

Now That You're the Boss... A New Manager Needs More Than Technical Expertise

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Organizations the world over reward technically competent professionals by anointing them managers—but often fail to recognize that the skills required for technical success are rarely the same ones that translate into managerial effectiveness.

What's more, many new managers are left to fend for themselves, without the training needed to ensure their success. To avoid the most common pitfalls resulting from this scenario, new managers might consider adding these seven behaviors to their repertoire of technical competence.

- 1. Relinquish the illusion of control.** Tight-fisted control is a sign of fear, not confidence. True control is based on having the systems in place and people prepared to effectively handle any eventuality, not on micro-managing the day-to-day routine tasks. Managers overly immersed in minutiae fail to make the most effective use of their time. Your time is best spent thinking broadly and strategically about client or customer needs and preparing staff members to achieve increasingly higher expectations.
- 2. Capitalize on the wisdom of team members.** Technical proficiency is a “given,” but managers cannot afford to fall into the trap of believing that they alone have all of the answers—because they don't. You can increase the confidence and competence of individual team members by continually posing the question, “What do you think we should do in this situation?” Once given the answer, let employees take the ball and run with it or, when needed, redirect their suggestions by building on their core concepts.
- 3. Create synergistic teamwork.** Time and time again it has been proven that $1+1+1$ does not = 3 when it comes to teams. To achieve team synergy hold regularly scheduled meetings that are sacrosanct; use meetings for productive problem solving sessions rather than “show and tell”; and rotate leadership of the meetings among team members. You convey the message that these are team meetings, not your meetings, by encouraging ownership through shared planning, preparation, and facilitation.
- 4. Establish appropriate boundaries.** Trying to manage while at the same time thinking you are still a “buddy” isn't realistic. New managers must delicately balance remaining friendly with their direct reports while transitioning to a new peer group. You can accomplish the first by continuing to have lunch with team members, supporting personal or professional concerns, and even participating in after-hours social activities, but no longer expecting the team to meet your personal needs. Conversely, begin building relationships with other managers by using them as sounding boards for your concerns, offering collegial assistance when needed, and sharing books or articles of common interest.

5. **Create a common vision.** As the saying goes from *Alice in Wonderland*, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” This may be fine in Wonderland, but teams need more. Use one or more team meetings to craft a vision behind which everyone can align. A vision addresses the issues of Who are we?, How do we want others to perceive us?, and How are we going to accomplish our mission in a productive, yet satisfying way?
6. **Solicit and respond to feedback.** You can establish the norm for giving and receiving feedback on your team by being the first to ask, “What am I doing well and what would you like me to do differently?” Given the answer, avoid the tendency to get defensive. Instead, think about the feedback and find ways to provide people with what they need. When it comes to managing, the golden rule is not “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” but rather “do unto others as they would like to be done unto.”
7. **Address personal problems creatively and compassionately.** The problems faced by staff members frequently don’t fall neatly into the solutions defined by your human resources department. Address personal problems creatively and compassionately. Go to bat for the special needs of employees. Question the validity and usefulness of policies and past practices that don’t meet current realities. Take a calculated risk by stretching the boundaries when the situation calls for an alternative solution.

As you continue along your management path, mistakes are inevitable, but old-fashioned common sense and a lot of heart go a long way in helping to define your unique leadership style. Rather than relying on time-worn models of management, trust your instincts, ask lots of questions, and don’t be afraid to allow others to see the most effective of all management characteristics: human kindness.