

Making the Transition to Management

1st August 2020

You've recently become a manager or supervisor, or about to become one. Your responsibilities have grown, and relationships with colleagues (as well as the organisation's expectations of you) have changed. This period of transition may feel exhilarating, but also unsettling—adapting to your new role will take time.

Much of your success as a manager will depend on the relationships you build with peers, employees, and company leaders. To succeed, you'll need to earn the respect of all these groups, and you must now learn to think like a manager as well.

Common pitfalls for new managers

An ineffectual managerial style can lower productivity and morale, increase complaints, and lead to product and quality problems. As you work to find a supervisory style that feels comfortable for you and your employees, remember some of the managers you've worked for in the past. Consider which managers were most effective, and what behaviour or approaches seemed counterproductive. This can be useful as you start to develop your own style.

Here are a few common pitfalls new managers encounter:

Oversupervising. Micromanaging is sure to alienate employees, so try to lead without being heavy-handed, exercising power and authority only when absolutely necessary. Setting up specific check-in times to make sure that an assignment is on track will help you give an employee more autonomy. Also, when possible, focus on required project outcomes when assigning work, and allow employees to work toward those goals in ways that best suit their skills and work style.

Undersupervising. New managers can also give too little supervision because of lack of experience, fear of appearing bossy, or the desire to be liked by the friends and colleagues they now manage. Effective managers stay on top of projects and problems so that their departments run smoothly, taking responsibility for team performance. Sometimes this means making difficult decisions or telling an employee their work isn't meeting expectations. Most employees want to feel that someone is in charge and respect a manager who keeps a team on target.

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Failing to delegate. The manager's job is to get the work done through others, not to do it for them. Because many managers are promoted based on their outstanding technical work, they find this shift in responsibility especially difficult. But, failing to delegate results in little time for strategic planning, organising, and thinking about the big picture. Effective delegating requires planning and trust as well as employees who are able and willing to perform the task.

Sharing confidential information. In your new role as a manager, you'll probably have access to confidential employee information and personnel records as well as confidential company information. Be careful never to share confidential information with anyone, either at home or in the workplace.

Blaming upper management for unpopular decisions. Managers are often asked to announce and explain new company policies to their employees. Managers who disparage unpopular new policies by using phrases like, "they're making us do this," undermine both their own influence and the company's ability to drive change. If you disagree with a policy, discuss your concerns privately with your manager. Make sure you understand the company's reasons for initiating the policy. When communicating the policies, explain them clearly so that employees can understand why the policies are being introduced, even if they don't agree with them.

Providing preferential treatment to favourite employees. Effective managers spend a reasonable amount of time with each of their employees and make sure assignments are fairly distributed and rotated. Of course, you'll have some employees who you feel more positive about, but this shouldn't be evident to your employees. Real friends who are now your employees won't expect preferential treatment. If you've usually eaten lunch or taken breaks with friends in your department, you still can, occasionally, as long as you also spend similar amounts of time with all your employees.

The pressures and challenges new managers face

The manager's job is to meet the needs and expectations of employees and management. When these needs clash, as they are bound to from time to time, you may feel pressure from both sides. Successful managers manage their stress by getting the support and

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information they need. Here are some proven ways to ensure you take care of yourself and get the help you need during this transition:

Work closely with the human resources (HR) department. It's essential for you to develop a close working relationship with your HR team. Take advantage of all training schemes offered for new managers so that you fully understand the HR policies and procedures you'll be required to follow. Be sure that you understand the types of situations in which you'll be expected to contact HR immediately for guidance, such as an employee with a performance problem. Your HR department is a valuable resource for guidance in talking to employees, dealing with problems, and understanding your organisation's policies and procedures.

Get the support you need to meet the pressures and challenges of the job. As a new manager, you're probably working longer hours and feeling more pressure than you were before. This is sure to have an effect on your work life and your personal life. Find out what kind of support your organisation offers.

Take good care of yourself. As with any major change, adequate sleep and a healthy diet will also help you handle stress. Regular exercise is also an effective and healthy way to reduce stress.

Maintain your network. New managers often feel so overwhelmed with new responsibilities that they neglect the relationships they have with peers, colleagues and former managers. Try to maintain or expand your network by scheduling occasional lunches, coffee breaks or other activities to ensure that you keep up with your business acquaintances. These relationships are invaluable when you're seeking co-operation with other departments.

Best practices for new managers

With so many different responsibilities, new managers can often feel so overwhelmed that they don't know what to focus on first. Here are some key factors that will help you succeed as a manager and stay on track:

Develop a good relationship with your own manager. You'll need to communicate effectively not only with the people you're managing, but also with your own boss. Get to

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know your manager and become familiar with their work habits and style. Do they like to receive regular written reports or informal verbal updates? Make an effort to understand the problems and pressures your manager is facing, and make sure you clearly understand what they expect from your team. This helps build mutual trust.

Create shared team goals. It's your responsibility to help shape goals and steer your team towards the organisation's larger objectives. Employees must be able to see how their efforts fit into the direction of the department, division and company. The more involved employees are in goal setting, the more committed they'll be to achieving success. Make sure that they know what you expect from them and what you see as the critical department goals.

Be a clear and careful communicator with your team. Keep communication lines open by providing as much information as you can. This will help build trust and reduce conflicts and misunderstandings. Hold regular team meetings. You can begin a meeting by saying, "Let me bring you up to speed on some things going on in the company." If you don't know all the answers, share what you do know and admit to not knowing what you don't; some information is better than none. This is especially important in times of change.

Have meetings with each of your employees one-on-one. Talk to each of your employees individually within the first few weeks of any new managerial assignment. Find out about their career goals; what they like best and least about their current assignments; and what obstacles, if any, make it difficult for them to do their best work. Make sure that each employee knows to come to you with questions and concerns. Schedule regular one-on-one sessions with each employee.

Check in regularly to see how things are going and to make sure people have what they need to do the job. While you want to give employees as much autonomy and responsibility as you can, you still need to keep in touch to make sure that staff members feel confident and competent in their jobs. Make sure that they have the tools, resources, and information they need to do good work. Help to clear away obstacles that are preventing them from meeting work goals.

Learn how to delegate. Effective managers give employees sufficient authority, autonomy and resources based on their skill level and experience. Employees with less experience

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may need more support and supervision, while experienced workers can usually perform well with less direction.

Recognise and reward good work. It's important to give praise and recognition both publicly and privately. All employees need to feel valued. Let them know when they're doing good work. Most employees find recognition that specifically relates to their personal efforts and acknowledges the value of their accomplishments much more meaningful than bland generalisations.

Handle any problems as quickly as possible. The longer you wait, the bigger a problem becomes. Keep constructive feedback focused on the work—not on personalities. Your goal is to improve performance, not to lay blame. Instead of saying, "You always miss deadlines," you could say, "This project is taking longer than we expected. Where did we fall behind, and what are your ideas for getting back on track?" Focus the conversation on behaviour and outcomes. Keep dated notes on key events for use later in performance reviews. Give constructive feedback or reprimands in private, never in public.

You'll experience many changes as you grow into your new role. Expect some growing pains along the way as you move into a new position of leadership and responsibility. It may take as long as a year for you to feel comfortable in your new role. You'll know you've made a successful transition to management when you and your employees are performing confidently and competently—and when your department and company are working in harmony to reach shared goals.

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