FOR MID-MARKET PRIVATE EQUITY FIRMS

120 Days In: The Leadership Warning Signs That May Put Your Value Creation Plan at Risk

The 90 to 120 days following an acquisition are among the most consequential in any deal's lifecycle. It's the window where operating assumptions meet reality, where the executive leadership team you underwrote either confirms your thesis or starts quietly undermining it.

Drawing on hundreds of executive placements and conversations with operating partners across our network, we've identified the C-suite leadership warning signs that surface most consistently in this window and that, left unaddressed, can put the value creation plan at significant risk.

WARNING SIGN #1

The CEO Who Once Thrived Now Struggles Under a Board

FIT GAP

What it looks like:

- Strong pre-close performance, but post-close the board dynamic shifts where reporting cadences, financial discipline, and oversight start to feel like interference.
- Conflict-avoidant with the board in ways that look like professionalism but function as avoidance.
- The identity of the business remains fused with the identity of the CEO in ways that pre-close felt like a strength, but post-close creates fragility (key relationships, institutional knowledge, and cultural authority have not been transferred or documented).

The tell: Board meetings are well-prepared and go smoothly, but the weeks that follow are quiet in the wrong way: no decisions get made, priorities don't shift, and action items quietly expire. Or the opposite happens where too much changes too fast, signaling the CEO is still operating reactively to authority rather than from a durable strategic framework.

WARNING SIGN #2

No Real Second-In-Command

CAPABILITY GAP

What it looks like:

- The CEO is credible and capable, but nearly every decision still runs through them regardless of perceived impact or upside.
- No clear successor and/or no functional leader who can carry the organization through a transition.
- If the CEO exits (voluntarily or otherwise) you lose 6 to 12 months of momentum at exactly the moment you need to be executing.

The tell: Key decisions are still being made at the CEO level that should have been pushed down long ago, and no one on the team is flagging it. The absence of pushback is itself the signal: the org has normalized the dependency rather than building around it.

WARNING SIGN #3

Resisting New Reporting and Accountability Structures

BEHAVIOR GAP

What it looks like:

- Slow to adopt new dashboards or operating metrics post-close, with delays that get attributed to bandwidth but reflect something closer to reluctance.
- Finds reasons why the old way of tracking performance "made more sense for this business" (the pushback sounds reasonable on the surface, but the pattern is consistent wherein every new structure meets friction).
- Monthly reporting arrives late, incomplete, or framed defensively. Here, the data will also often be buried in narrative.

The tell: The numbers are in there somewhere, but they're not driving decisions. Reporting has become a compliance exercise rather than a real management tool.

WARNING SIGN #4

CXO on Separate Pages

COLLABORATION GAP

What it looks like:

- Functional leaders are operating in silos with each running their own agenda without a shared view of priorities.
- Decisions requiring cross-functional alignment get escalated to the CEO, stalled in follow-up, or quietly dropped. Nobody owns the gap between functions.
- Tension between functions is visible enough that it's already filtering down into their respective teams.

The tell: Every decision requires the CEO in the room. And even then, people leave the meeting without genuine alignment, just a directive they'll interpret differently once they're back at their desks.