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The First **30 Days** as a Fractional HR Leader

A pragmatic cadence for founders and operators — listen,
build the framework, align the room, ship the first quick win.
All inside one month.

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Most fractional HR engagements stall before they deliver.

The standard cadence — listen for 30, diagnose for 30, plan for 30 — is a holdover from enterprise consulting. It made sense at Apple. It made sense at Walmart. It doesn't make sense at the 10–250 person business that hires a fractional HR leader because they have a problem today.

The CEO of a growing business is already worried about something. A regrettable resignation. An ER complaint sitting in their inbox. A comp inequity that's about to leak. A hiring plan that hasn't moved in two months. Telling them you'll have recommendations in 90 days is telling them you're the wrong hire.

The 30-day approach works because it compresses listening, framing, alignment, and first delivery into a single month — **without skipping the steps**. The discipline is in the sequencing: listen first, frame the strategy to business priorities, get the leadership team aligned, then ship the first quick win. Done in that order, four weeks is enough.

"At 250 people, founders aren't waiting 90 days for a diagnostic. They're waiting for the next ER complaint. Move faster — but in the right sequence."

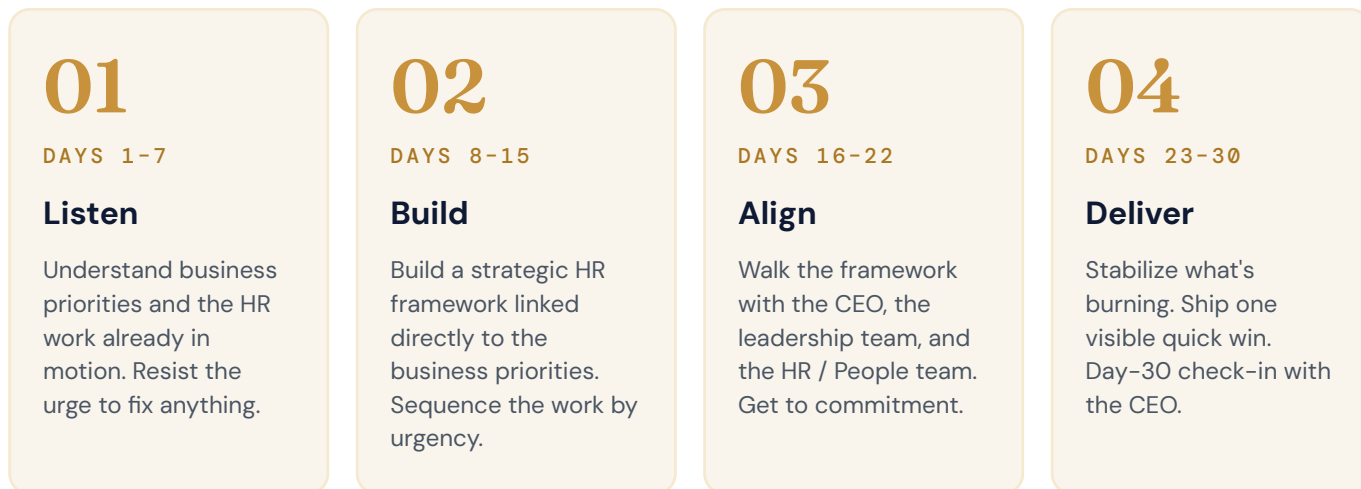
This playbook lays out the four phases, the work products that come out of each, and the worked example of what the strategic HR framework actually looks like at the end of week two. It's the playbook I use myself.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Founders and CEOs of businesses with 10–250 employees who are bringing in fractional HR leadership for the first time — or evaluating whether to. If you're hiring an in-house HR Director, this still works as a 30-day plan for them.

Four phases. One month. In sequence.

Each phase has a clear output the CEO can see and respond to. No phase is skipped. No phase runs long.



Why this sequence works

Listen before you frame. You can't build a strategy linked to business priorities until you know what those priorities actually are — in the CEO's words, not your assumptions. A week of listening earns the credibility to do the next three phases fast.

Frame before you align. Walking the leadership team through a half-formed framework wastes everyone's time. The framework needs to be tight enough to push back on before the alignment conversation works.

Align before you deliver. Quick wins that aren't aligned to priorities look like busy work. Quick wins that are aligned become proof points — they earn the next 90 days.

"Listen, build, align, deliver — in that order. Doing them out of order is how 90-day engagements turn into 9-month engagements with nothing to show."

Listen. Resist the urge to fix anything.

Week one is for understanding, not improving. You're earning the right to be heard in week three.

WHO YOU TALK TO

- **CEO / Founder** — 60 min, strategic conversation
- **Leadership team** — 30 min each, individually
- **Current HR holder** — 60 min working session (office manager, coordinator, recruiter — whoever has held the function)
- **5-8 employees** — short skip-level conversations across levels and functions

WHAT YOU READ

- Business plan, OKRs, board materials
- Employee handbook (or note the absence)
- Most recent engagement survey or pulse
- Current org chart and compensation data
- Any open ER files, performance issues, or terminations in progress
- Last three CEO update notes to the team

WHAT YOU WRITE DOWN

- Top 5 business priorities in the CEO's words
- Active HR work already in motion
- 3-5 people-risk items that need stabilization
- Quick-win opportunities you've spotted
- Open questions you still need answers to

DON'T YET

Make recommendations. Fix things. Write policies. Hire anyone. Tell the CEO what you think is wrong. Build a deck. Promise an output by Friday.

The biggest mistake in Phase 1

Confusing listening with passive note-taking. Listening means asking sharp follow-up questions. "When you say the team is stretched, what does stretched mean — hours, capability, or motivation?" The quality of the framework you build in week two is determined by the quality of the questions you ask in week one.

Build a strategic HR framework linked to business priorities.

The output is a single page the CEO is happy to walk into a board meeting with. It is not a 40-page HR roadmap.

The work of Phase 2 is translation: from "here's what I heard the CEO say matters" into "here's the people strategy that makes those priorities deliverable." Done well, the framework looks deceptively simple — a vision statement, three pillars, named initiatives under each, and the metrics that prove it's working.

Done poorly, it looks like a generic HR plan that could have been written without ever meeting the CEO. The test is whether someone reading the framework can identify which business this was built for by week three.

The three-pillar structure

Almost every strategic HR framework I've built — at Starbucks, at Walmart, at the multi-site healthcare network in the example on the next page — uses some version of this three-pillar structure:

01 · TALENT

- How we build, retain, and grow capability across the business
- Career models, succession, hiring practices, performance discipline

02 · CULTURE & CARE

- How people feel about working here — and what we do about it
- Engagement, recognition, inclusion, employee experience

03 · ENABLEMENT

- How HR work gets done at scale — infrastructure, systems, ways of working
- Org design, HRIS, comp infrastructure, policy & governance

The pillars are stable across most engagements; what changes is what sits underneath them. The next page shows the framework I built for a real engagement — a Canadian multi-site healthcare network — anonymized.

Strategic People & Culture Framework — FY26

ENGAGEMENT A Canadian multi-site healthcare network · 60+ clinics · 1,500+ team members · CA / US footprint

VISION & STRATEGIC FOCUS

Become Canada's leading network of patient-centered clinics — built on a strong, engaged, well-led team that delivers exceptional care at every site.

01

PILLAR · TALENT

Unlock the full potential of every team member

Provide the development, resources and space to build clinical and operational capability across the network.

FY26 KEY INITIATIVES

- Clinical career model — defined progression for each role family
- Manager development program — every operations lead trained in coaching cadence
- Internal mobility playbook — fill 70% of leadership roles internally
- Quarterly performance & development conversations on a consistent cadence
- Key talent & succession review for top 30 roles

SUCCESS METRICS

70% internal fill on leadership roles · 2-deep bench at every key role · -10pp regrettable turnover

02

PILLAR · CULTURE & CARE

Cultivate an inclusive culture where every team member feels seen and valued

Listen actively, act intentionally, and reinforce belonging across the network.

FY26 KEY INITIATIVES

- Annual engagement survey + clinic-level action plans owned by managers
- Listening sessions, skip-levels, and pulse surveys on a quarterly cadence
- Recognition program tied to patient and team outcomes
- Inclusive hiring practices + leader DISC certification
- Modern, hybrid-friendly support office for clinic admin teams

SUCCESS METRICS

+10pp engagement YoY · Sustained 80+ favorability on culture items · Action plans live at 90% of clinics

03

PILLAR · ENABLEMENT

Modernize how work gets done at scale

Eliminate work that doesn't matter so the team has capacity for what does.

FY26 KEY INITIATIVES

- Org design refresh — spans, layers, role clarity across head office and clinics
- HRIS implementation (Deel) for unified team data across CA / US
- Compensation review and pay banding refresh — clinical and support roles
- Policy & handbook overhaul — CA + provincial compliance, audit-ready
- ER & investigation framework rolled out to every people leader

SUCCESS METRICS

Average span 5-7 / no teams of <3 · Audit-ready handbook within 6 months · HRIS live by Q3

Business priority linkage: Each pillar maps to one or more of the CEO's stated business priorities — patient experience, multi-site operating discipline, network expansion, margin management, and de-risking the regulatory profile. Initiatives without a clear business-priority link are deprioritized.

Get the CEO and leadership team to commit — not just nod.

The framework is only useful if it survives contact with the leadership team. Alignment week is where that test happens.

1

CEO 1:1 · 60 minutes

Walk the framework end to end. Invite pushback. The question to anchor on: "Does this match what you're trying to build, in the order you'd build it?" If the answer is anything other than a clear yes — that's the conversation. Don't move to the leadership review until the CEO is bought in.

2

Leadership team review · 60–90 minutes

Working meeting, not a presentation. Anchor on the business priorities you wrote down in Phase 1. Confirm the sequencing — what's in front, what waits. Name owners for each initiative. Surface disagreement; resolve it now, not in execution.

3

HR / People team alignment · 60 minutes

Bring whoever holds the function inside. Make it explicit who owns what going forward — what you'll lead, what they'll lead, where you'll work together. The goal is partnership, not a hostile takeover.

The output of Phase 3

A one-page framework the CEO is happy to share at the next board meeting, plus a 30-60-90-day work plan with named owners and dates. The CEO should be able to answer "what's your fractional HR leader working on?" in one sentence.

WATCH OUT

If the alignment conversation surfaces a structural disagreement — about the company's direction, an underperforming leader, a quiet acquisition plan — pause the framework. Resolve the upstream issue first. Building an HR strategy on top of an unresolved business question wastes everyone's month.

Stabilize what's burning. Ship the first quick win.

By week four you've earned the credibility to move. Use it on the two things that matter most.

1

Stabilize what's burning

If there's an active ER file, a comp inequity that's about to leak, a manager making bad calls, or a compliance gap on a tight clock — that's day-23 work. Don't wait for a perfect process. Move with judgment. The CEO hired senior HR for exactly this kind of moment.

2

Ship one visible quick win

Pick a single thing that signals the function is moving — a comp benchmark for a contentious role, a clear handbook update, a hiring scorecard the team can actually use, a re-launched onboarding flow. Done by day 30. Visible to the team. Useful, not just visible.

The Day-30 check-in

End the month with a single one-page review with the CEO. Three sections:

- **What was committed** — the framework, the priorities, the 30-60-90 plan
- **What was delivered** — stabilization steps taken, first quick win shipped, named risks closed
- **What's next** — the top 3 priorities for days 31-60, with owners and dates

If you've done the work in the right sequence, this conversation is short and easy. The CEO already knows what you've been doing. The page is a summary, not a surprise.

"Quick wins that are visible but not valuable are worse than no quick win at all. They tell the team you're optimizing for being seen instead of being useful."

Common traps & the 30-day checklist.

COMMON TRAPS

- ✗ Trying to fix things in week one — loses trust before you've earned it
- ✗ Building a generic HR roadmap that isn't anchored to business priorities
- ✗ Spending Phase 3 on slide design instead of the alignment conversation
- ✗ Quick wins that are visible but not valuable (busy work)
- ✗ Hiring before stabilizing — compounds the problem you were brought in to solve
- ✗ Promising day-90 outcomes by day 30
- ✗ Letting the CEO defer the framework conversation past day 22

THE 30-DAY CHECKLIST

DAYS 1-7 · LISTEN

- CEO 60-min interview complete
- Leadership team 1:1s done
- Current HR holder working session
- 5-8 skip-level conversations
- Business plan / OKRs / handbook read
- Top 5 business priorities written down

DAYS 8-15 · BUILD

- Three-pillar framework drafted
- Initiatives sequenced by urgency
- 30-60-90 work plan drafted
- Success metrics identified per pillar

DAYS 16-22 · ALIGN

- CEO 1:1 — framework walked, bought in
- Leadership team review — owners named
- HR / People team alignment
- 1-pager ready for the board

DAYS 23-30 · DELIVER

- Stabilization steps underway
- First quick win shipped
- Day-30 CEO check-in delivered
- Days 31-60 priorities confirmed

ABOUT

Hi, I'm Sal.

I've led People & Culture at Walmart, Apple, Starbucks, Amazon, LCBO, Loblaws, and several nationwide multi-site operators — the common thread is scale, complexity, and people risk. The most rewarding work has been at the intersection of HR and operations: leading an enterprise-wide compensation rollout, driving engagement turnarounds that earned the Sam Walton Award two consecutive years, and supporting Amazon Logistics Canada through 27.7M-package hypergrowth.

I specialize in building HR infrastructure from zero, transforming engagement, mitigating ER & LR risk, and designing the organizational structures that let growing businesses scale without losing control. Now I deploy that capability on a retained, fractional basis for the businesses that need senior judgment without the full-time overhead.

Credentials: MBA (Queen's), BBA & HR Mgmt (Davenport), Advanced Diploma in HR Management (St. Clair College), CHRL. Certified in DiSC, LSI, Strategic Workforce Planning (HCI), Workplace Investigations (Bernardi HR Law), and Culture Shaping (Senn Delaney).

20+ YEARS OF PEOPLE & CULTURE LEADERSHIP
ACROSS

Walmart · Apple · Starbucks · Amazon · LCBO · Loblaws
· plus several nationwide multi-site operators in
healthcare and global digital retail

LET'S TALK

30 minutes is usually enough to know if I can help.

If you're a CEO weighing whether to bring in fractional HR — or you've just hired one and want a second opinion on the first 30 days — book a free intro call.

[Book a 30-min call →](#)

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