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Your first Management Position

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Your First Management Position

Becoming a manager for the first time is a significant life and professional event. It is also a daunting experience taking on your first management position and having a degree of natural anxiety is expected. However, somehow you have earned the position of manager, a senior manager has appointed you to the position, and they have faith that you can do it.

Despite any misgivings you may have, they can see that you possess the attributes the position demands, like your personal qualities, strengths, and the requisite skills. It is worth reflecting on what these things are as they will boost your self-confidence. As a new manager, you may feel that you need to have answers to everything, don't fall into this trap; ask your team members for help; it is the right thing to do and shows your humility.

If they haven't already, you should expect your manager to explain their expectations of your position. These are vital to know as it is these that your performance will be judged on. Whatever the reasons are that got you the job, you are expected to deliver, so make sure you are very clear about what that is.

You may have gained your management position at a new company meaning that it is a more difficult way to start as you may not know how the business works, and you won't know the culture (the way people behave and speak). Take your time; there is no rush.

Things to do in your first month

1. Honeymoon period.

You are not expected to perform miracles or deliver much in your first month; sometimes known as the honeymoon period, which, for senior managers, can last as long as three months or the first 100 days. For junior managers, you can relax a bit for the first month. This is because it is accepted that it takes time for you to understand your new position, its requirements, and people's expectations of you.

2. Have a plan.

The most successful managers have a clear plan of what that first month, two months, and three months will look like. You cannot manage anything successfully if you don't have a plan covering your work and that of your team. Talking with your team and your business stakeholders is a way of finding out what's currently working, what isn't, what the current priorities are and identifying potential issues and solutions.

3. Get to know your team.

Stepping into a management position for the first time isn't just a change of task; it's a fundamental shift in thinking and approach to work. To be successful, you must transition from getting the job done to get the work done through other people. This requires a new level of self-awareness, a different range of skills, and a new perspective that redefines success. Meet your staff, explain a little about your background, but only a little, a couple of sentences, people aren't interested in what you have done. Talk mainly about them, ask what their job is, what they do, ask what their top 3 issues are.

Always avoid any discussion about personalities, that is, people as causes of problems. Always bring any conversations about people back to focus on work processes and functions as potential issues, but never the people. You can make your judgements about people later. For now, observe how people behave, how they talk, whether they are positive or negative in their views, what seems to bother them, and what they like and dislike about the team and the company.

For the first few weeks, spend 50% of your time listening and 50% doing. Listen to the needs of others, ask about things like: Do they have the tools they need to do their jobs, have they been trained? Do they understand their roles and responsibilities? Do they have performance goals, do they enjoy teamwork? Don't change anything; listen and observe. Record your notes about issues, things you might change, improvements that can be made and especially things that might boost staff morale.

4. Start doing check-Ins.

When you first start, set up one-on-one meetings with each team member to discuss their role, goals, and any work challenges, they may currently be facing. Also, try to join team lunches and Friday after-work drinks to get to know everyone in a more relaxed environment. The better you know your team, the better you're able to determine how they work.

5. Meet your peers.

That is, managers who are on the same organisational level as you. Introduce yourself, have a two-sentence description of your work experience ready to tell them, ask them what their job is, what they expect from you and if they have any issues with your team. Finally, give them a copy of the organisation chart and ask them if it is correct or add their teams.

6. Learn as much as possible.

First off, make it your mission to learn everything you can. Investigate if your organisation offers formal supervisor, project management or management training, and take advantage of it if they do. Review team member personnel files and past performance reviews.

Do not make many, if indeed any, changes after you arrive; resist this temptation, and instead, take plenty of time to understand your organisation and team fully. Make lots of notes for review later, don't rely on your memory. Use a pad and pen, not a laptop or tablet. (You remember more by writing than typing). Understand the business structure, get a copy of the company's organisational chart, or, if need be, create your own, including your position and team.

7. Change your focus.

A critical mindset to adopt is that you are now a manager and not a team member or work mate; you must think about controlling, planning, and organising against just doing. This shift can be difficult at first, but it's crucial as it is tied to your team's performance. This means, if your team fails, you fail. And if they succeed? You can take credit, but you must share it with the rest of the team, or they won't be willing to do a great job for you again.

8. Be on model behaviour.

You are now a role model for your team members and others to copy. You must set a good example with everything you do and say. Team members will only do their best at work if they see you are doing the same. This means meeting commitments, meeting deadlines, doing what you say and keeping your personal thoughts to yourself.

9. Manage upwards.

Being the boss doesn't mean you can ignore your manager. It's more important than ever to keep them in the loop since you'll be reporting the progress of an entire team of people. It's also essential to ensure that the goals you outline for your team are tied to your manager's priorities. Ask to set up regular meetings to discuss your goals, progress, issues, and how they relate to the organisation. You can only impress your boss with your team's progress if you're moving in the right direction. Ask your boss about being a mentor for you or if they can recommend someone who can.

Things to do in your first six months

1. Focus on relationships.

It is very important to build trust, influence, and agree on mutual expectations with everyone you work with. The best way to do this is by establishing productive personal relationships. Simply focusing only on one-on-one relationships with team members is not enough to guarantee success.

2. Focus on team building.

During their first six months, new managers tend to fail to recognise and address their team-building responsibilities. You may be tempted to exclusively focus on your team member relationships only as against a view of the team. Individual team member performance is one thing; team performance is quite another. Working with your team to solve problems, make decisions, set direction, and review progress are just some of the things you need to do.

"When new managers focus solely on one-on-one relationships, they neglect a fundamental aspect of effective leadership: harnessing the collective power of the group to improve individual performance and commitment. By shaping team culture, the teams' norms and values, a manager can unleash the problem-solving abilities of the diverse talents that make up the team." Source: Linda A. Hill, *Becoming A Manager*, 1992.

3. Pay attention to detail.

"Micro-managing and paying attention to detail are not the same thing. Paying attention to detail is what good managers must do to ensure that work is done correctly. It involves assigning work, allowing staff to do it their way, and ensuring it gets done according to agreed standards.

- Checking-in during team members work progress to see if assistance is needed and to ensure that work will be completed on time is not micromanaging; it is paying attention to detail.
- Hold staff accountable for quality work and deadlines but give them the freedom to determine how to do their job. Tell them what you want, but not how to do it.
- Encourage team members to try new ideas.
- Allocate enough time and create reasonable deadlines that allow for innovation and creativity to take place. Check on progress using your Weekly Check-Ins and as an opportunity to offer help and resources; this should also be a learning opportunity for you." Source: Eric J. Romero.

4. Delegate.

Doing all the work by yourself is no longer the goal. Productive managers drive team results by delegating tasks to their team members (team members or subordinates are known as direct reports). It's not possible to do all the work yourself anymore. If

you try to, your team members will stagnate, and productivity will slow. Plus, delegating shows trust in your team.

5. Shift your skillset.

Many new managers struggle because they rely too much on technical skills that aren't as necessary in a manager position. So, shift your mindset and your skillset and work on managing others.

- Continue with your team member Weekly Check-Ins.
- Develop team member skills by assigning challenging tasks.
- Provide constant and consistent feedback.

Traps most new managers fall into

1. Relying on the same skills that got you promoted.

It's easy to assume that the skills that made you a good mobile phone salesperson will make you a good mobile phone sales manager; however, this is not the case. Thinking that you can rely on your existing job knowledge and technical skills only to succeed as a manager is a mistake. You must take the time to develop good management and people skills; these are more important than your technical skills. While having knowledge (being a subject matter expert) is important, management requires an entirely different skill set. This is the most common mistake first-time managers make, not focussing on managing their team members or peers. Most people are promoted to the position of manager based on their previous excellent performance - but aren't given adequate management training.

2. Not managing upwards, downwards, and sideways.

As the name suggests, this means managing in three directions. Before you were a manager, you only had to concern yourself with satisfying your manager's needs - managing upwards. Now that you have staff, you also need to concern yourself with their needs - managing downwards. And because you have other managers as peers, you need to manage sideways. **Managing upwards** means satisfying your manager's needs, responding to your manager's directions, and prioritising completing your manager's work requests ahead of your own. Be careful of the following:

- Failing to speak regularly with your manager.

- Approaching your manager with a problem when you have not considered how the problem may be solved.
- Giving your manager a nasty surprise. (The no-surprises rule.)
- Doing anything that requires your manager to defend you.

Managing downwards means giving direction to your team members, allocating tasks to them, prioritising their jobs, and responding to their needs ahead of your own.

Managing sideways means being attentive to the needs of your peers.

3. Not asking for help.

Not asking for help from your manager, team members, or indeed others is a mistake. Some new managers falsely believe that as a new manager, they should have all the answers and that if they don't, they are weak. Experienced managers know that no one has all the answers all the time. Knowledge, skills, and experience are only gained over time; it is easier to learn on the job if you can draw on the support and assistance of others.

Another reason new managers don't ask for help is that they believe it may damage or dilute their relationships with others. Sharing the fact that you don't know something, admitting to a mistake is in some new managers minds a risk that the information shared will be used against them. Take your manager as an example; as a new manager, you can develop a good, strong relationship with them simply by admitting your mistakes and by asking for help and advice.

4. Micromanaging.

Many people confuse micro-management with attention to detail. Micro-managing has a negative connotation, and for a good reason. When a manager assigns work, tells capable team members exactly how to do it, monitors the work excessively, and takes over when the work is not done exactly as they wanted – that is micromanaging. The result is that team members never learn how to do their job or utilise their skills and creativity. Micromanaging discourages team members who will quickly lose interest, feeling that they have no sense of ownership in their work.

Micromanaging tells your team members that you do not trust them to do the job. When you constantly step in or second-guess their decisions, you're telling them that you know better than they do. Make sure to give your team members some latitude and let go of your desire to control every outcome.

5. Being an autocrat.

A new manager can feel pressured by their team members to be a strong manager and get results. It is a mistake to push your team too hard by being unreasonable or demanding instead of supporting them. If you focus on being there for your team and giving them the guidance and support, they need, they will perform better.

6. Not establishing crystal clear objectives.

Which is a better objective?

Example 1: Increase sales.

Example 2: Increase sales by 20% and generate 10% more revenue.

Example 1: Reduce the number of default loans.

Example 2: Reduce the number of default loans by 10%.

Other considerations

1. Managers do and do not wield significant authority.

New managers often believe that their new position gives them more authority and, with that, the freedom and autonomy to do what they like. They find that they are now a part of a network of similar people, who are making relentless and often conflicting demands on them and instead of feeling free, they feel constrained.

The people who present the most difficulties don't fall under your control – peer managers, outside suppliers or managers in another business unit. A common mistake is ignoring these relationships, focussing too much on team members only. When you finally accept your network role, you can feel overwhelmed by its demands.

2. Authority flows from the manager's position.

New managers do have some authority despite the interdependencies that constrain them; the secret is how to best use it. The biggest mistake is becoming an autocrat, believing that doing this will get better and faster results which you will not. The best way forward is by realising that your new team members are the secret to your success. Just telling a team member to do something does not make it happen - in fact, the more talented the team member, the less likely they are to follow your orders. Fairly quickly, the realisation comes that the source of your power is not your

formal authority. Authority emerges only as you establish credibility with team members, peers, and your manager.

New managers need to demonstrate their management competence over and above everything else. This can be a problem because many new managers believe their technical knowledge and competence is the most important thing they have to offer, and they rely on it far too much.

3. Managers must control their team members.

Because of insecurity in their new role, most new managers can become too controlling to get compliance from their team members. They fear that their team members will walk all over them if they don't establish control early on. To gain this control, they often rely too much on their formal authority.

Even if they achieve some measure of compliance, whether through formal authority or authority earned over time, compliance does not equal commitment, and if team members are not committed, they won't be happy or produce good work. Sharing your power with their team members is the right approach. In this way, you command more influence that allows your people to take the initiative.

Summary

1. **Honeymoon period.** - You are not expected to perform miracles or deliver much in your first month.
2. **Have a plan.** - The most successful managers have a clear plan of what that first month, two months, and three months will look like.
3. **Get to know your team.** - To be successful, you must transition from getting the job done to get the work done through other people. This requires a new level of self-awareness, a different range of skills, and a new perspective that redefines success. Meet your staff, explain a little about your background, but only a little, a couple of sentences, people aren't interested in what you have done. Talk mainly about them, ask what their job is, what they do, ask what their top 3 issues are.
4. **Start doing check-ins.** - When you first start, set up one-on-one meetings with each team member to discuss their role, goals, and any challenges, they may currently be facing.
5. **Learn as much as possible.** - First off, make it your mission to learn everything you can. Review team member personnel files and past performance reviews.
6. **Change your focus.** - A critical mindset to adopt is that you are now a manager and not a team member; you must think about controlling, planning, and organising against just doing.

7. **Be on model behaviour.** - You are now a role model for your team members and others to copy. You must set a good example with everything you do.
8. **Manage upwards.** - Being the boss doesn't mean you can ignore your manager. It's more important than ever to keep them in the loop since you'll be reporting the progress of an entire team of people.
9. **Focus on relationships.** - It is very important to build trust, influence, and agree on mutual expectations with everyone you work with.
10. **Focus on team building.** - During your first six months, you may tend to fail to recognise and address your team-building responsibilities. You may be tempted to exclusively focus on your team member relationships only as against a view of the team. Individual team member performance is one thing; team performance is quite another. Working with your team to solve problems, make decisions, set direction, and review progress are just some of the things you need to do.
11. **Pay attention to detail.** - Micromanaging and paying attention to detail is not the same. Paying attention to detail is what good managers must do to ensure that work is done correctly. It involves assigning work, allowing staff to do it their way, and ensuring it gets done according to agreed standards.
12. **Delegate.** - Doing all the work by yourself is no longer the goal. Productive managers drive team results by delegating tasks to their team members.
13. **Relying on the same skills that got you promoted.** - It's easy to assume that the skills that made you a good mobile phone salesperson will make you a good mobile phone sales manager; however, this is not the case. Thinking that you can rely on your existing job knowledge and technical skills only to succeed as a manager is a mistake. You must take the time to develop good management and people skills; these are more important than your technical skills. While having knowledge (being a subject matter expert) is important, management requires an entirely different skill set.
14. **Being an autocrat.** - A new manager can feel pressured by their team members to be a strong manager and get results. It is a mistake to push your team too hard by being unreasonable or demanding instead of supporting them. If you focus on being there for your team and giving them the guidance and support, they need, they will perform better.