

The Executive Listening Tour

Interview Guide



The conversations a new leader uses to understand a business from the inside: opening framing, the four areas worth learning, and the questions to ask every senior leader. Employer-agnostic. Built to feel like a thoughtful conversation.

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PART OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM · PHASE ONE: LISTEN

[Read the full article: erikrmiller.com/blog/executive-listening-tour](https://erikrmiller.com/blog/executive-listening-tour)

Listen with a structure, not a script

A listening tour produces impressions. A structured one produces understanding you can trust. This guide gives you the structure: the same core questions asked consistently, so answers can be compared rather than merely remembered. The structure sits underneath the conversation, never on top of it. To the person across the table it should feel like an unusually good discussion. To you, later, it should add up to a clear picture you can rely on.

Scale it to your organization. There is no correct number of conversations. Choose coverage across the functions that decide, influence, serve customers, and run operations, and keep going until new themes stop appearing. A small company reaches that point quickly. A global one needs wider coverage. Sample for representativeness, not to a quota.

THE FOUR AREAS WORTH LEARNING — MOVE ACROSS THEM NATURALLY

BUSINESS

How the company makes money, what constrains growth, which commitments are already made.

“In the CFO’s terms, how do we really make money, and what most limits it?”

ORGANIZATIONAL

How work and decisions move, who is trusted, where handoffs fail: the reality beneath the org chart.

“When an important decision has to get made here, what actually happens?”

CUSTOMER

Where the deepest customer knowledge lives, and what it says gathered in one place.

“Who understands our customers best, and what do they know that the rest of us don’t?”

LEADERSHIP

What each leader believes the priorities are, how each defines success, expectations of your function.

“Asked identically — see the alignment questions on the next page.”

Three question types, one conversation

Layer all three in each conversation. Open questions discover what you didn't know to ask. Scaled questions let the answers line up across every conversation. Ranking questions bring real priorities into the open.

SCALED — ASK IDENTICALLY EVERY TIME, RATE 1 (LOW) TO 5 (HIGH)

- How clear is our strategy to the people who have to execute it?
- How well do teams work across departmental boundaries?
- How confident are you in how important decisions get made here?
- How well does the organization understand its customers?
- How aligned is the leadership team on what matters most right now?

RANKING — BRING TRADE-OFFS INTO THE OPEN

- Rank these initiatives in the order you would protect them if the budget were cut.
- Of everything we could improve, which two would matter most in the next year?

OPEN — WHERE THE REAL INFORMATION LIVES

- Walk me through how this actually works, not how it's supposed to.
- What would you fix first if this were yours?
- What does everyone here believe that an outsider would question?
- What haven't I asked that I should have?

The sharpest part of the tour

Ask every senior leader these exact questions, word for word, inside their own conversation. Never as a separate survey, never where they can hear each other. Then look at the answers together. The variance is the finding: where leaders quietly disagree on things that should have one answer is often the single most useful discovery of a transition.

- What are the organization's top three priorities right now?
- How will we know, a year from now, that we succeeded?
- Who owns the most important decisions in your area?
- What is the single biggest constraint on our growth?
- What should the incoming leader change first, and be careful not to touch?

Two guardrails keep this honest: apply variance only to questions that should have one answer (strategy, priorities, decision rights, success), and always pair low variance with what's actually happening in the business. A team can agree and be wrong together. Consensus is a finding, not a verdict.

RUNNING THE CONVERSATION

- Frame the invitation honestly: you're understanding the business before proposing change.
- Open wide, fold in the scaled, ranking, and alignment questions, then close open.
- Capture consistently, numbers as numbers and rankings in order, using the tracker.
- Listen more than you signal; stay curious and hard to read, so what you learn stays honest.

RESEARCH & SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- › [Google re:Work — A Guide to Structured Interviewing \(updated 2026\)](#)
- › [Byford, Watkins & Triantogiannis — "Onboarding Isn't Enough," HBR \(2017\)](#)
- › [McKinsey — Successfully Transitioning to New Leadership Roles \(2018\)](#)
- › [Kambil — Managing Stakeholder Relationships, Deloitte Insights \(2017\)](#)
- › [Whitler & Morgan — "Why CMOs Never Last," HBR \(2017\)](#)

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