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INSIGHT

30-60-90 Day Plan at Interview



Introduction

More and more FM and estates interviewers now say the same thing at the end of the first round: 'Come back and tell us what you would do in your first ninety days.' Some candidates treat it as a gift. Others treat it as a trap. Both are right.

Done well, a 30-60-90 day plan is the single best way to turn a good interview into an offer. It shows you can think about their building, their people and their risks rather than talking about your own past. Done badly, it makes you look like someone who arrives with a template and a plan to fix everything in week one.

The difference is rarely effort. It is judgement. Hiring managers are not marking you on how ambitious the slide looks. They are asking a quieter question: if we put this person in charge on Monday, will they be safe, sensible and useful by the end of the quarter?

This guide takes you through what the plan is really testing, how to research it when you know very little, how to structure each thirty-day block for an FM or estates role, how to present it in ten minutes, and the traps that cost capable people the job. Use it whether you are asked for a plan in advance or put on the spot.

What the interviewer is really testing

The plan itself is almost beside the point. Nobody expects you to know the detail of a site you have never managed. What they are testing is how you think when information is incomplete, which is exactly the situation you will be in on your first morning.

Behind the request sit four questions. Do you understand what matters most in this role? Do you sequence sensibly, or do you try to do everything at once? Are you aware of the limits of what you know? And do you talk like a leader or like a contractor looking for tasks?

A useful test: imagine the panel scoring you afterwards on a single line, 'Would I be comfortable leaving this person alone with the building?' Everything in the plan should help them answer yes. Ambition helps only when it sits on top of obvious care.

- Priorities: do you put safety, compliance and people ahead of cosmetic wins?
- Sequence: do you listen before you change anything?
- Humility: do you name what you do not yet know?
- Commercial sense: do you connect your actions to cost, risk or service?
- Communication: can you explain a plan clearly to a non-specialist panel?

Read the request as a test of judgement. If your plan answers those five points, it will land, even if the individual actions are modest.

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Do the homework before you draft anything

A plan written from a job advert is generic. A plan written from evidence is persuasive. Spend your preparation time collecting facts, not decorating slides.

Start with what you can see. Read the job description for the verbs, because 'transform', 'embed' and 'stabilise' signal very different starting points. Look at the organisation's published reports, planning applications, sustainability statements and press for hints about growth, consolidation or cost pressure. Check whether the role is new, a replacement or an interim cover, because each changes what the first thirty days must achieve.

Then use the interview itself. The earlier rounds are your research. Note the words the panel repeats, the problems they hint at and the people they mention. If three different interviewers refer to 'the contractor situation', that belongs in your plan.

Do not worry if the answers are thin. A plan that says 'I have assumed the compliance records are in reasonable order, and I will confirm that in week one' is stronger than one that pretends to certainty.

- Why is the role open, and what happened to the last holder?
- Which sites, contracts and statutory regimes does it cover?
- Who will you report to, and who are your key stakeholders?
- What does the team look like, and what is its mood?
- What would the hiring manager call a good first year?

If you can ask those questions before presenting, do. If you cannot, build your assumptions into the plan and label them clearly as assumptions.

Choose a simple shape: listen, prove, lead

The classic structure works because it matches how trust is earned. In the first block you learn. In the second you deliver something visible. In the third you set direction. Resist the urge to invent a cleverer framework. Panels have seen the clever ones.

Give each block a one-line purpose that you can say aloud. For example: 'Days one to thirty, understand and stabilise. Days thirty-one to sixty, fix the first thing that matters. Days sixty-one to ninety, agree where we go next.' If the panel remembers only those three sentences, you have still done your job.

Within each block, limit yourself to three or four actions. A plan with fifteen bullets in each column reads as anxiety. Three well-chosen actions with a clear outcome read as control.

A quick decision test for any action you are tempted to add: would a sensible new leader do this before they understand the place? If the answer is no, move it to the next block or drop it.

- Every action should name what you will do, with whom, and what the result looks like.
- Prefer verbs like review, meet, confirm, agree and report over verbs like fix, overhaul and transform in the first month.
- Put a measure or a decision point at the end of each block.
- Mark where you will check in with your line manager.

The structure is a scaffold, not a promise. Say so out loud, and you will sound more senior than the person who defends every date.

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Days one to thirty: listen, map and make things safe

The first month is about understanding the estate and the people, and making sure nothing dangerous is hiding in plain sight. This is where FM candidates either sound credible or sound like consultants.

Start with compliance. You cannot know a site is safe until you have seen the evidence. Say that you will review the statutory compliance position across the usual areas, such as fire, water hygiene, gas, electrical, lifts and asbestos, and confirm who holds each duty and where the records sit. This is not about doubting your predecessor. It is about knowing what you now own.

Then people. Commit to meeting your direct reports one to one, walking the sites with the people who run them, and speaking to the stakeholders who use the service. Ask what is working, what is not and what they would change first.

If the role covers outsourced services, add one line on the contractors. Say you will meet the account leads, read the contracts and the service levels, and see how performance is reported today. That one sentence shows you understand that in most FM environments you manage through suppliers as much as through your own team.

- Review the compliance picture and the open actions, and agree with your manager which are urgent.
- Meet each direct report and the key contractors, and note what you hear before you form a view.
- Walk every site, including plant rooms and out-of-hours areas.
- Understand the budget: committed spend, forecast, and where the pressure is.
- Write a short findings note for your manager at day thirty.

Say plainly that you will not announce changes in this period unless something is unsafe. Panels relax when they hear that.

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Days thirty-one to sixty: fix one thing that matters and show your hand

By now you have a view. The second block is where you turn it into one visible improvement, and the word is one. Choose a problem that is important to the people who hired you, within your control and capable of showing progress in a month.

Good candidates in this block do three things. They pick the issue using evidence from the first month. They agree it with their manager so it is a shared priority rather than a private project. And they define what 'better' looks like before they start.

For FM and estates roles, the right first fix is often unglamorous. It might be a contractor performance meeting that has lost its edge, a planned maintenance backlog with no owner, a helpdesk that nobody trusts or a reporting pack that tells the board nothing useful. The point is not the topic. It is that you chose well and moved quickly without breaking anything.

If the panel asks what you would do if the issue turned out to be bigger than expected, answer with a sequence: contain it, tell your manager, agree the plan, then fix it. Leaders who escalate early and calmly are the ones panels trust.

- Choose the issue with your manager, not for them.
- State the measure up front: fewer overdue tasks, faster response, cleaner audit result.
- Involve the team in the fix so it survives your first holiday.
- Report progress honestly, including what has not worked.

A modest, completed improvement beats a grand programme that has only just started. It is also the best evidence you can give the panel of how you will behave in the job.

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Days sixty-one to ninety: set direction and make commitments

The last block is where you move from reacting to leading. You now know enough to propose a direction, and you should present it as a proposal, not a decree.

Talk about three outputs. First, a priorities plan for the next year, built from what you found and agreed with your manager. Second, a view of the team: skills, gaps, succession and where you may need to recruit or develop. Third, an agreed set of measures that the leadership team will use to judge the function.

This is also the point to show you can think beyond your own desk. Mention how you will build relationships with finance, HR, IT, procurement and the business units you serve. Facilities leaders succeed through other departments, and a plan that never leaves the FM office suggests you do not know that.

Be careful with the word 'strategy' here. Many FM leaders are hired by people who want fewer surprises and clearer reporting before they want a grand vision. Ask yourself whether your third block gives them that first.

- Present a draft twelve-month plan for sign-off, not a finished strategy.
- Agree the five or six measures that will define success.
- Set out the development needs of the team and how you will address them.
- Review supplier arrangements and identify where renewal, retender or renegotiation is due.
- Schedule a ninety-day review with your manager and agree what comes next.

End the block with a conversation, not a reveal. The more your plan invites input, the more it sounds like a leader and the less it sounds like a pitch.

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Format and delivery: one page, ten minutes, a conversation

Keep it short. One page is ideal, with the three blocks as columns or rows and a short header stating your assumptions. If you are asked to present, ten minutes is plenty. Bring a printed copy for each panel member so they can write on it, which they will.

Open with context rather than the plan. Spend your first minute saying what you understand about the organisation and the role, and what you do not yet know. That tells the panel you have listened. Then walk through each block in turn, naming the purpose, the main actions and the outcome.

Finish by asking where you have got it wrong. This is the most important line in the presentation. You are inviting the panel to correct you, and every correction is information about their real priorities.

If you are asked to send the plan in advance, send the one-page version and keep the detail in your head for the conversation. A long document sent ahead is rarely read properly, and it invites the panel to challenge detail you could have explained better in person.

- Plain words, no jargon the panel did not use themselves.
- No more than a page, and no dense slides read aloud.
- Speak to outcomes: what will be different, not what you will do.
- Leave time for discussion, at least as long as the presentation.
- Send a clean copy afterwards with the changes the discussion suggested.

Traps that cost capable people the job

Most failed plans fail the same ways. They are rarely stupid. They are usually confident in the wrong places.

The first trap is arrival-day heroics: promising to restructure the team, retender the contracts and cut costs in ninety days. Experienced hiring managers know that this is either naive or reckless. The second is the template plan, with the same bullets for a school estate and a financial services headquarters. The third is ignoring the person you report to. A plan with no check-ins suggests you work alone.

Two more deserve a mention. Internal candidates often assume they know the answer and skip the listening phase, which can read as arrogance or an unwillingness to change. External candidates sometimes criticise the current state of the estate before they have seen it, which is a quick way to alienate the panel.

- Do not promise savings or headcount changes you cannot yet evidence.
- Do not criticise predecessors or the current team.
- Do not skip safety and compliance because they feel basic.
- Do not present a plan you could not defend under questioning.
- Do not forget to explain how you will know it is working.

If a panel member challenges you, treat it as a gift. Agree what is fair, adjust the plan in front of them and move on. That is exactly what you will do in the job.

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Rehearse it, then follow it up

Read the plan aloud at least twice before the interview. Time yourself. Then explain it to someone outside FM and ask which part they did not follow. If a friend cannot repeat your three block purposes, a panel will not either.

Prepare for the five questions that nearly always follow. Why those priorities? What would change your plan? What if the budget is cut? What if the team resists? What would you do in the first week if you found a serious compliance gap? Have an honest, short answer to each.

After the interview, send a brief thank-you note with your revised plan attached and one sentence on what you took from the discussion. It shows you listen and it keeps your name in front of the decision-maker while they compare candidates. If you are offered the role, bring the plan to your first conversation with your new manager. It is already half the agenda.

Finally, keep a record of the questions you were asked. Panels repeat their worries across candidates, and if you are not successful this time, the pattern will tell you what the next employer is likely to probe. Many candidates improve markedly between a first and second plan simply because they paid attention to what the room cared about.

Before you present your 30-60-90 day plan

- [ ] Collect facts from the advert, the organisation and every interview round.
- [ ] List your assumptions on the page and label them as assumptions.
- [ ] Give each thirty-day block a one-line purpose you can say aloud.
- [ ] Limit each block to three or four actions with a clear outcome.
- [ ] Put safety, compliance and people ahead of cosmetic wins in the first month.
- [ ] Choose one visible improvement for days thirty-one to sixty.
- [ ] Frame the final block as a proposal your manager can shape.
- [ ] Keep the plan to one page and bring printed copies.
- [ ] Rehearse aloud and time yourself to ten minutes.
- [ ] Prepare honest answers to the budget, resistance and compliance questions, then send a revised copy within a day.

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Next steps

A 30-60-90 day plan is not a document you are judged on. It is a conversation you are using to show how you think. Keep it modest, evidence-led and open to challenge, and you will usually come across as more senior than the candidate with the more ambitious slide.

Your next step: write your three block purposes in one sentence each, then test them on someone who works outside FM. Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management recruitment consultancy.

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