

■ VP Readiness Field Guide

1. Vision & Strategy

Model: OKRs (Objectives & Key Results)

Playbook:

- Define the North Star vision.
- Translate into Objectives.
- Set 2–4 measurable Key Results.
- Communicate widely until everyone can repeat it.
- Review and adapt quarterly.

Example / Anecdote:

At Google, leadership set an OKR to 'Make search 10x faster.' The measurable Key Result was page load under 0.5 seconds. Teams innovated on caching, CDNs, and compression without being told exactly how. Lesson: As VP, define the ambitious 'what' and the measurable 'done.'

Checklist:

- Do I have a crisp 3–5 year vision?
- Have I defined objectives that inspire but don't micromanage?
- Are key results measurable and time-bound?
- Can my team articulate the vision without me in the room?
- Am I reviewing progress regularly and adjusting?

VP-Level Moves:

- Frame strategy as choices: 'We will focus on X, not Y.'
- Use narratives + numbers when communicating.
- Tie team OKRs to company OKRs to show alignment.

2. Executive Communication

Model: Pyramid Principle (Barbara Minto), BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)

Playbook:

- Identify the headline before presenting.
- Lead with the outcome or recommendation.
- Support with 2–3 points max.
- Anticipate questions and have data ready.

- Match format to audience (Board, CEO, Team).

Example / Anecdote:

A VP of Product presented to the board. Bad version: 'We've been redesigning checkout... here are 20 slides of flows.' Good version: 'We reduced checkout drop-off by 12%, adding \$3.2M ARR. Here's how.'
Lesson: Lead with the outcome — details support the story.

Checklist:

- Did I start with the outcome or recommendation?
- Can I deliver the main message in 30 seconds?
- Did I limit supporting arguments to 2–3?
- Do I have backup data ready (not leading)?
- Is my story tuned to my audience?

VP-Level Moves:

- Board: Always lead with ROI.
- Exec peers: Frame around tradeoffs.
- Team: Balance story + numbers.
- General rule: If it can't fit in a tweet or slide, refine.

3. Organizational Design

Model: Galbraith's Star Model

Playbook:

- Define the strategy first — structure follows strategy.
- Choose structure (by product, geography, customer segment).
- Design decision-making processes and accountability flows.
- Align incentives and rewards with desired behaviors.
- Hire or reorganize talent to fit the structure.

Example / Anecdote:

Netflix shifted structure around 'content verticals' (kids, international, originals) to match strategy, not efficiency. Lesson: Structure follows strategy.

Checklist:

- Is the org structure aligned to strategy?
- Do processes reinforce accountability?
- Are incentives aligned with desired outcomes?
- Do I have the right leaders in the right places?

VP-Level Moves:

- Avoid vanity reorganizations; always tie to strategy.
- Be explicit about decision rights (who decides vs. advises).
- Communicate org changes as enablers of strategy, not as cost cuts.

4. Decision-Making Under Ambiguity

Model: RAPID (Recommend, Agree, Perform, Input, Decide), OODA Loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act)

Playbook:

- Clarify decision roles with RAPID.
- For crises, cycle fast with OODA: Observe → Orient → Decide → Act.
- Document major decisions and rationale.
- Set time limits — perfection is the enemy of timely action.

Example / Anecdote:

A SaaS startup clashed on pricing. By assigning RAPID roles (Sales recommended, Finance agreed, CEO decided), they cut decision cycles from months to weeks.

Checklist:

- Do we know who actually decides?
- Have we separated input from decision rights?
- Is speed valued alongside accuracy?
- Do we document decisions to avoid re-litigating?

VP-Level Moves:

- When ambiguity is high, anchor in principles not predictions.
- Create psychological safety so teams can act without fear.
- Model decisiveness — don't let perfect be the enemy of progress.

5. Talent & Leadership

Model: Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard)

Playbook:

- Tailor leadership style to individual readiness.
- Coach high-potential talent for stretch roles.

- Build a talent map (potential vs. performance).
- Have succession plans for key roles.
- Spend 30–40% of time on hiring and retention.

Example / Anecdote:

A high-performing engineering manager needed autonomy (delegate), while a new hire needed daily support (direct). Lesson: One style doesn't fit all.

Checklist:

- Do I flex my style based on the person's stage?
- Do I know my top performers and flight risks?
- Have I built bench strength for future roles?
- Am I dedicating enough time to recruiting and coaching?

VP-Level Moves:

- Personally close critical hires.
- Invest in leadership development for managers.
- Celebrate and reward learning, not just results.

6. Culture & Operating Rhythm

Model: Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Playbook:

- Build trust through vulnerability and candor.
- Encourage healthy conflict — avoid artificial harmony.
- Ensure commitment by clarifying decisions.
- Create accountability through peer expectations.
- Focus relentlessly on collective results.

Example / Anecdote:

A VP saw meetings with no conflict; decisions never stuck. She introduced 'red team' exercises. Trust grew, debates sharpened, execution improved.

Checklist:

- Does my team feel safe to disagree openly?
- Are decisions clear and visible?
- Do peers hold each other accountable?
- Are we measuring collective outcomes, not silos?

VP-Level Moves:

- Establish a consistent operating cadence (weekly, monthly, quarterly).
- Model vulnerability — admit mistakes first.
- Address cultural drift immediately; culture compounds silently.

7. Business & Financial Acumen

Model: Driver Tree / Unit Economics

Playbook:

- Understand the P&L;: revenue, gross margin, Opex, net income.
- Map initiatives to P&L; line items.
- Review financial performance quarterly.
- Spot cash flow risks early.
- Focus on unit economics (CAC, LTV, churn, etc.).

Example / Anecdote:

An e-commerce VP realized boosting average order value by \$5 added more profit than acquiring 10k new users. She shifted spend from ads to upsells.

Checklist:

- Do I know our gross margin trend?
- Can I connect initiatives to financial outcomes?
- Am I balancing growth with efficiency?
- Do I know our burn rate and runway?

VP-Level Moves:

- Always frame projects in terms of financial impact.
- Learn to read and challenge the P&L;.
- Partner tightly with Finance to anticipate risks.

8. Influence & Stakeholder Management

Model: Stakeholder Map + RACI

Playbook:

- Map stakeholders by power and interest.
- Identify who to keep satisfied, who to keep informed.
- Use RACI to clarify roles and avoid confusion.
- Pre-align stakeholders before big decisions.

Example / Anecdote:

A VP wanted a new testing framework. He pre-aligned Finance, Product, and HR on benefits. By the time it hit exec meeting, it was a rubber stamp.

Checklist:

- Do I know who my key stakeholders are?
- Have I pre-aligned before major meetings?
- Is RACI clear for big projects?
- Am I balancing relationships across functions?

VP-Level Moves:

- Invest in 1:1s with cross-functional peers.
- Never surprise stakeholders in public forums.
- Be known as a collaborator who drives outcomes.