

# First Time Manager

Laying The Foundation For Future Success

Patrick Forsyth



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# **FIRST TIME MANAGER**

## LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

First Time Manager: Laying The Foundation For Future Success

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The advertisement features a black header with the CMO Inspired Conference logo on the left, which consists of a green speech bubble containing the letters 'CMO'. To the right of the logo, the text reads 'INSPIRED CONFERENCE' in large white letters, followed by '25 OCTOBER | DE VERE BEAUMONT ESTATE | OLD WINDSOR UK' in smaller white letters. Below the header is a photograph of a large, white, classical-style building with a fountain in the foreground. At the bottom of the advertisement is a collage of four images showing conference attendees and speakers. A green banner at the very bottom of the advertisement contains the text 'Join Over 100 Chief Marketing Officers & Digital Innovators' in white.

# 1 INTRODUCTION: THE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

“You only get one chance to make a good first impression”.

– Anon

## An important step

So now you are a manager (or are about to be). Sounds good, but it makes you think; or it should do. Becoming a manager may be a step up, but it is also wholly different from being in an executive role.

Management:

- Involves responsibility for others
- Is potentially very rewarding
- But it is likely to be a challenge.

The role demands specific approaches and skills, some of which you may not have used before. You need to adjust, and this book is designed to help you do so – promptly, easily and certainly. It provides guidelines so that you get into your new role effectively and fast, and achieve the results that you want.

**The first rule: do not underestimate the change involved in your transition to management.**

It was Harry Emerson Fosdick who said: “Always take a job that is too big for you”. You may currently be worrying that you have done just that. Great. But what he meant was that anything else would not be aiming sufficiently high. Besides what is being said here is that it is rising to the challenge that is rewarding.

It all sounds good, but let me digress for a moment. Before going on it is worth linking progress into management with other possible routes ahead. In many fields, and in many organisations, progress within the organisation, including the rewards that can accompany it, is inherently linked to a management role. Thus:

- Success at one thing leads to promotion into a *different* role
- Some of the skills that made you successful in the past may *not* help you as a manager
- Additional skills demanded by management may *not* play to your strengths
- The job of managing people may, or may not, be something you enjoy of itself rather than wanting because it takes you up the organisation hierarchy

Thus you may need to pause, reflect and consider – do you *really want to be a manager*? If not consider other ways ahead; if you do – read on.

### **Approaching your new role**

As you approach your new role, success is influenced radically by the attitude you take to it, and this is especially true early on (and in the first 100 days). You should:

- See it as something new; something needing different approaches to those you have used in the past (though do not throw the baby out with the bath water, your prior experience will be necessary)
- Aim to learn surely and fast, keep an open mind, beware of making unwarranted assumptions and consciously define and adopt new approaches.

The remainder of this book focuses on two things:

1. Action and attitudes taken up front in the first days and weeks in office which make a difference to ultimate success
2. Those aspects of the management process that you need to get to grips with in the early days, and which have a disproportionate effect on success.

Management is a unique process with its own demands in terms of approaches that make it work; let's define it in more detail:

## What is management?

Being a manager involves people; other people. You may still have work of your own to do, but additionally you have others reporting to you.

At its simplest, management is:

- Achieving results *through* other people, and
- Usually doing so towards specific, tangible, often financial, objectives.

Management is more than work allocation – deciding who does what. It is *not* just doing things *for* other people – and the process of management takes, time, effort and expertise. Of these the one most easily underestimated is time. You still almost certainly have your own tasks to do – the executive part of the job so to speak – but you must create adequate time to manage those reporting to you.

So what does management involve?

Let's look at the tasks and skills involved. Once you have people reporting to you, the classic tasks involved in managing them are:

- Planning (what must be done to achieve the desired results)
- Organising (time, people and activities)
- Recruitment and selection (to create or replenish the team)
- Training and development (to keep peoples' skills sharp)
- Motivation (creating and maintaining positive attitudes amongst the team)
- Control (monitoring performance standards and taking any necessary action in the light of results).

And the overall orchestration of everything all this, and whatever work the team does, implies. If that seems a lot then, yes, it needs some juggling. You are going to need to keep a clear head, an eye on both the detail and the broad picture, and become expert at the skills the role demands. So the tasks of management demand proficiency in a number of **skills**. These will vary depending on the exact nature of the job you do, but are likely to include:

- Decision making and problem solving
- Time management
- A variety of communications skills (business writing, making formal presentations, running meetings, one to one liaison with staff, interviewing etc.)

The effectiveness of your management of people can easily be diluted by shortfalls in your skill levels – ensuring that you have the skills for the job is a key starting point because strength in your personal skills directly affects your potential ability to manage a group of people (in this context it might be worth looking at another publication I have written for this series: “Maintaining Career Fitness”). Certainly at an early stage you can usefully personalise the kind of skills list just mentioned – and link the specific skills you list to some sort of rating and, if necessary, to action you propose to take to improve the rating to a level you feel is necessary for your current role.

Skill	Action

Completing this exercise may stretch well beyond your appointment; starting it should not be delayed.

Whatever else your management role involves, it is the manager’s responsibility to create a **vision**. This may sound intangible, but it is not. It links closely with having clear objectives, and it goes further. You need to provide:

- Clarity of purpose
- A belief that delivering excellence is necessary, worthwhile and possible
- A feeling of interest (better still excitement) about achieving goals
- A link between the overall picture and the needs and satisfactions of the individual members of the team.

All this can focus corporately or, more likely in context of the new manager, on section or department.

Think through this aspect of your new role carefully, and make sure you have the information necessary to define a vision and know how you will put it over to others. This idea goes way back: “Where there is no vision the people perish.” (*Proverbs 29:18*)

What sort of manager are you going to be? What kind of manager *should* you aim to be? There are various ways to define styles of management; five classic styles are:

- *Dictatorship*: the manager decides on their own
- *Benevolent autocracy*: the manager decides, the group advises
- *Democracy*: the group decides, the manager advises
- *Laissez-faire*: nobody makes proper decisions
- *Consultative*: manager asks, group contributes, manager decides

All styles have their place and are relevant to some situations, indeed the situation must always be considered. Many times what is needed is a blend of more than one style.

Overall, your style makes a difference. Management demands a style that reflects an approach of “working with people” (the days of just telling staff what to do are long gone). You will have decisions to make about this.

Ultimately your style must play to your strengths, be acceptable to your staff – and aid effectiveness.

### **Getting your priorities right**

Whatever your job you will be subject to Pareto’s Law (the 80/20 rule). This means that 80% of the results you and your team achieve flow from just 20% of causes. Make it personal: 20% of what you do contributes disproportionately to what you achieve.

This should give everyone pause for thought. But for managers the situation can be multiplied. Your peoples’ situation is the same. Misjudge your priorities – and, at worst, it can mean the whole team is not concentrating on those things that have the greatest impact on results.

So, early on, you must:

- Define and concentrate on your own priorities
- Make managing your people an unbreakable priority
- Work with them to ensure they work in a way that focuses on their core 20% of key tasks.

The ultimate objective is to make the productivity of the whole team effective, and ensure everyone works in a way that reflects the realities of the 80/20 rule. In part this is a numbers game: if you spend time doing something yourself then, however effective, it represents just one person's effort – if you do something that makes say ten other people perform better, then in some respects that maybe ten times better in terms of output (not literally, maybe, but you take the point).

### **A good beginning**

Your future success now ultimately depends not just on you, but on your people. What view of you will they take? If they have to have a manager, then they would doubtless prefer a good one. What will they find? They will be watching and waiting and it will not take them long to form at least an initial view about you. First impressions last, it is said. So, people will:

- Observe you, your manner and style
- Listen to what you say, and read between the lines
- Watch what you do and how you do it
- Look for how it all affects them.

For you this means:

- Preparation before you start
- Starting as you mean to go on.

You will not jump successfully into management by hoping to “make it up as you go along”. If you want a good start; you have to make it happen.

Everything that follows here is predicated on the belief that you *can* make a success of management. It shows *how* you need to act and *what* action is necessary to become, and remain, a good manager.

You should never feel other than that success is something actively gained. Never rely on good luck (though by all means take advantage of any that may come along).

Remember the saying that – *luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity.*

Next, having set the scene, let us see what you can do to get ready *ahead* of the transition. (*Note:* if you are already in the job, don't skip this next section, there may be things here to action rapidly before too much time goes by). As ever, being prepared is always to be recommended.

## 2 BEFORE YOU START

### **The power of preparation**

Whatever field of endeavour one looks at very few, if any, successful people just wing it. Skill is involved in doing a whole range of things, certainly in managing people, and “be prepared” really is a good motto. Once you are in the hot seat, there may not be time for much reflection, and therefore time and thought spent in advance may well prove invaluable.

Preparation can:

- Secure information, allowing appropriate decisions to be made
- Allow you to create a plan of action
- Ensure you are in a position to start as you mean to go on
- Give you confidence to proceed as you decide is right.

Not least, come the day – such action will make it clear to people that you *are* prepared, and this will positively affect the profile you acquire. So systematic preparation is the order of the day.

The best managers do their “homework”, and this begins before the job starts.

### **Focus first on you**

A crucial step is to analyse your strengths and weaknesses. It may help to think back to past appraisals. Be honest. Make a list. What are you good at, and what are you not so good at? How well equipped are you for the work environment? Review:

- Skills
- Personality factors
- Knowledge (of the job, function, organisation, people, product – whatever is relevant)
- Connections (who you know may be as useful as what you know)
- Profile (how are you seen around the organisation?)
- Attitudes (and how they affect your work and dealings with others).

Make a list. You can use this to link to the nature of the job you must now do. Now look at yourself alongside the job description for your new position (this might even be something you can do, in part, in discussion with your own manager). See how you match up.

Ask questions. For example:

- What skills need strengthening?
- Which aspects of your personality can you use? (Or do you have to curb?)
- What areas of knowledge must you extend, how and from where?
- Who do you know that might be useful and who must you forge new links with?

Be specific. Consider both the short and long term. Prioritise (you conclude that you will be able to manage with your current level of report writing skills, for instance, but how long will you survive if you do not know how to run – and maintain control of – a meeting? Both may be something that is worth further study).

Now analysis is no good unless it leads to some action. Consider next what your analysis necessitates. In part this may just be a number of personal resolutions (*I must curb my temper*), but some elements will demand you create an action plan.

Remember how busy you will likely be when the job gets underway. List concrete proposals and get things moving where possible (again this may need consultation with, or sanction from, your own manager). The things necessary here may range wide:

- A meeting you need set
- A training course on which you need to set attendance
- Information you need to locate or take in
- Experience you need to gain.

Note: *an action plan should specify: the what, who and when of the action it specifies.*

Consider an example: say you resolve that, since your new role demands regular report writing, your skills in this area must be improved; it may be useful here to consider the consequences of *not* getting such a skill up to speed – if the first thing you circulate to your new team is ambiguous gobbledegook what impression would that give? Then list the actions you consider necessary:

- Read something about it
- Attend a course (perhaps only really key skills could justify this just as you take up a new appointment)
- Persuade someone (in the role of mentor) to critique a couple of your reports – perhaps before and after an input as above
- Obtain a clear specification from your new manager (what do they expect in terms of length, style etc.)

*Keep this sort of plan in mind as you take up your new post and relate it to your timetable and diary.*

### **Information review and update**

There is an old saying that forewarned is forearmed. Never is it truer than when you are stepping into what might be called uncharted territory.

Ahead of starting your management job, you need to run some checks, asking yourself what it might be useful (or essential) to have some up to date information about in advance. You might check things like:

- Targets (Is your new group – and each of the individuals in it – on target, or ahead and if so why?)
- Procedures and systems (What is there that you might usefully be familiar with ahead of being involved in it or responsible for it)
- People (Do you know the new team? How well? Should you meet any of them singly or together *before* you take up the appointment? Can you organise an introduction by someone who does know them? – maybe their existing manager can do this; any such handover is always useful)
- Lines of communication and reporting (to whom do you and your team relate and in what way? What processes, such as meetings or reports, are involved?)
- Controls (How will you monitor performance and progress?)
- Policy (Do you know what applies in your new situation and understand your role in it?)
- Records (What should you look at? Consider everything from notes about peoples' last job appraisal to the contents of the stationery cupboard).

*Be thorough here; information really is power.*

In addition to the one-off actions, already referred to, you should consider *ongoing* factors that you may need to set up and which can be actioned in advance. In other words get ready the:

- Things you will definitely want to do (you may be sure that a particular reporting format is necessary and appropriate, for example)
- Things you *feel* likely to be appropriate (you may want to spend less time here, but still want to be in a position to act promptly if your feeling is proved right).

Action here may include both preparing the system or whatever itself, and thinking through how you will explain, justify and announce it.

*Take care: balance your enthusiasm for what you know with the fact that there is more to learn about the new situation you are about to step into.*

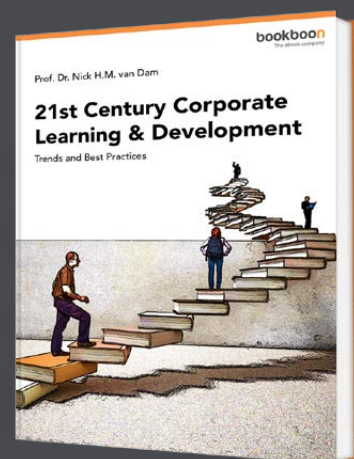
### **Appointment announcement**

A wrong basis for the announcement, one that gives a wrong impression or inaccurate information, may take a long time to recover from. If, for instance, your appointment is designed to affect change – do not hide the fact. *Moral:* this is an area in which to anticipate and influence what will be said and how.

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What will people hear about your appointment? It is worth checking how the change in your responsibilities will be announced, especially if you work for an organisation of any size,

- Ask how your new staff will be told, and ask too if you can see any note that will go to them before it does (and maybe influence it – it should position what is happening as a positive move, explaining as required).
- Ditto wider notification: check who else will be told and how? Will it be on notice boards (electronic or otherwise)? Should it feature in any corporate newsletter? The list here may be long.

At the very least you should know what has been said to people before you walk through the door on day one as it were. More likely you will want to influence what is said, how it is put and to whom the message is directed.

### **Thinking about day one**

Beyond the general and broad preparation referred to, you need to think – specifically – about your first day (or two) in situ. You do not want to get caught up doing nothing but responding to events, nor do you want people to see you as unapproachable just because the priority seems to be reading files.

So, as far as is possible decide:

- *What you will do*: for example: convene a (maybe short) staff meeting (with what agenda?), get up to date on the current situation, organise your own workload, check your diary, and more.
- *What you will arrange/announce*: for example: setting and announcing dates and times for various discussions, meetings and decisions, asking for views from people (in writing or that they can think about and bring up at a meeting), and more.
- *What you will **not** do*: (or not immediately, for whatever reason); this is as important as the positive “to do” side, especially as somethings will need an amount of consideration.

Resolve NOT to be railroaded into making instant decisions in response to urgent requests (or demands); though make it clear you will consider them promptly (and do not forget). So far so good, let's see now just how you make the best start.

## 3 STARTING AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

### Consider your people

Before you do anything have the likely expectations of your people in mind. They will tend to define a good manager as one who:

- Is positive and enthusiastic
- Has vision (seeing the longer and broader view)
- Achieves their own goals
- Is well organised
- Makes good – objective – decisions
- Delegates appropriately
- Provides good – honest – feedback
- Is fair and has no favourites
- Is open-minded and curious
- Listens (and is available to listen)
- Knows and takes an interest in staff
- Prompt and support staff development
- Is a good communicator
- Shows confidence and gives credit
- Keeps people informed
- Is honest, open and fair
- Acknowledges their own mistakes and weaknesses
- Shares experience and helps develop people.

Similarly, people will have firm views about what they do *not* want. Such factors include a manager:

- Putting themselves before their people
- Failing to set clear objectives and priorities
- Who is a loner (seemingly uncaring about the team)
- Who is secretive (or late in informing)
- Procrastinating
- Being unapproachable
- Failing to consider peoples' feelings
- Who lets their personal workload prevent team maintenance

Both lists could be extended, with other perennial issues and sometimes with factors that are especially important in your job, organisation or function.

*It must be your business to discover what is most important to your people.*

Throughout your planning and progress you need to tailor your approach depending on whether you are moving positions within an existing employer or moving to a new one.

- *Existing employer:* here you need to keep in mind that people know you. Your position relative to others will – must – change. You have to create a suitable “distance” between you and others and not allow existing relationships (and friendships) to dictate the way things work. At the same time you are (still) part of the team and how this manifests itself needs consideration. Beware being arrogant; do not throw the baby out with the bath water – old alliances can help.
- *New employer:* bear in mind in this case that the learning curve you face is inevitably much steeper. Beware of acting (or even of giving a view) before you have sufficient facts.

Always match your approach to the actual circumstances and be realistic about the situation you are in.

### **First things first**

Day one as a manager: there may well be a great deal to get your head round if you are moving into a new situation. You should:

- *See your new manager early on:* confirm your role and priorities and set up communications procedure between you, especially to make clear how you check things during the first few days
- *Arrange introductions to other key people:* if your work involves contacts with others (another department, people on the same level as you etc.), make sure you know them and begin to cultivate a relationship from the word go
- *Meet your own staff:* (more of this anon)

And, again especially in a new environment, remember, as was said up front, that “you only get one chance to make a good first impression” (it may be a cliché, but it is true). So consider the details and get them right, for example:

- Be sure to arrive on time (or a touch early)
- Look the part (think about what you wear)

## Meet your team

Make a point of speaking to everyone on day one. If this is not possible (for example someone may be away) set a time for an initial word. This can be informal (just a word at their desk) or in your office or a meeting room. It needs to do various things:

- Act as a personal introduction
- Clarify, briefly, how you see their role (and help define it if necessary)
- Dispel any immediate fears they may have
- Answer any immediate questions (or say when they can and will be answered)
- Begin to show yourself as the kind of manager you want to be
- Ask questions and canvass opinion from the team (about how things are going, what might need change, challenges for the future etc.)

Keep these exchanges positive. Do not be afraid to put things on ice for the moment but be specific (*I can't answer that now, give me a day or two and I will say something about it when the whole team gets together*), and do not forget when and how you have said things will be picked up.

So, keep notes – and keep promises made during such conversations.

You need to begin to get the measure of people early on. Beware of thinking you are an expert psychologist, but do see this as a stage of mining for a variety of information, for instance:

- Listen to *what* people say and *how* they say it
- Read between the lines
- Check immediately anything that is unclear (it gives the wrong impression if you have to ask later, more so if you act having misunderstood)
- Address (or note) any apparent hidden agendas
- Be aware of the informal communications channels as well as the hierarchical ones
- Note any areas requiring further investigation.

You need to get to know your people, how they work, and their strengths and weaknesses. This cannot be done in five minutes, but is a process that must start early and be handled objectively.

*Warning:* Beware of making and acting on unwarranted instant assumptions about anyone and especially acting on unsubstantiated hearsay or rumour.

### **A first staff meeting**

This may not be possible on the first day, but get the team together as soon as possible. Remember your meetings speak volumes about the kind of manager you are, so plan to make it a good one.

- Set a time and date that is as convenient to people as possible (you may need to check this with a new group)
- Organise the administration (place, refreshments, act to stop interruptions etc.)
- Issue a clear agenda in advance
- Make sure the agenda is worthwhile, fits the time and makes for an encounter those attending will find useful
- Tell people what you expect from them (for instance if someone is to give you a run down on their section or work, let them plan how to do it from your clear brief)
- Have start, and finish, times set – and try to stick to them. You are setting up habits here so be sure to start *on time*
- Give people a say – listen – make notes and be seen to take an interest in their views
- Make any action points clear (whether for the group or for individuals)
- Link to the next meeting (for which you might set a date)
- Confirm anything necessary in writing.

Remember that such a meeting should motivate – people are wondering how your presence and style will affect them. Show them it will be good. Spell out how.

The actual agenda for such a meeting will depend on your precise role. It is likely that an agenda will include such items as:

- Your understanding of the role of the team and the immediate goals
- Any necessary explanations for change (e.g. why you are now their manager)
- The current position (how are things going, what problems or opportunities are current)
- A chance for people to ask questions
- Details of, and reasons for, any immediate changes
- Procedures regarding reporting and communications (e.g. when and how you plan to keep in touch with both individuals and the group)
- Action points on immediate operational issues.

You should ask as much as tell, and not change existing procedures without good reasons (and knowing the facts). Remember that, however logical changes may be, people will be suspicious – *will it adversely affect me?* – So see, and explain things, from their point of view.

Empathy is your greatest ally in the early stages of managing a group.

## Early action

Making a positive start is something to do as soon as possible (though always with a firm basis of information). Identify an issue waiting for attention and which is *seen as needing attention*. And sort it out.

Pick something where you can:

- Tell people you recognise it is a priority, one that must not be ignored or side-lined
- Explain the basis of a decision
- Specify action to be taken (this could be a temporary measure)
- Take any additional action necessary (e.g. confirm in writing, consult or advise further afield than your section)
- Get it off the department's "to do" list promptly and definitely.

What you need is something that will be seen as due (overdue?) for action, and that will also be seen as well resolved; it should provide an example of how you mean to go on. Select carefully, act in a considered fashion and this can not only clear the decks of outstanding issues, it can say something positive about you and what working with you will be like too.

## Ground rules

Management works best with some consultation, but some things need to work without argument. This is important. The two things go together: if everything involves lengthy consultation time runs out, things do not get done and we are all in trouble. So some things must work by dictat, and this must be understood.

Example: you might consult about something like the departmental policy on dress code or what can be claimed on expenses, then – for a while at least – what is decided (what you decide) assumes the status of a rule. It is expected that people toe the line, and no time should be wasted on endless arguments about "exceptions". In due course, depending on the topic, you will need to assess the situation again and maybe change the rules.

Similarly with things like meetings (*when we set the date for a staff meeting, we all stick to it and start on time*), and procedures (*when certain documents are sent out you get a copy – always*).

How you act in this kind of way affects your profile as a manager. If people say of you: *If you attend one of Patrick's meeting you better be on time*, that is surely a good thing – as long as they believe you are a manager that understands their point of view as well (setting a finishing time is good too).

As well as laying down the law as it were you need to address other issues. Sometimes a manager has to face awkward, contentious, embarrassing or tough issues. Difficult situations, you may have noticed, do not tend to get easier if delayed or ignored. For the manager, dealing with such situations goes with the territory as they say. Do so promptly.

It is one of the things people watch for. They wonder: *how will they be under pressure? What happens when we stand up to them or make something awkward?* The answer is simple – show them.

You may be better to pick your ground, and find something to use, early on, to demonstrate that you do have the clout that it takes to be successful in management. Thus:

- Pick a suitable example (something that does matter, but which you are sure of)
- Make a stand, be adamant – explain, by all means, but stick to your guns
- Do not back down (it may well be that pressure to do so at this stage is in the nature of a test)
- Let the word go round – *they are no soft touch*.

### **Matters of discipline**

This is probably not something that will come up for a while, but in case it does it is certainly important enough to deserve comment.

Never duck or delay matters of staff discipline, rather, because you have to tackle it urgently, you must:

- Check the situation *very carefully*
- If facts are not clear check further, but do not delay long and set specific timing for further action
- Deal with the matter of itself (do not feel you have to be lenient because it is day one)
- Take action and check it against policy (e.g. if a warning is necessary, should it be in writing, how should it be expressed, where should it be filed and who should be copied?)
- Remember the key task is to secure the future
- Be fair and do not go over the top to register your power.

Appropriate action is likely to be approved by the team; being seen as a soft touch can create problems for the future.

## **A working formula**

There may well be things you are sure of and want to instigate early on. For example you may want regular meetings, certain things put in writing, files organised in a particular way and so on. Certainly, you may want to have aspects of the management process itself clear: reporting procedures, checks and controls, regular and informal communications, overall – how you will work with people one to one and as a group. All needs to be clear.

That being so, and especially if any such things change or supplant existing ways, then:

- Communicate formally (normally in writing)
- Explain what you are doing and why
- Position it as a trial if necessary (why not? You can build in any good feedback and may be grateful of an opportunity to change again if things do not work out, without it looking as if you do not know what you are doing).

And provide feedback, thank people for fitting in and taking the extra time; show them how it will help you – and them.

## **Positioning yourself as manager**

Ask yourself what characteristics will make you the sort of manager you want to be? What would *your staff* say?

List them: being knowledgeable, confident, well organised, looking the part, efficient, decisive...whatever.

Notice that such characteristics are not things that you either are or are not. They are things that you can *intend* to be – and intend to project. Note any you feel you should work at or emphasise.

Remember that while you can tell people how you intend to operate, most of what allows them to form a view about you will be based less on what you say – *but on what you do*.

This includes something that goes on all the time – communications. One of the things that is most likely to put you in the “bad manager” category is being seen to communicate inadequately in any way. Staff would define this as unclear, ambiguous, too little, too late or not at all (keeping unnecessarily secrets); and, most important, not relating to their point of view.

So, you must resolve to communicate:

- Using appropriate methods (memo or meeting, e-mail or notice board)
- From the right perspective (talk about “we” not “I” and put things personally – *you will find*, rather than – *this is the case*)
- Using good communications principles (keep it simple, make it clear, be precise and succinct...and more). Communicating is one of the most important things you do – if you feel you need to bone up on it, so be it, do so. Ignoring failings or uncertainties risks disaster)
- Explain both the what *and* the why of things.

Your early communications will be looked at, or listened to, especially carefully (maybe even looking for fault). Lines will be read between and inferences about you, and the way you do things, will be drawn – for good or ill. Take care.

While thinking about communications make one firm rule for yourself: resolve always be courteous to your staff.

The old adage that politeness costs nothing is true, and any temptation that staff may provide to descend into insults or even just being offhand may cause problems and will certainly not engender respect. This applies whatever the provocation (and, believe me, sooner or later if you manage people, there will be some provocation!). It may be worth mentioning the focus these days on an ultra-politically correct culture and the need to be alert to the tone and words you use.

So, keep cool, count to ten if necessary, and moderate your language and your manner.

A final point about communications is that you need to be constantly well informed about what is going on: in your department, around the organisation and in any other area that is important to you.

Never forget that *informal* communications are as important here as formal ones.

The need for a good network of contacts has already been mentioned. Here we flag one further recommendation relating to the grapevine (which exists in *every* organisation). Three actions:

- Discover how it works and who is key to its operation
- Get yourself “plugged in”
- Remember that communication is two way (you must contribute to receive)
- Use it constructively: ignore and do not start rumours, use it for firm information, early warning and dissemination and keep your eyes and ears open.



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## 4 GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR TEAM

As a manager you have a juggling act to undertake, one which balances different points of view, classically those of:

- Yourself
- The organisation
- Your department (or division, section or whatever)
- Your people
- External contacts (e.g. customers or suppliers).

Sometimes (regularly?) there are conflicts here. Something is right for the department and the people, but not for either the organisation or yourself. Sometimes you will find yourself in the position of disagreeing with a policy of the organisation, but having to support it even though you know that your people see it as wrong, personally inconvenient or worse.

How you handle this balancing act is important, and why you do something may need to be made clear in these terms. It is an area for some consistency.

You need to keep certain factors in mind in balancing this mix:

- First and foremost your responsibility is to the organisation and the results you are charged with producing for them
- You can only do this with the support of your people, so in the long term you must carry them with you (some disagreement may be seen as inevitable)
- You have a responsibility upwards and downwards within the organisation (so perhaps one answer to this sort of conflict is to support a policy, insisting that your people comply, while communicating upwards in an attempt to have it changed if it can be bettered)
- You must never be seen to be being selfish and simply acting to make your own lot better (this will, rightly, always be resented)
- You must sometimes be *seen* to fight your corner on behalf of your section and its people (this will be appreciated, more so if what you take issue with is a nonsense, and especially if you win!)

This is another thing you might seek to demonstrate early on as a manager.

As well as making clear your position in respect of the organisation and the other “players”, you need to consider – and make clear – the relationship between you and your own staff.

You must always be fair (but should rarely be democratic). People must see the realities involved, that there is a balance and that you cannot always be automatically “on their side” right or wrong.

But you do need to make it clear that you:

- See your success as tied in with – indeed dependent on – them
- See your role as essentially supportive (in all sorts of ways: guidance, counselling, development and motivation)
- Believe that by working *together* you can all succeed – and that means not just by all doing your share of the work but by *everyone* contributing creatively (ideas may come from anywhere).

“I don’t know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody”

– Bill Crosby

Dealing with **poor performance** is something else any manager will have to do from time to time and it may not seem the easiest thing to do. Realistically however, if performance is poor you have few options, you can:

- Put up with it (not to be recommended)
- Re-brief or train to allow performance to improve
- Redeploy the person to something they *can* do
- Terminate employment

*Note: these are linked, for example you should only fire someone after making sure they are in a position to be able to do something, and providing training or whatever might help correct the situation. If no improvement then occurs, more drastic action may be necessary and justified.*

Without getting too much into the detail, one point is important here. Do not put off taking action because you worry about the reaction of others. Provided action is justified it will almost certainly be approved. Most team members hate “passengers” and are conscious that they and their colleagues have to make up the difference.

## **A major principle**

There is one maxim that, while it may initially seem somewhat obtuse, should be a guiding principle for every manager – and one to take on board early on. It is simply stated:

*As a manager: you cannot have the power and the credit.*

This means that you have to think in terms of the team. If you want to get things done – have the power to make things happen – then you have to give other people the credit for what they do. Never:

- Pass off their ideas as yours (even when you contributed to their origination)
- Talk about “what I have done” when you mean what “we” or, better still, “they” or “you” have done
- Fail to *actively* give credit, within the group and beyond.

You depend on your people. Do not seek credit for what they do; they will resent it – rightly so. And that will adversely affect their performance. If you want credit, it must come from what you do to make your people effective.

## **Who is in charge?**

The answer to this is clear – you are. The hierarchy means something and you should never apologise for it.

Supervision works best when it is not overt, but ultimately you must supervise. This means:

- Making it clear when, where, how and on what issues your approval is required
- Keeping control of key issues, but thinking carefully about what are key issues and where you can empower people to make their own decisions
- Recognising that the buck stops with you, facing issues, making decisions and never saying you will deal with things and then side-lining or endlessly postponing them
- Being prepared to stick your neck out sometimes and always having the courage of your convictions.

*Your people must never doubt who is in charge. Remember that if you look like a doormat (even for a second) people will walk all over you, and that credibility – once lost – is hard to win back.*

### **Being part of the team**

You are in authority. You must make decisions and ensure that rules and procedures are followed. But you will not win the hearts and minds of people by being aloof. You carry people with you best by:

- Leading from the front
- Getting involved
- Getting your hands dirty occasionally (regularly?)
- Knowing what is going on so that you are able to do all this.

People will support those who they feel understand their situation, more so if they have some first-hand experience of it and are genuinely part of the team. They like it if you pitch in when there is an emergency and it is all hands to the pumps (and do not pick the easiest task). They like it if you sometimes take a turn making the tea or refuelling the photocopier.

*You should aim to become part of the team sooner rather than later.*

### **Managing means motivation**

Resolve now – right now – that you will make motivation a priority. Make no mistake, motivation makes a difference – a big difference. People perform better when they feel positive about their job. You must:

- Recognise that active motivation is necessary
- Resolve to spend regular time on it
- Not chase after magic formulae that will make it easy (there are none)
- Give attention to the detail
- Remember that you succeed by creating an impact that is cumulative in effect and tailored to your people.

Your intention should be to make people feel, individually and as a group, that they are special. Doing so is the first step to making sure that what they do is special. A good maxim to bear in mind is:

“If you think you can, you can and if you think you can’t, you’re right”

– Mary Kay Ash

The detail here is important (but beyond the brief here and something else worthy of further study). Every manager needs to know something of how motivation works. The key is affecting the “motivational climate” by taking action to:

- *Reduce negative influences:* views about many factors potentially dilute the good feelings people have about their jobs. These include: company policy and administrative processes, supervision (that’s you, unless you are careful!), working conditions, salary, relationships with peers (and others), impact on personal life, status, security. Action is necessary in all these areas to counteract any negative elements.
- *Increase positive influences:* here specific inputs can act to add strength to positive feelings. Here such can be categorised under the following headings: achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth.

Many things contribute – from ensuring that a system is as sensible and convenient to people as possible (reducing negative policy/working conditions), to just saying “Well done” sufficiently often (recognising achievement).

The state of motivation of a group or individual can be likened to a balance. There are plusses on one side and minuses on the other. All vary in size or weight. The net effect of all the influences at a particular time decide the state of the balance and whether – overall – things are seen as positive, or not. Bearing in mind the image of a weighing scales may help you monitor things in this area.

Changing the balance is thus a matter of detail, with for example several small positive factors being able to outweigh what is seen as a major dis-satisfier.

You need to make it clear from the beginning that you are concerned that people get job satisfaction. Major schemes can wait. Early on you should:

- *Take the “motivational temperature”*: investigate how people feel now, this is what you have to work on
- *Consider the motivational implications of everything you do*: put in a new system, make a change, set up a new regular meeting – think: what will people think about it? Will *they* see it as positive?
- *Use the small things – regularly*: for example, if asked if you have praised people often enough lately, you must always be able to answer “Yes” – honestly
- *Never be censorious*: you must not judge other people’s motivation by your own feelings. Maybe they worry about things that strike you as silly or unnecessary. So be it. The job is to deal with it, not to rule it out as insignificant.

*Create the habit of making motivation a key part of your management style and doing so will stand you in good stead. If you care about the people (really care) – it will always show and always be approved.*

### **Keep in touch**

Take away communications from an organisation and there is not much left – yet it can often be neglected. *Communication is the foundation of a good relationship between manager and staff, and thus the basis for success*; it is something to get working for you early on.

Make sure you take action to create good – and *two-way* – communications. For example by:

- *Practising M.B.W.A.*: that is “management by walking about” – talk to people informally, ask, listen, take note and ensure feedback
- *Regularly informing people of your thinking*: by memo, e-mail, at meetings etc. tell people what your vision is, what you plan, hope and intend, what’s happening – *and how it will affect them*
- *Systematising the processes involved*: make aspects of what you do formal and regular, e.g. regular departmental meetings, updates on operational issues etc.

Remember that being seen as open (and honest), concerned that people should know what is going on and concerned also to encourage and receive their inputs, is fundamental to good management.

## **The power of consistency**

People work successfully with managers of all sorts, the tough and the tender. However nothing, but nothing, throws them more than a manager who runs hot and cold – sweetness and light one minute (and ready to listen and consult) and doom and gloom the next (just demanding that people “do what I say”).

Early on you may need to experiment a little with how you deal with things. That apart you should try to adopt a consistent style. For example, let people know that:

- You will always make time for them (soon, and at an agreed time, if not instantly)
- You never prevaricate (decisions may not be made instantly – if they need thought or consultation – but nor will they be endlessly avoided. If there must be some delay, tell people why and when things will be settled)

Make sure people understand *how* you approach things and *what* your attitude is to problems, opportunities and so on. While solutions may, doubtless should, vary (and for many things there is no one right way forward) – your method and style of going about things should be largely a known quantity. *People like to know where they are, and work more effectively when they do.*

## 5 WORKING WITH PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE RESULTS

A first overriding principle here should be the foundation of how you operate, and again it helps to make this clear early on.

Consider: managing people does not just mean acting as overseer to see that they get their work done satisfactorily. It means involving people throughout the team in a creative role to ensure that together you are all able to succeed.

Involving people on broad issues is motivational. Never underestimate people, their views can enhance everything – methods, standards, processes and overall effectiveness.

*Remember:* managers are not paid to have all the ideas that are necessary to keep their section working well in a changing world, but they *are* paid to make sure that there are *enough* ideas to make things work and go on working. *Note:* use your people and make it clear to them that you want and value their contributions.

### **Underpinning success**

Some matters are of particular importance to the way a manager and staff work together. This is not the place to review the whole management process, but the following four areas are key and must be addressed correctly early on if satisfactory results are to follow. They are:

1. Setting goals
2. Project management
3. Ongoing development
4. Job performance appraisal

Each of these is now commented on in turn.

i) *Setting goals*: Perhaps the oldest management maxim of all is the saying that “*if you don't know where you are going any road will do*”. For all its familiarity and common sense it is worth stressing – no one and no organisation works well without clear objectives. The responsibility for setting many of them may well now be yours. They will only be clear if they are:

- *Specific*: so that they are clearly understood and no misunderstanding is possible
- *Measurable*: so that everyone knows whether they have hit them, or not
- *Achievable*: because if they are simply pie in the sky they will be ignored and you, and any future process of objective setting, will lose credibility
- *Realistic*: in the sense that they must logically fit with the broad picture and be a desirable way of proceeding
- *Timed*: without clear timing they will become meaningless.

This means they are, classically stated, SMART.

*This is not cosmetic or management gobbledegook, it matters – the objectives you set must condition and direct what your people do; make sure everyone has clear goals from day one onwards.*

ii) *Project management*: Many of the things to be done involve the complexity of people working together in a co-ordinated way over time. Whenever this is headed up by, or involves, you make sure that the project is:

- Carefully and systematically planned and organised
- Effectively executed
- Precisely monitored
- Fine-tuned so that contingencies and changes are accommodated
- Brought in on time, on spec and, if appropriate, on budget.

Your management of others will be jeopardised if the way you organise the work of the section in any way falters.

iii) *Ongoing development:* Nothing is so important to people as their success. Time and again you hear people say something like “*above all, I want to work for a manager from whom I learn*”. The development of your people is not something to ignore or leave to training departments; the responsibility is yours.

You should aim to make sure people have the right knowledge, skills, and attitudes to do the jobs you want and do them well. Remember development is not (only) about correcting weaknesses, it is about upgrading and taking people forward, not least to keep up with change. Tell people that you:

- Recognise that their development is important
- Will help them gain experience and extend skills

And then create a visible system so to do

*Note:* There is an old saying that you can either *have five years’ experience, or one years’ experienced multiplied by five*. People want the latter – show them you are the means to achieve just that and they will want to work with you and do so effectively.

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Use the development cycle:

- i) Analyse the job (what is needed to do it)
- ii) Analyse the person (what competencies they have)
- iii) Look ahead, anticipate what new skills etc. the job might necessitate in future
- iv) Define the “gap” – what must be done to create a good fit between the person and the job
- v) Specify development activity, methods, budget and priorities
- vi) Implement action and monitor results

This is a rolling cycle. Keep clear records, make sure everyone is reviewed in this way and create a culture in which people value development and what it brings. Part of your job is helping people to learn.

Development is sufficiently important to people (as well as being important in its own right) for you to address the process and give out the right messages about it early on.

You may sensibly not want to send everyone off on a course in your first five minutes, so consider other actions, asking yourself:

- Should development be on the agenda for meetings?
- Can anything be done on-the-job? (If so then this is a key part of the manager’s personal responsibility for development)
- Can any ongoing actions be instigated now? (A simple monthly lunchtime session, perhaps)

The culture of an organisation in terms of its attitude to training and development is important to people; in part the view they take is dependent on you. Send the right signals.

### **Job performance appraisal**

Sadly in too many organisations appraisals are poorly conducted and rated unhelpful by those who are appraised. It is a good rule for new managers to: *make the first staff appraisal you conduct for your people memorable.*

Appraisals should:

- Be constructive, helpful and motivational
- Focus primarily on the future (yes, a review of past performance is involved, but the purpose is to make things go better in future)

- Be a genuine opportunity for both parties to ensure the year (or whatever period is involved) ahead goes well, perhaps better than the last
- Link to action plans for the future.

Study your organisation's appraisal system, learn how to conduct an effective appraisal meeting, and doing so becomes a good use of management time.

It is not just something that assists the achievement of results in a practical sense, but also a prime opportunity to position yourself as a competent manager; and differentiate yourself from others.

### **Systems and processes**

Over the previous few pages have selected a number of individual areas that are important to the management process and to the new manager. Whatever processes you are setting up they will be seen as a sign of your style; if they are approved, they build trust. If not they distance you from your staff.

So, overall make sure that systems and processes are:

- Fair
- Relevant
- Effective
- Understandable
- Time (and cost) effective.

And that they are not:

- Bureaucratic
- Restrictive or contradictory
- Out of touch with realities
- Incompatible with other systems (or with common sense)
- Over complex.

Everything you set up (or keep set up if someone else instigated it) must assist the work of the section to be effective and efficient. Those who do the work will quickly see inappropriate systems as you making their jobs more difficult; not a way you want to be seen. Remember the one-time Abbey National (bank) advertising slogan: *Life's complicated enough.*

## 6 ADDING STRENGTH TO THE TEAM

### Getting the best from the team

Recognise from the beginning that your effectiveness depends on the team and on the interaction of three separate factors:

You **must**:

- Ensure continuous *task achievement*
- Meet the *needs of the group*
- Meet the *needs of individual group members*.

*This balance must always be kept in mind (though some compromise may be necessary).*

Your own best contribution to getting things done is ideally approached systematically.

You must:

- Be clear exactly what the tasks are
- Understand how they relate to the objectives of the organisation (short and long term)
- Plan how they can be accomplished
- Define and provide the resources needed for accomplishment
- Create a structure and organisation of people that facilitates effective action
- Control progress as necessary during task completion
- Evaluate results, compare with objectives and fine tune action and method for the future.

The following three checklists highlight the thinking that is necessary here.

### CHECKLIST 1: *Achieving the task*

Ask yourself:

- Am I clear about my own responsibilities and authority?
- Am I clear about the department's agreed objectives?
- Have I a plan to achieve these objectives?
- Are jobs best structured to achieve what is required?
- Are working conditions/resources suited?
- Does everyone know their agreed targets/standards?

- Are the group competencies as they should be?
- Are we focused on priorities?
- Is any personal involvement I have well organised?
- Do I have the information necessary to monitor progress?
- Is management continuity assured? (In my absence)
- Am I seeing ahead and seeing the broad picture?
- Do I set a suitable example?

### CHECKLIST 2: *Meeting the individual needs*

Ask yourself if each individual:

- Feels a sense of personal achievement from what they do and the contribution it makes
- Feels their job is challenging, demands the best of them and matches their capabilities
- Receives suitable recognition for what they do
- Has control of areas of work for which they are accountable
- Feel that they are advancing in terms of experience and ability.

Many questions stem from this about what people do, how they do it, how what they do is organised and how they feel about it. It is worth thinking through what you need to ask in terms of your own particular team.

### CHECKLIST 3: *Team maintenance*

To involve the whole team in pulling together towards individual and joint objectives, ask, do I:

- Set team objectives clearly and make sure they are understood?
- Ensure standards are understood? (And that the consequences of not meeting them are understood and approved)
- Find opportunities to create team working?
- Minimise any dis-satisfactions?
- Seek and welcome new ideas?
- Consult appropriately and sufficiently often?
- Keep people fully informed? (About the long and short term)
- Reflect the team's views in dealings with senior management?
- Accurately reflect organisational policy to the team and in their objectives?

*Note:* I am sure it is self-apparent, but the responses to these questions should be positive. An analytical approach to these areas is the foundation to making your operation work effectively – and thus to getting tasks done effectively.

The organisational structure of a team is important, especially in dynamic times when such things may need to change and perhaps change regularly. Who does what, how one job relates to another, the lines of reporting and communication – all affect effectiveness and do so for good or ill. This is something to assess early on and watch on a regular basis. Check therefore:

- Making sure that the structure you inherited fits the tasks to be done
- Making any changes on a considered basis
- Explaining any changes positively (they may be seen with suspicion)
- Keeping the organisation under review to ensure a good “fit” between it and what it must do continues (external as well as internal changes or pressures can affect this)
- Fine-tune as necessary with an eye on tasks, individuals and the team as a whole.

Any, even slight, incongruities about the way people are organised can easily dilute overall effectiveness; do not make change for changes sake, but do not expect things to remain without needing change for ever.

### **Self sufficiency and responsibility**

If you organise things so that people are suitably self-sufficient it saves time and promotes goodwill. Remember that having responsibility is motivational – and that means that people tend to do best those things for which they see themselves as having personal responsibility.

This, in turn, means thinking in terms of – and using – two distinct levels of self-sufficiency in how people work. These are:

- *Involvement:* first, it is necessary to create involvement in ways such as: consultation, giving good information, making clear that suggestions are welcome and that experiment and change in how people do things is a good thing. This provides the opportunity for people to contribute beyond the base job.
- *Empowerment:* this goes beyond simple involvement. Empowerment adds the authority to be self-sufficient (to make your own decisions) and creates the basis for people to become self-sufficient on an ongoing basis. In a sense empowerment creates a culture of involvement and gives it momentum.

Together involvement and empowerment create an environment in which people can have responsibility for their own actions. But remember:

*Responsibility cannot be given – it can only be taken; thus only the **opportunity to take** it can be given.*

Specifically, acting so that you create a situation in which people *do* take responsibility for their work demands:

- Clear objectives (people knowing exactly what they must do and why)
- Good communications
- Motivation (to show the desirability of taking responsibility for the individual as well as the organisation)
- Trust (having created such a situation, you have to let people get on with things).

A team enjoying involvement in what they do, and having the authority to make decisions and get the job done, is the best recipe for successful management.

Overall a successful team is one that:

- Is set up right
- Responds to the responsibility they have for the task
- Seeks for constant improvement (and does not ever get stuck “on the tramlines”)
- Sees their manager as an asset and thus a fundamental support to their success.

A team in this situation will do well and are more likely to go on doing well, than a group just “told what to do”. Your role is one of catalyst – constantly helping the team to keep up with events, to change in the light of events and succeed because they are always configured for success.

## 7 MAINTAINING SUCCESS

Let's look ahead, something you should do on a regular basis as a manager. It is only (unnecessary?) short-term firefighting that stops this happening sufficiently. Remember this sensible saying: "My interest in the future is because I am going to spend the rest of my life there." *Charles Kettering*

All action that you take early on must be predicated on the necessity not only to create an effective management relationship, but also to maintain it. Thus you need to consider two time scales alongside each other:

- *The short term:* asking what the immediate impact of something will be. Asking: How will people respond? How will it add to the growing view people have of what kind of manager I am? And will it "do the job", getting done whatever needs to be done, and getting it done effectively?
- *The long term:* asking such questions as: does this set an unfortunate precedent? Is this an approach that makes sense long term? Or: even if this causes upset now, will the logic of it be clear later or will it be promptly forgotten?

While matters of immediate urgency are, in a sense, always a priority – *you do well always to keep the long term in mind also.*

Your job is to get things done – to achieve your objectives. Doing this demands that you win, and keep, the goodwill and support of your team. On an ongoing basis, therefore, you need to get into the habit of considering both the effectiveness of your actions and decisions – will they do the job that needs to be done? – And the way they will be perceived – how will other people react?

Sometimes the response is positive. People approve the decision and applaud you for the line you have taken. In this case, you may want to maximise this effect. Sometimes you may feel that the response will be negative, in which case you may need to:

- Reconsider, and select another way forward
- Take the action, but explain why a particular approach is necessary
- Compensate for the negative reaction. Perhaps you need to do something, you explain it but know it will still rankle – so you find an opportunity to balance it with something else making it clear that it was exceptional.

## **Nothing is for ever**

The environment in which you work is no doubt dynamic. Change is the order of the day. We may not know exactly what is coming, but during the course of your career as a manager you can be sure that change will continue and that the pace of change will increase.

Never forget this and help – and expect – your people to recognise it too.

As a manager you are effectively an agent for change, so you must:

- Constantly review everything (including procedures, systems and policy) to anticipate what needs changing
- Involve your team in this process, both in identifying areas for change and in prompting ideas about how change should be made
- Always be open-minded, and create a culture of open-mindedness amongst your team

Challenging the status quo – asking “Why?” and actively prompting change – is a key part of your remit. Keep ahead; managing today using yesterdays’ methods will never keep your team with you.

## **Maintaining credibility**

If you act like a good manager, then people will *believe* you are a good manager. Many things already mentioned have influence here, in addition remember that:

- You are judged not by the number of times you fail, but by the number of your successes: keep an eye on the ratio
- You are more likely to succeed by sticking your neck out than by always playing it safe (though consideration and care is necessary)
- If you admit your mistakes people will see that you are human, then they can help you not repeat them (and avoid making similar ones themselves)
- You should never cut off your options until it is unavoidable; you may want the choice later

Now that you are a manager you have to operate in a way that creates a persona that inspires respect and confidence: *your success can rub off on others.*

## **Building on success**

The ongoing success of you and your operation involves a cycle of activity:

1. Understanding the key things that can create success
2. Being conscious of *how* you do things as you do them
3. Planning and acting in accordance with that
4. Monitoring the results arising from what you do
5. Fine-tuning, and building in the experience of how things worked to improve what you do next.
6. Never rest on your laurels: remember even the best performance can be improved.

## 8 AFTERWORD: SUMMARY AND KEY ISSUES

In this final chapter I aim to focus on some overall factors that act to dictate success and also to give a final example as much to illustrate the style of thinking a new manager must take on as anything else.

First, **keep the key management functions in mind**, you should:

- Define objectives (your own and others)
- Plan (and time) action
- Communicate (throughout the process)
- Support others' action
- Evaluate performance (and link to the future)

Then relate this to the task, the team and the individual people. This will provide a sound foundation for everything else you do.



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Before moving on in summary, it is worth noting that we have come full circle. A good start is, of course, desirable in its own right. This is not just because it makes for a more comfortable transition for you, but because it brings better results. Thus ongoing success you will have as a manager is influenced by:

- The attitude you take to the transition
- What you do *before* you move into a new appointment
- The *early* focus you bring to bear on key issues
- The relationship you thus cultivate with staff
- The working habits you create for yourself (and others) in the process.

Together, all the above influence both early success in the job – and how you take things forward into the future. *The opportunity of getting off to a good start may occur only once, but its effects are long lived.*

From the beginning, and on an ongoing basis, always operate on the basis that managing people:

- *Takes time* (you cannot get so bound up in your own workload that you skimp on time you should spend with others)
- *Takes effort* (it is a challenge, there are no magic formulae or quick fixes that will do the job for you)
- *Needs thought* (the obvious or immediate answer may not be best, things may well need research, analysis and thinking through)
- *Is not a solo effort* (seek and take advice from where you can – including your own staff)
- *Will not always go right* (as Oscar Wilde said “Experience is the name so many people give to their mistakes”; admit your mistakes – publicly if necessary – and learn from your experience)
- *Is a process of helping people to be self-sufficient*; this implies trust and that management works best when you take a positive view of what people can do (and do not see your role as a sort of corporate “security guard”)
- *Is based on good, regular and open communication* (something that pervades many issues commented on in these pages)
- *Needs to be acceptable to people before it can be effective* (hence the crucial role of motivation as part of the management task)
- *Becomes self-sustaining when it works*, i.e. if people find your management helpful – both to the job, the organisation and to them – then they will support it, support you and the ongoing process of creating success will continue.

Overall: management is not what you do *to* people it is the process of how you work *with* people to help prompt their performance. Work *with* people from day one – and go on doing it throughout your management career.

At the end of the day success all comes down to a taking a well-considered approach. Charge in, desperate to make an impression, go at everything at once in order to make an impression and disaster may closely follow. And as was said at the beginning: *first impressions last*. This is a sentiment that has been thought of in a similar way for a long time:

“First organise the near at hand, then organise the far removed. First organise the inner, then organise the outer. First organise the basic, then organise the derivative. First organise the strong, then organise the weak. First organise the great, then organise the small. First organise yourself, then organise others.”

– Written by Chinese General Zhuge Liang nearly 2000 years ago

Perhaps we should resolve to particularly bear in mind the last sentence: *First organise yourself, then organise others*.

Having highlighted key issues let’s turn finally to a couple of points linked to the way you should think now you are a manager.

### **Management magic**

At the start of this text the point was made that managing people takes time, the numbers mean that the time is likely to pay off if you do the right things and do them well. To review everything that makes management work is beyond the brief here, but from the beginning you should remember that:

- Some of what needs doing is absurdly simple. Consider the power of saying “well done”, the potential of asking others if they have any ideas
- Some ideas and actions have far reaching consequences. Something that works and is used again and again can act to boost effectiveness in a big way.

Now let me include an example of this sort of thing, both as a useful tactic and an example of action that has this kind of deep effect.

### **EXAMPLE: Simply the most time saving phrase in the language**

There is a scene that is played out in offices all over the world and which must waste untold hours every single day. Imagine a manager is busy in their office when a head comes round the door and one of their staff comes in. ‘*What is it?*’ they ask. And the reply is something like: ‘*I am not sure how to handle so and so and wondered if you would just check it with me.*’ The manager thinks for a second. They are busy – in the middle of a job and not wanting to lose concentration – but have already been interrupted. So their first thought is to minimise the interruption so they can get back to work fast. So, if the matter allows, they spend a minute or two explaining what to do and then tell the other person to let them get on, and the brief impromptu meeting ends. This may be done kindly or abruptly, the effect is much the same, and the scene may be played out many times in a day by the one manager.

But suppose the same manager is away from the office for a couple of days. In their absence people face similar situations. If the manager was in, they would go and ask. In their absence, they simply get on with the job, when the manager returns to the office what do they find? A chain of disasters? A plethora of wrong decisions and misjudged actions? Rarely; the things that would have been checked if they had been there have been actioned, and not only is no harm done, everything has probably gone perfectly well.

Think about it. I suspect this picture will ring bells with many, if not most, managers. Why does it happen? It is a classic case of thinking that it is quicker to do things *for* people, most often in this case providing the answer or making a decision, action follows, and life goes on. I believe this is wrong. You have to take a longer term view, and this is where the most time saving phrase in the language comes in.

Next time you are interrupted in the way I have described, try responding by saying: ‘*What do you think you should do?*’ They may not know, but you can press the point, prompt them to make some, several, suggestions, and when they do, then ask which solution they think is best. This takes a few minutes, certainly longer than the earlier “do this” response, but if they are coping when you are not there to ask, then you will find that when you prompt them they most often come up with a good answer (in business there is rarely any one right way). Then you can say something like: ‘*That’s fine*’, and away they go to carry on, leaving you to get back to your own work.

Now this is not just a better way of dealing with this situation. It is doing something else of very real value: it is teaching them not to interrupt, but rather to have the confidence to think it through for themselves. You have to be insistent about this. It will not work if you only make them think it through when you have more time, and still provide a quick answer when you are busy. It is the thinking it through you insist they do that allows them to develop both skills and confidence. So, every time – every single time – someone comes through the door with a question about something with which you believe they should be able to deal unaided, you say: *‘What do you think you should do?’* It must become a catch phrase.

Then as this practice continues the message will get home to them, so that if they even start to think of asking you they can hear your likely response in their mind. If you do this you will find such questions coming less and less often. You will find that if they do ask, they move straight to the second stage, and come in with two or three thought out options just wanting you to say which is best. Resist; ask them. The message will stick and, surprise, surprise, you will find you are saving time. What is more, your people will almost certainly get to like it more also, especially if you comment favourably on how well they are doing on the decisions they are making unaided.

This is one of the best tested and useful time savers around – the most time saving phrase in the language – and all it needs is some persistence and determination. Early on you may think it is taking too much time, but the investment formula will surely pay off. There are considerable amounts of time to be saved here, linked in fact to the number of people who report to you. Do not be faint hearted about this, it is very easy to break your resolve in a busy moment and send someone on their way with an instant dictated solution. Exceptions to your consistency will just make the lesson take longer to get over. But this idea really does work in the longer term; not to operate this way does your people a disservice and allows you to miss out on one of the best time savers managers can find.

Forgive the last heading, such a tactic is not of course magic, but the word does serve to illustrate that there are things that are both simple and effective, indeed some of the simple things have the greatest effect. Most important it makes people think, prompts idea generation and self-sufficiency and can dramatically and positively affect results – and surely that’s what management is all about; from day one!

## **And finally...**

Being a manager is a challenge (this is where we started), but it is also almost infinitely rewarding to create and maintain a team of people who deliver excellent performance and produce whatever results are targeted.

As we have seen, it is a task that takes time, requires effort and needs a considered approach. Reading this book will not guarantee you become CEO in the first six weeks (if you know what does that, let me know), but it may help you get firmly set on an initial rung of the ladder, and to go on from there.

Meantime, I suggest you always remember the old saying:

*Never rely on good luck, it is only useful to explain why other people succeed (especially those you dislike!)*

So, in ending I do not wish you luck I wish you well with it. *At the end of the day all sorts of things can help, but only one person can guarantee that you become a good manager – and that's you.*

**"There are no short cuts to any place worth going"**

**– Beverly Sills**