

THE WAKE-UP CALL



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# The First 90 Days in a Failing Company: A Step-by-Step Action Plan

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**Situation:** You've just been hired to lead a struggling company. Revenues are down, costs are up, employees are demoralized, and customers are leaving. Everyone is looking at you for a solution. You don't have time for PowerPoint strategies or six-month transformation plans. You have **90 days**—at best—to prove you can stop the bleeding.

I've been in this situation **more times than I can count**. As an interim manager, my job has always been to land in a crisis, cut through the noise, and **deliver results fast**. In those first critical 90 days, you need to focus on **five things**—or you'll fail.

### 1. Control the Cash Like Your Life Depends on It (Because It Does)

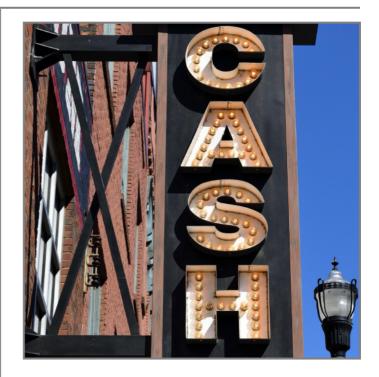
Forget strategy. If you run out of cash, the game is over.

- **Daily cash reports**—No more monthly updates. If you don't have a grip on today's liquidity, you're flying blind.
- Slow down outflows, speed up inflows— Renegotiate payment terms, push invoices, and kill unnecessary spending.
- **Zero-based budgeting**—Forget last year's budget. Start at zero and justify every euro you spend.

Especially the **ZERO-BASED Budgeting** is important, because in most cases, in struggling companies, the budget has been cut over a long period of time and there is a great need for essential repairs and other expenditures.

#### Do not fall for it in the first 90 days!

There will be time to fix these issues later on. First, it is time to s**top the bleeding**, while making sure the "patient" survives.



# 2. Fix What's Broken in the Core Business—Fast

Most failing companies don't need a reinvention; they need **operational sanity**. Look at:

- **Delivery reliability**—If customers can't trust you to deliver, they'll leave.
- **Pricing discipline**—Are you selling unprofitably? Stop it.

• **Production and logistics bottlenecks**—You don't need consultants, just a whiteboard and a stopwatch.



### 3. Find the 10 People Who Can Actually Execute

Here's the brutal truth: **Most teams in crisis are paralyzed.** They've seen five CEOs come and go. They've heard "transformation" before. They're skeptical—and they should be.

- Find the doers, not the talkers—Who in the company is still making things happen despite the chaos?
- Give them authority—No committees. No endless meetings. Just clear missions.
- Cut the noise—If someone is resisting necessary change, you don't have time to convert them.

## 4. Communicate Like a Wartime CEO

In a crisis, **silence is death**. People assume the worst when they don't hear from leadership.

- Forget corporate BS—Be blunt. Say, "We're in trouble, but here's what we're doing."
- **Overcommunicate**—Daily standups, weekly updates, open-door policies.
- Address fear head-on—People don't fear layoffs; they fear uncertainty. Remove it.

### 5. Create a Win in the First 30 Days

The first 90 days of a turnaround aren't about **big visions**; they're about **momentum**. All Stakeholders, especially employees and customers need proof that things are changing **now**.

- Start with one customer. Find one problem you can solve in a month—Fix a supply chain issue, close a big deal, cut an obvious inefficiency.
- Celebrate it visibly—Show the team: "We are moving in the right direction."

### Final Thought: Speed Is Your Biggest Weapon

Turnaround success isn't about **perfect strate-gy**; it's about **decisive action**. The first 90 days determine if a company starts recovering or enters a death spiral. I've seen both outcomes—and trust me, you want to be on the winning side.

What's your biggest takeaway from leading in crisis? Contact me!

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