

The Best Advice For First-Time CHROs

At the first in-person meeting of the 2025 class of the Modern Future CHRO Academy, a nine-month program, current and former CHROs shared their best advice with attendees for navigating the first year in the top job. The panel included both former CHROs who helped coach academy participants and M1 members attending the March Chicago meeting hosted by BMO.

Lilicia Bailey

PhD, Senior EVP & Chief People Officer
CommonSpirit Health



"Stay curious. It's going to help you control your emotions at times when you're like 'I cannot believe this is going on.' But if you approach it with curiosity, you'll be thinking how you add value to the business, and you'll approach the way you're thinking and the way you orchestrate the work in a different manner."

Kane Calamari

SVP, CHRO & President – Ace Foundation
Ace Hardware



"If you're going to be the CHRO, you better have the courage to walk in and tell your CEO—him or her—what they need to hear. If you can't do that, do something else. And I really mean that, because somebody's got to coach them at times. That is the hardest part—sometimes you go in there, you've got to duck. You've got to be careful. But they need to hear from you."

Mirian Graddick-Weir

former CHRO
AT&T and Merck



"No matter how approachable you are, I've found that the higher up you go—especially when you get into the CHRO role—people tell you more of what you want to hear versus what you really need to hear. My advice is to have a personal board of directors with people outside the company, inside the company, and in your own organization. [Find] people who are truth tellers; who can be ruthlessly honest about what you're doing well and not doing so well."

Jennifer Manchester

CHRO
Fiserv



"Your CEO should be your right-hand person—and vice versa. You need to be in sync with your CEO, because if you're not, it's never going to work. Yes, you have to give them feedback. But if you don't believe in the core values and what they're trying to do for the company, then you can't serve the company well."

Mike Rude

Operating Partner, Cressey & Company and former CHRO Stryker, Catamaran, and Option Care Health



"One of the things I underestimated in my first CHRO job was the unique dynamic that you have in managing your relationship with the CEO, your peers on the executive team, and the board. You have to be Switzerland, in some respects. You have to have trust and build credibility with your CEO. But you can't be viewed by your peers on the executive team as a mouthpiece for the CEO. I found that being very open in a discussion with those people about that—and the role I need to play with my peers, with my CEO and the board—helped manage those relationships."