year avoided = $60,000-$90,000 saved.

But the real cost isn't the departures — it's the quality of the people who stay despite bad onboarding. A new hire who survives a chaotic first 90 days has learned to operate in chaos. They've learned workarounds instead of systems. They've absorbed bad habits from whoever happened to be near their desk. They're producing at 70% of what they could produce with proper onboarding — and they may never close the gap because the foundation was wrong.

Quick-Start Checklist

- ✓ ☐ Design the 90-day plan for your most common role (three phases, with weekly milestones)
- ✓ ☐ Build the ramp scorecard with graduated weekly targets
- ✓ ☐ Fix Day 1: desk ready, laptop configured, welcome kit, captain at the door
- ✓ ☐ Assign peer mentors for every new hire (6-12 months tenure, approachable)
- ✓ ☐ Train captains on the daily feedback rule (10 min/day during Phase 2)

- ✓ ☐ Institute the three formal checkpoints: Day 30, Day 60, Day 90
- ✓ ☐ Day 90 decision: A-player trajectory — yes or no. Decide now, not at month 6.
- ✓ ☐ Track: time to productivity, ramp scorecard progression, 90-day assessment outcomes, first-year retention

---

Implementation Tools

Ready-to-use templates for this Growth Factor

XLSX **90-Day Onboarding Plan Template**
Columns: Week, Phase, Activities, Owner, Ramp Score Target, Actual Score, +1 more

XLSX **Ramp Scorecard Template**
Columns: Dimension, Weight, Interviewer 1, Interviewer 2, Interviewer 3, Avg, +1 more

PDF **Day 1 Readiness Checklist**
Desk, laptop, welcome kit, captain prep

PDF **Peer Mentor Selection Guide**
Criteria and 15-minute daily check-in format

PDF **30/60/90-Day Review Templates**
Conversation guides for each checkpoint

The 90-day program creates a data trail that improves hiring over time. When you track ramp scorecard progression for every new hire, patterns emerge: which interview scores predict fast ramp? Which backgrounds correlate with success? Which captain behaviors accelerate development? After 20-30 hires through the structured program, you have enough data to refine your hiring scorecard (Principle #33), improve your interview questions, and sharpen your candidate selection. The 90-day program isn't just onboarding — it's a feedback loop that makes every future hire better.

The Data That Proves It

Companies that implement a structured 90-day program consistently see two results: ramp time drops from 110+ days to 55-65 days, and first-year turnover drops from 35-45% to 15-20%.

The ramp improvement alone is worth the investment. If your company hires 20 people per year and the average ramp drops from 110 days to 60 days — that's 50 days of additional productivity per hire × 20 hires = 1,000 days of recovered productivity per year. At $200-$400/day in value per productive employee, that's $200K-$400K in annual value from the ramp improvement alone.

The retention improvement compounds: every avoided departure saves $15K-$25K in recruiting, onboarding, and ramp costs for the replacement. At 20 hires per year, reducing first-year turnover from 40% to 20% prevents 4 departures = $60K-$100K saved annually. Combined with the ramp improvement, the 90-day program produces $260K-$500K in annual value — from a system that costs essentially nothing to operate once built.

The 90-day program is the bridge between recruiting (Principle #33) and performance (Principle #6). Recruiting gets people in the door. The 90-day program determines whether they stay, thrive, and become the A-players who build your company for years to come.