DisruptedCMO

180

THE CMO180 Onboarding Model

A Guide Your First 180 Days

GUIDE

The "First 90 Days" Onboarding Problem

Most of the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) onboarding advice out there sounds more or less the same: meet the stakeholders, assess the team, review the data, build a plan. These are of course necessary onboarding steps, but they don't constitute a truly useful framework for navigating the complexity of an executive leadership transition.

They treat CMO onboarding as a functional ramp-up exercise, a checklist to work through, rather than what it actually is: a real-time diagnostic of a complex adaptive system that you need to understand before you can lead it.

The other problem is the timeframe. Ninety days is barely enough to diagnose the situation with any confidence. The real work of building alignment, making strategic choices, and showing measurable impact happens in days 90 through 180. Cutting the plan at 90 creates a false finish line that either pressures CMOs into premature action or leaves them without a roadmap once the "official" onboarding period ends.

The CMOs who fail most likely don't lack marketing expertise, after all that's why they got hired. More likely they misread the organizational system they walked into. They pattern-match from their last company, move too fast on the wrong things, or spend so long in listening mode that they lose credibility and that initial sense of "new hire" goodwill and momentum.

Read Further:
- [Why CMO 90-Day Onboarding Advice Missed the Mark](#)
- [Why CMO Onboarding Often Goes Wrong](#)

This guide proposes something different: a 180-day framework built around three concurrent lenses and three overlapping phases, grounded in the Disruption-Fluent Marketing framework.
Read on or refer to the links on this page..

Quick Links:
- CMO180 Interactive Tool (free)
  https://cmo180.disruptedcmo.com/

- Disruption-Fluent Marketing Framework (and whitepaper):
  https://www.disruptedcmo.com/dfm

  Disruption-Fluency Self-Assessment (free, personalized results in minutes):
- https://assess.disruptedcmo.com/

Three Lenses

What I've found works better than a linear checklist is organizing the transition around three concurrent lenses. You're not "learning" in month one, "planning" in month two, and "executing" in month three. You're doing all three simultaneously from the moment you walk in the door, across all the many workstreams a new CMO faces.

The Revenue Engine

- Map the full business model
- Understand the go-to-market motion
- Assess marketing's real pipeline contribution
- Evaluate sales-marketing relationship health

See: Revenue Engine Mapping Worksheet in Appendix D

Quick Wins & Burning Buildings

- Identify what needs fixing immediately
- Triage: not every fire qualifies
- Prioritize visible, achievable early wins
- Build credibility with key stakeholders

See: Full Scoring Worksheet in Appendix C

Organizational Reality

- Map how decisions actually happen
- Assess organizational speed and agility
- Evaluate sensing and learning capacity
- Find the critical constraint holding back

[Take the Free Interactive Self-Assessment](#)

Three Phases

While the three lenses are concurrent, the center of gravity of your work does shifts over 180 days across three overlapping phases.

Listen & Learn

Weeks 1-6
- Complete stakeholder listening tour
- Map the revenue engine
- Identify and fix burning buildings
- Conduct 30-day CEO check-in

Connect the Dots

Weeks 5-13
- Synthesize themes and contradictions
- Formulate the revenue thesis
- Present organizational assessment to CEO
- Draft three-to-five strategic priorities

Make Your Move

Weeks 9-26
- Implement operating model changes
- Launch first strategic initiative
- Reallocate budget, address capability gaps
- Deliver 90-day CEO/board readout

The complete 44-milestone plan across all three phases is in Appendix A.

The Importance of Gathering Stakeholder Intelligence

"Meet all the key stakeholders" is standard advice.

What's less standard is practical guidance on synthesizing what you're hearing across 50+ conversations.

The order matters. Start with the CEO, CRO, and CFO to establish the revenue and strategic context. Then VP Product and VP CS to round out the business picture. Then your own direct reports, skip-levels, cross-functional peers, and external partners. Each subsequent conversation is informed by the context from the previous ones, which means you ask better questions as you go.

Track two things across every conversation: what people say, and what they don't say. The patterns of avoidance are often the most diagnostic. Pay attention to contradictions between stakeholders and resist the urge to determine who's "right." Instead, get curious about why two intelligent people in the same company see the situation so differently. That divergence usually reveals something structural about how information flows across the organization.

Appendix B provides a stakeholder interview guide organized by role.

Screenshot from the CMO180 tool at https://cmo180.disruptedcmo.com

Making The Model Your Own

This model is a starting framework, not a prescription. If you were hired for a turnaround, compress the listening phase and act faster on fires, but don't skip the organizational diagnostic. If you're a first-time CMO, lean more heavily on the stakeholder intelligence and diagnostic elements. If the company has never had a "real" marketing leader before, your Phase 1 will include significant education about what modern marketing actually does.

On the next page you'll find a list of various ways to access and make use of this framework, from simple copy/print worksheets in this document, to a simplified spreadsheet you can download, to a free interactive and AI-supported web app. All are entirely free to use, a contribution by DisruptedCMO to help transitioning marketing leaders find more success.

A CMO transition is itself a disruption, to the organization and to you. The fluency with which you navigate it demonstrates your capacity to navigate every disruption that will surely follow. If you approach it with genuine curiosity rather than preconceived assumptions, with the discipline to diagnose before prescribing, and with the willingness to act with confidence on burning buildings while still building your foundational understanding, you model exactly the kind of leadership that complex, adaptive organizations require.

Appendix: CMO180 Tools & How to Use Them

The CMO180 toolset can be used in three different formats, all of which are free to access and use:

1. **CMO180 Online App** - https://cmo180.disruptedcmo.com/
2. **CMO180 Copy/Print Worksheets** – see the following pages
3. **CMO180 XLSX Worksheets** – see links below

The CMO180 Online App
"Your second brain for the most consequential 180 days of your career."

CMO180 is a **free** planning and diagnostic tool that helps new marketing leaders navigate their transition: from understanding the revenue engine to diagnosing organizational dynamics to identifying quick wins. It was built by DisruptedCMO as a resource for CMO's and marketing leaders.

Includes a highly flexible, structured milestone timeline: apply the full 44-milestone CMO180 model (listed in detail in Appendix A), draw from a milestone bank to structure your own, or start from a blank slate. Also included are stakeholder conversation trackers, quick win/burning building identification tools, and (optional) embedded AI coaching and trend/opportunity identification. 100% free, no ads, no gotchas, your data is your own.

Try it out: https://cmo180.disruptedcmo.com/
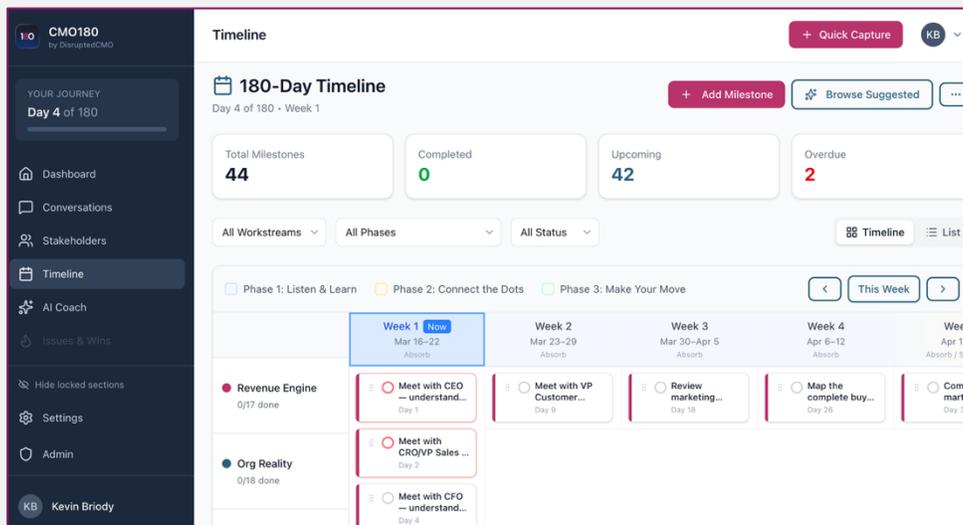
The CMO180 XLSX Worksheets
A simplified spreadsheet companion to the CMO180 online app. Use it as a quick-reference planner, a checklist you can work through offline, and a place to capture structured notes about the revenue engine, stakeholders, and quick wins during your first 180 days as a CMO.

Download it here: https://www.disruptedcmo.com/downloads/CMO180_PlannerSheets.xlsx

Appendix A: The Complete 44-Milestone Plan

Phase / Week	Day	Activity	Lens
PHASE 1: Listen and Learn (Weeks 1-6)			
Week 1			
	1	Meet with CEO: understand growth thesis and expectations	Revenue Engine
	2	Begin 1:1s with all direct reports	Org Reality
	3	Meet with CRO/VP Sales: understand GTM motion	Revenue Engine
	3	Request access to all key systems (CRM, MAP, analytics, PM tools)	Org Reality
	5	Meet with CFO: understand budget and ROI expectations	Revenue Engine
	5	Review existing marketing dashboards and reports	Revenue Engine
Week 2			
	7	Meet with VP Product: understand roadmap and product-market fit	Revenue Engine
	8	Meet with VP Customer Success: understand post-sale journey and NRR	Revenue Engine
	10	Meet with VP Engineering: understand martech and data relationship	Org Reality
	10	Identify initial burning buildings (top 3-5 pain points)	Quick Wins
	14	Complete initial C-suite stakeholder round	Org Reality
	14	Review current marketing attribution model	Revenue Engine
Week 3			
	15	Begin skip-level conversations	Org Reality
	15	Map the actual buyer journey (not the idealized version)	Revenue Engine
	17	Meet with key agency and vendor partners	Org Reality
	18	Audit current campaigns and channels	Revenue Engine
	21	Complete martech stack inventory	Revenue Engine
	21	Assess team capabilities vs. needs	Org Reality
Week 4			
	25	Deliver first quick win	Quick Wins
	28	Establish regular cadence with Sales leadership	Org Reality
	30	Document initial revenue thesis	Revenue Engine
	30	30-day check-in with CEO	Org Reality
PHASE 2: Connect the Dots (Weeks 5-13)			
	32	Synthesize stakeholder feedback into themes	Org Reality
	35	Assess data quality and completeness	Revenue Engine
	38	Resolve or advance top 3 burning buildings	Quick Wins
	40	Present organizational assessment to CEO	Org Reality
	45	Align with CRO on shared pipeline metrics	Revenue Engine
	45	Begin coaching direct reports on leadership expectations	Org Reality
	50	Draft marketing strategic priorities (3-5)	Revenue Engine
	52	Evaluate and decide on operating model changes	Org Reality
	55	Build shared marketing performance dashboard	Quick Wins
	60	Present revenue thesis and strategic priorities to exec team	Revenue Engine
	60	60-day check-in with CEO	Org Reality
PHASE 3: Make Your Move (Weeks 9-26)			
	65	Implement operating model changes with pilot team	Org Reality
	70	Launch first strategic initiative	Revenue Engine
	75	Resolve remaining Phase 1 burning buildings	Quick Wins
	80	Conduct marketing budget review and reallocation	Revenue Engine
	85	Address team capability gaps (hire, develop, or restructure)	Org Reality
	90	90-day CEO and board readout	Org Reality
	90	Establish marketing contribution baseline	Revenue Engine
	110	Review and optimize martech stack	Revenue Engine
	110	Scale operating model to additional teams	Org Reality
	140	Reassess organizational culture and readiness	Org Reality
	165	Measure strategic initiative impact	Revenue Engine
	180	180-day retrospective	Org Reality

Appendix B: Stakeholder Interview Guide

These are not scripts. They're conversation starters organized by stakeholder type, designed to surface the insights that matter most during a CMO transition.

CEO	• What's the growth thesis for the next 12 to 24 months? Where does marketing fit in that? • What did my predecessor get right? Where did they fall short? • What does success look like for marketing by the end of this year? • Where are you most worried about the business right now? • What's the one thing you want marketing to change immediately?
CRO / VP Sales	• Walk me through how a deal gets done here, from first contact to close. • Tell me about the last deal you won and the last deal you lost. What made the difference? • How do you evaluate the leads and pipeline that come from marketing? • Where do you feel supported by marketing? Where are you frustrated? • If you could change one thing about how marketing and sales work together, what would it be?
CFO	• How is marketing's budget structured, and how do you evaluate ROI? • What financial metrics do you care about most when it comes to marketing? • How does the board think about marketing investment? • Where do you see waste or inefficiency in how marketing spends? • What would make you confident that marketing is a good investment?
VP Product	• What does product-market fit look like for each of your major products or segments? • What's on the product roadmap for the next six months, and why? • How do you and marketing collaborate today? Where does it work and where does it break down? • What do customers love most about the product? What do they struggle with? • What features or capabilities do customers not know about that they should?
VP Customer Success	• What drives churn? What drives expansion? • Where do customers struggle most in the post-sale journey? • What's the NRR story, and where are the biggest opportunities to improve it? • How do you think about the marketing-to-customer-success handoff? • If marketing could do one thing better to support customer retention, what would it be?
Direct Reports	• What's working well in how the team operates today? • What's broken or frustrating? • What would you change if you could? • What are you most proud of from the past year? • What skills or capabilities does the team need that it doesn't have? • What do you need from me to be successful?
Skip-Level Team Members	• What's it actually like to work on this team day to day? • When you have a good idea, what happens to it? • What gets in the way of doing your best work? • Is there anything about how the team works that everyone knows but nobody talks about?
External Partners	• What's your honest assessment of this marketing organization? • Where do they excel? • Where do they struggle? • If you could change one thing about how we work together, what would it be?

Appendix C: Quick Win Identification Worksheet

CMO 180 — Burning Building / Quick Win Worksheet

One issue per sheet. Duplicate this tab for each burning building or potential quick win.

1. ISSUE DETAILS

Title: Brief description of the issue or opportunity

Category:

Source:

Context: What is the situation? What triggered this issue?

2. SEVERITY ASSESSMENT

Severity (1-5)	Impact if Resolved (1-5)	Effort to Resolve (1-5)
1=Minor → 5=Critical	1=Minimal → 5=Transformative	1=Trivial → 5=Major

3. QUICK WIN CRITERIA

Visible to stakeholders who matter?		
Achievable within 60 days with existing resources?		
Addresses a pain point others have already identified?		
Builds credibility with a specific constituency?		If yes, which?
Requires major resources or a full strategy?		If Yes → not a quick win

4. PRIORITY DECISION

Priority:

Target resolution date:

Owner:

Key constituency served:

5. ACTION PLAN & NOTES

Immediate next steps (within 1 week):

Resources / support needed:

Success criteria — how will you know this is resolved?

Risks / dependencies:

Additional notes:

Appendix D: Revenue Engine Mapping Worksheet

CMO 180 — Revenue Engine Mapping Worksheet					
1. BUSINESS MODEL					
Primary revenue sources:					
Pricing model:					
Growth motion:					
Key Metrics					
ARR	NRR	Gross Churn	ACV	CAC	LTV
LTV:CAC Ratio:					
2. BUYER JOURNEY					
Journey Stages (map the real journey, not the idealized one)					
Stage	Description	Marketing Role	Owner	Key Metric	Gap/Opp
Typical timeline (first touch → close):					
Key decision-makers at each stage:					
Where marketing touches each stage:					
Gaps and opportunities:					
3. MARKETING CONTRIBUTION					
Attribution model in use:					
Trust level (1-5):		1=Nobody trusts it → 5=Finance & Sales agree			
Marketing-sourced pipeline (%):					
Marketing-influenced pipeline (%):					
Key Conversion Rates					
Lead → MQL	MQL → SQL	SQL → Opp	Opp → Close		
4. MARTECH STACK					
Tool Name	Category	Annual Spend	Owner	Utilization (1-5)	Notes
5. SALES-MARKETING ALIGNMENT					
Relationship assessment:					
Key friction points:					
Current SLA (if any):					
Collaboration cadence:					

The CMO180 Onboarding Model is built on the Disruption-Fluent Marketing framework. For the full theoretical foundation, read the DFM whitepaper at https://disruptedcmo.com/dfm.

For the AI-powered interactive version of this guide, use the CMO180 app at https://cmo180.disruptedcmo.com

Kevin Briody is a three-time CMO and former agency Chief Strategy Officer with 25+ years of marketing leadership experience spanning B2B, B2C, and B2G. He is the founder of DisruptedCMO and the creator of the Disruption-Fluent Marketing framework.

Learn more at https://disruptedcmo.com/about