

How to Learn to Manage People



"Management is nothing more than motivating other people."

Lee Iacocca

Congratulations! You finally got that promotion you've been wanting and now, you're a manager – perhaps for the first time in your career. So, now what? If this is your first foray into management, you might be a bit nervous. That feeling is understandable, common and, in fact, quite warranted. This is going to be very, very different from what you've done before. Management has an entirely different set of goals, rules and a different skill set is required. Very often, people that are new to management do not completely understand what it means to be a manager – how their life will change (yes, your life will definitely change). This is especially true if you've moved from an hourly wage to a salary... more about that later.

This article will present you with a set of guidelines you can use to help make some sense out of what is often a confusing transition. This is not meant to be a complete set of day-to-day instructions; that concept is pretty much gone forever now that you're a manager. It is, however, a reasonable outline that will help you through the process of goal setting and managing staff. So take a deep breath and let's get started!

Steps

1. **Understand what management is:** The primary thing that sets managers apart is the migration away from a concept known as "individual contributor." Managers are not, primarily, individual contributors. That means that you are going to be responsible for the work of others; your success depends on how well your team performs. You are now responsible for far, far more work than you could ever possibly produce by yourself (see warnings). You can't fix all the problems – don't even try... that's not your job anymore.
2. **Prepare for the transition:** This *will* become confusing and frustrating... perhaps not immediately, but managers are often pulled in multiple directions. You may have a different dress code to follow. You will have new rules to follow (particularly in the area of Human Resources).
 - *Find a mentor:* Not your immediate manager, but find another manager with lots of experience and ask that person to help you transition. This is a very important and often overlooked tool. It will also gain you considerable esteem in the eyes of the upper level management team. It shows maturity.
 - *Join a networking group:* There are lots of these (Toastmasters for example). Ask other managers and executives about local clubs. Take advantage of the networking opportunities in your area.
 - *Contact HR:* Go to the Human Resources department and ask if there are any HR books or training courses you can use to help you. Read a bit about being a manager. There is a mountain of literature on the subject. Read some of the more well-known books ("*The One Minute Manager*" and "*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*" are management staples).
 - *Help your staff cope:* It's possible the people you will manage used to be your peers and that *will* be the cause of envy (possibly resentment) and friction. You can't prevent it but if you keep the lines of communication open it will reduce the issues. However, you must remember that you are now management and while you don't want to flaunt it, you can't let your former peers

take advantage of your previous relationship. Even if they weren't your peers, getting a new manager is always disconcerting. Address the staff and let them know your plans. Establish the manager/staff relationship early. Even if it seems a bit awkward at first do *not* be bashful about it... just follow the steps, be yourself, and don't forget where you started.

- *Don't neglect family:* Your husband-wife-playmate-whatever and children, if any, and friends still need your attention just like they did before. You will have a lot more on your mind now - management is a hard transition. Keep your priorities in check. If you hear people mentioning that you're distant - take note. You don't want to let your career ruin your family relationships (you wouldn't be the first).
 - *Don't neglect your health:* OK, you've discovered that this is actually fun. The work is exciting, you're working longer hours, maybe working more at home, staying up a little later, getting up a little earlier, doing a great job handling the family and kids... are you sleeping enough? Are you sure?
3. **Identify your goals:** What, specifically, are your measured goals? Do you have hourly, daily or weekly targets your team must meet; what about your new goals such as reviewing productivity? Write down everything and post it prominently (see tips). This will be your checklist. A word of caution here, this list will change over time; it is a living document. Some things may stay the same (service levels, for example) but other things may change depending on the strategies handed down to you from the Executive Management. Review your list frequently, with a critical eye, and revise it when necessary.
 4. **Know your team:** You need to know, for each team member, their individual strengths and weaknesses. John works extremely fast but occasionally misses some of the details. Jane is incredibly thorough but has issues with the volume of work processed. Bill has spectacular customer relationships but can never say "no" to the clients whereas Mary has excellent technical skills but falls short in people skills. You really need to know all this very, very well. You will use this knowledge to balance the productivity of your team.
 5. **Match tasks with staff:** Use the information you gleaned from the above steps to match people with work. This is termed skill-based work assignment. You want to play into each person's strengths and minimize work assignments that would target their weaknesses. If you have the opportunity, put people together that have complimentary skill sets. You might put John and Jane on a project together, or have Mary and Bill consult together on a presentation.
 6. **Meet with your team members:** Regular one-on-one meetings are critical to good management. These meetings have several purposes.
 - *Give feedback on job performance:* Discuss the previous week's objectives including what went well, what areas might improve for next time and how that improvement might be obtained. This will lead into...
 - *Outline the goals for the next meeting:* These are typically referred to as "action items" and will form the basis for the next weekly production review.
 - *Learn about staff issues:* You're going to be a bit out of touch now and you absolutely must realize that. The only way to keep track of issues that affect the performance of your team (and therefore your job) is to listen to your employees!
 - *Ask for ideas:* Your staff wants to feel engaged. Without exception, the number one motivating factor behind people leaving a job is poor management – that very often stems from feeling ignored. You will be graded not only on your team's performance, but also on your turnover rate.
 - *Motivation:* In Peter Scholtes' lectures, he points out that people motivate themselves. The best managers find ways to get their people to become motivated to do their jobs well and with pride. Use these sessions to find out what motivates your employees and use that feedback to improve their contribution.

7. **Be visible:** You must not isolate yourself from the team. Sometimes the initial workload will seem overwhelming and you might have a tendency to sequester yourself away from the staff to keep up – especially with the new [paperwork load](#) you'll have. You absolutely must not give the appearance of being an "ivory tower" inhabitant. If your team doesn't see their leader, they'll develop an attitude of anarchy. Things will go very badly for you. Even if you're [managing remote staff](#), you need to make sure they "feel" your presence. If you manage multiple shifts, make sure you visit the other shifts regularly.
8. **Document team activities:** Your personal performance review will focus largely on your team's performance so make sure you keep a written record of issues and accomplishments. This will be especially important if there are significant issues that arise. Problems are expected; how you and your team handle those problems must be a focus of your efforts.
9. **Reward performance:** This doesn't mean money... although money is nice, it's not a primary motivator for on-the-job performance. Recognition is much more effective. If you have the authority, perhaps grant performance leave (an extra day off for doing something exceptional). Make the rewards regular and make them attainable but difficult. When you give a reward, make it well known (reward publicly, admonish privately).
10. **Learn coaching:** There will inevitably be times when you need to correct behavior. Learn to do this properly. If you do it correctly, you will get the results you want. If you do it poorly, things can go horribly wrong. See [How to Give a Feedback Sandwich](#) for ideas.

Tips

- **Post your goals:** When you post your goals, and your team goals, make sure it's very visible. Your team needs to see these – all the time. "Increase service level by 5% over the next 6 months" shouldn't be a secret. Distribute updated goals as soon as they're available.
- **Compliment your staff:** Little things go a long way. Telling someone they're doing a good job really, really does make a huge difference! Don't do it so often it becomes meaningless, but do let your staff know they're appreciated.
- **Communicate, communicate, communicate!** Your staff will feel much more engaged if you let them know what's happening. Everybody wants to see the "big picture" sometimes.
- **Be fair, but firm:** There will come a time when you need to consider disciplinary action up to and including [dismissal](#). This can be incredibly difficult even for experienced managers. How to discipline employees is a topic in itself and beyond the scope of this article, but there are many good references. The short answer is be consistent and document everything.
- **Use the Human Resources Department:** If you have an HR department, they are now your newest and bestest friend. They are a resource to be embraced. They can help you with rewards, help you with discipline, help you stay out of legal trouble and they really like managers that recognize that. Truly, they are on your side.
- **Become familiar with EAP:** EAP = Employee Assistance Program. Most large companies have one and it can be incredibly useful. If one of your staff has a personal issue, refer them to EAP (do *not* try to play staff psychiatrist). If you start having personal issues (see Warnings) EAP is available to you, also.
- **Lead by Example:** A leader should focus on leading by example in all aspects of their work. Be a role model for your colleagues by exuding a positive presence. Show compassion, understanding, and respect, while focusing your tasks to be inclusive of teamwork and dedication. It is important that managers and supervisors exhibit the best possible values inside of the workplace. If you have a publicly-visible position that puts your personal life in the spotlight, understand that your entire life reflects upon this example you're setting.

- **Hire a Coach:** In addition to a mentor - hire a coach (if you have the opportunity and means). A mentor can be a great help but may not always have the time to devote. A coach is a trained professional with no agenda to pursue but yours and will help you develop your own authentic management style.

Warnings

- Do not try to do your staff's job: There is an old saying: *"If you want something done right, do it yourself."* Forget that. Wipe it from your mind. You never heard it, it doesn't mean anything, and it's a counterproductive concept. If you want something done right, assign it to the right people and motivate your employees. If you try to be too hands-on, you'll fall short of your management requirements. Your job is to manage. This is when it's completely appropriate to live vicariously through others.
- Maintain employee confidentiality (when possible): There are some times this is not possible (certain HR issues like potential violence in the workplace) but if someone comes to you with a problem be very, very cautious with their secrets. It only takes once to destroy your reputation as a confidant and legal issues can arise. If someone tells you "this is in confidence" make sure that person knows that you, as a manager, are not permitted to keep certain things confidential.
- Maintain corporate confidentiality: You will learn secrets. There is often a tendency to tell secrets because that may make us seem more important. If you learn of impending staff cutbacks, and you release that information without authorization, prepare to be on the cutback list. It's always hard to see this happen but nobody said being a manager would be easy.
- Be prepared for longer hours: It's a fact. You're salaried now and the expectation is that you will do whatever is necessary to get the job done. Managers have perks and benefits that hourly employees don't have but you also have additional responsibilities. Don't be late, don't leave early. Oh, once in a while if you have something to do, of course - just like anybody else would. But do not make a habit of it. You're a leader now. Act like one.
- Weekly one-on-one meetings are *not* performance reviews. While you will review the activities of the previous week, that is not the sole focus here. You want this to be less formal and open to discussion. Do not try to control this too tightly - it's your staff's meeting just as much as it is yours.
- The transition to management can be very intimidating. It's not always that way but more often than not, new managers will experience a lot of stress before they become comfortable with the position. Find someone to talk with. If you found a mentor (see Step 2) that person can help. Don't keep things bottled up inside - stay alert for any unwanted behavioral changes (anger, suspicion, increased alcohol consumption, etc.)