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THE
FIRST-TIME
MANAGER



SEVENTH EDITION

**LOREN B. BELKER
JIM McCORMICK
GARY S. TOPCHIK**

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- LOREN B. BELKER •
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HARPERCOLLINS
LEADERSHIP

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*To all managers who aspire to advance their skills for
the benefit of themselves and those they lead.*

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The First-Time Manager

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PREFACE TO THE SEVENTH EDITION

IT CONTINUES TO BE AN HONOR to be a part of this vitally important project that has had such a positive impact on hundreds of thousands of readers for more than thirty-five years. My first exposure to this book was when AMACOM Books approached me about updating it to create the sixth edition. Upon reading this classic, I arrived at four conclusions. The first was that this book is a fantastic resource that has clearly helped countless new managers. The second was that it would be impossible for people to read this book and not improve their ability to manage well, regardless of how long they have been managing. The third was that I would have thoroughly enjoyed sitting down with Loren Belker and Gary Topchik because both our philosophies of management and our general approaches to life are so well aligned. My final conclusion was that improving this extraordinary resource would be a daunting challenge. I felt as though I was being asked to polish an already brilliant gem.

Having never had the opportunity to meet Loren or Gary led me to feel an even greater obligation to bring their work forward respectfully, add some new insights, and not diminish the value they have provided. To paraphrase Sir Isaac Newton, if I have provided value “it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Respectfully,
Jim McCormick

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE the managers I have encountered and observed throughout my career. Their skills have ranged from extraordinary to horrendous, though I have learned from all of them. To the team members I have had the privilege to lead I say thank you. You have all been sources of enjoyment and learning. To the aspiring managers I have had the opportunity to teach, I applaud you for your thirst for knowledge. Thank you to my editor, Ellen Kadin, for entrusting me with the legacy that is this book. And finally, I thank my agent, Maryann Karinch, who knows my skills better than I.

—JM

INTRODUCTION

BY OPENING THIS BOOK, you have set yourself apart and made the clear statement that you desire to improve your management ability. Our compliments to you for your desire to both improve your professional skills and your ability to make other peoples' professional lives more fulfilling. This book was created to assist you in that effort.

Just as you cannot lead a parade if no one is following, you cannot manage if you don't have a team to lead. Engrained in this book is the belief that a well-led team will always achieve results that are superior to those of an individual. Consistent with that conviction, this book was written by a team. Three of us have taken up the challenge—at different times and in our own ways—of seeking to provide you with the best guidance we can muster for a new or prospective manager. The results of this joint effort are better because of our collaboration. The same will be true for you if you take to heart the insights you will discover in this book.

The advice in this book centers around two overarching messages: Be thoughtful in your actions and always conduct yourself with class. You will never regret either.

PART ONE

SO YOU'RE GOING TO MANAGE PEOPLE

Welcome to the exciting and challenging role of manager. Being successful is about valuing, understanding, and guiding the most complex of all systems—people. You will find it more of an art than a science and potentially more rewarding than anything you have ever done.

1



THE ROAD TO MANAGEMENT

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS that people become managers.

Unfortunately, many companies don't go through a very thorough process in choosing those who will be moved into a managerial position. Often the judgment is based solely on how well the person is performing in his current position. The best individual contributor doesn't always make the best manager, although many companies still make the choice on that basis. The theory is that successful past performance is the best indicator of future success. However, management skills are very different from the skills one needs to succeed as an individual contributor.

So the fact that an employee is a good performer, even though she demonstrates a pattern of success, doesn't necessarily mean the person will be a successful manager. Being a manager requires skills beyond those of being an excellent technician. Managers need to focus on people, not just tasks. They need to rely on others, not just be self-reliant. Managers are also team oriented and have a broad focus, whereas non-managers succeed by having a narrow focus and being detail oriented. In many ways, transitioning from the role of an individual contributor to a manager is similar to the difference between being a technician and being an artist. The manager is an artist because management is often nuanced and subjective. It involves a different mindset.

MANAGEMENT IS NOT FOR EVERYONE

Some companies have management-training programs. These programs vary from excellent to unfortunate. Too often, the program is given to people who already have been in managerial positions for a number of years. It's true that even experienced managers periodically should be given refresher courses in management style and techniques. But if a training program has any merit, it should be given to individuals who are being considered for management positions. The training program will not only help them avoid mistakes, it also gives trainees the opportunity to see whether they will be comfortable leading others. A management training program that helps potential managers decide that they are not suited for management has done both the prospective managers and the organization they are a part of a great favor.

Unfortunately, far too many organizations still use the "sink or swim" method of management training. All employees who move into supervisory positions must figure it out on their own. This method assumes that everyone intuitively knows how to manage. They don't. Managing people is crucial to the success of any organization; but in too many cases, it is left to chance. Anyone who has worked for any length of time has observed situations where a promotion didn't work out and the person asked for the old job back. The well-known saying, "Be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it" comes to mind. In many companies, the opportunities for promotion are limited if you don't go into management. As a result, some people go into management who shouldn't be there—and they wouldn't want to be in management if other opportunities existed for salary increases and promotion.

A series of management seminars was conducted for one company that used an enlightened approach to the problem of moving the wrong people into management. Everyone under potential consideration for a first-line management position was invited to attend an all-day seminar on what is involved in the management of people. Included were some simple but typical management problems. When these candidates were invited to attend, they were told by the company, "If after attending this seminar you decide that the management of people is not something you want to do, just say so. That decision will in no way affect other non-management promotion possibilities or future salary decisions in your current position."

Approximately five hundred people attended these seminars, and approximately 20 percent decided they did not want to move into management. After getting a brief taste of management, about a hundred people knew they would not make good managers, but they were still valuable employees. This is dramatic to consider. If this program is representative it suggests that 20 percent of people advanced into management would prefer not to be there. Far too many people accept management promotions because they feel (often rightly so) that they will be dead-ended if they reject the promotion.

THE OMNIPOTENT ONE

Some people believe that if you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself. People with this attitude rarely make good leaders or managers because they have difficulty delegating responsibility. Everyone has seen these people: They delegate only those trivial tasks that anyone could perform, and anything meaningful they keep for themselves. As a result, they work evenings and weekends and take a briefcase home as well. There is nothing wrong with working overtime. Most people occasionally must devote some extra time to the job, but those who follow this pattern as a way of life are poor managers. They have so little faith in their team members that they trust them with only minor tasks. What they are really saying is that they don't know how to properly train their people.

There is often a staff turnover problem in a team with this kind of manager. The employees are usually more qualified than the "omnipotent one" believes and they soon tire of handling only trivia.

You probably know of an omnipotent one in your own organization. It is a problem if you're working for one, because you'll have a difficult time being promoted. Caught up in your impossible situation, you're not given anything important to do. As a result, you never get a chance to demonstrate your abilities. Omnipotent ones seldom give out recommendations for promotion. They are convinced that the reason they must do all the work is that their staff doesn't accept responsibility. They can never admit that it is because they refuse to delegate. The trap of becoming an omnipotent one is being emphasized because you don't want to allow yourself to fall into this mode of behavior. If you notice that you are only delegating minor tasks, it is time to stop and make a personal assessment of your management style.

One other unvarying trait of omnipotent ones is that they seldom take their vacations all at once. They take only a couple days off at a time because they are certain the company can't function longer than that without them. Before going on vacation, they will leave specific instructions as to what work is to be saved until their return. They will direct their team to email, text, or call them regarding anything of significance even though they are supposed to be on vacation. The omnipotent one even complains to family and friends, "I can't even get away from the problems at work for a few days without being bothered." What omnipotent ones don't say is that this is exactly the way they want it because it makes them feel important. For some omnipotent managers, any joy in their retirement years is demolished because retirement means an end to their dedication to the job, their perceived indispensability, and possibly their reason for living.

THE CHOSEN FEW

Sometimes, people are chosen to head a function because they're related to or have an "in" with the boss. Consider yourself fortunate if you do not work for this type of company. Even if you *are* related to the boss, it's very difficult to assume additional responsibility under these circumstances. You doubtless have the authority, but today's businesses aren't dictatorships and people won't perform well for you just because you've been anointed by upper management. So, if you're the boss's son or daughter or friend, you really need to prove yourself. The reality is that your colleagues may even expect you to perform at a higher level than someone who does not have the advantages you have. You need to accept the higher standard they have set for you. That is just the way it is. You'll get surface respect or positional respect, but let's face it—it's what people really think of you, not what they say to you, that matters—and that affects how they perform.

In the best organizations, you're not chosen for a managerial position because of your technical knowledge, but because someone has seen the spark of leadership in you. That is the spark you must start developing. Leadership is difficult to define. A leader is a person others look to for direction, someone whose judgment is respected because it is usually sound. As you exercise your judgment and develop the capacity to make sound decisions, it becomes a self-perpetuating characteristic. Your faith in your

own decisionmaking power is fortified. That feeds your self-confidence, and with more self-confidence, you become less reluctant to make difficult decisions.

Leaders are people who can see into the future and visualize the results of their decisionmaking. Leaders can also set aside matters of personality and make decisions based on fact. This doesn't mean you ignore the human element—you never ignore it—but you always deal with the facts themselves, not with people's emotional perception of those facts. This does not mean that you are blind to the emotional impact of your decisions but that you do not let those impacts take you off course. People are chosen to be managers for a variety of reasons. If you're chosen for sound reasons, acceptance by your new staff will, for the most part, be much easier to gain.

2



STARTING OUT

YOUR FIRST WEEK ON THE JOB as a manager will be unusual, to say the least. If you're a student of human behavior, you'll observe some surprising developments.

SETTLING IN

Don't believe that everyone is happy about your promotion. Some of your coworkers will feel *they* should have been chosen. They may be jealous of your new position and secretly hope you fail.

Others, the office "yes people," will immediately start playing up to you. As the chosen one, you can be their ticket to success. Their objective isn't all bad, but their approach is unfortunate.

Some coworkers will put you to the test early. They may ask you questions to see if you know the answers. If you don't, they'll want to see if you'll admit it or if you'll try to bluff your way through it. Some may ask you questions you cannot possibly know the answers to, just for the sheer delight of embarrassing you.

Most—you hope the majority—will adopt a wait-and-see attitude. They're not going to condemn or praise you until they see how you perform. This attitude is healthy and all you really have a right to expect.

Initially you will be measured against your predecessor in the position. If that person's performance was poor, yours will look great by comparison

even if you're mediocre. If you follow a highly capable performer, your adjustment will be tougher. Before you begin thinking it's best to follow a miserable performer, consider the load of tough problems you'd be inheriting from your inept predecessor, which is why he is no longer there. It will be difficult but potentially quite rewarding, if you're up to the challenge. The highly capable predecessor is probably gone because she was promoted. In either case, you have a big job ahead of you.

One of your first decisions should be to refrain from immediately instituting changes in the method of operation. (In some situations, top management may have instructed you to go in and make certain immediate changes because of the seriousness of the situation. In such cases, however, it is usually announced that changes will be forthcoming.) Above all, be patient. Keep in mind that most people find changes threatening and are inclined to resist them either consciously or unconsciously. Sudden change often results in a fear response that will work against you and not serve you well as you seek to make a positive impact.

When you do need to make changes, whether soon after your promotion or later, be as forthcoming as possible in explaining what will be taking place and why. While change may be frightening to people the unknown is even more disabling. This does not mean that you disclose every detail. Determining what to disclose and what to keep to yourself is part of the judgment you need to have as a manager. But the more forthcoming you can be, the more you will help your team get past the resistance to change that is part of human nature.

In all settings, but particularly when implementing changes, answer questions as honestly as possible. If you are new to the position, don't be afraid to say "I don't know" if you don't. Your people don't expect you to know everything. They may just be probing to see if they can trust you. Trying to fabricate an answer to a question you don't know the answer to is always a bad idea, and will very likely cost you credibility and trust.

If you make changes immediately, you'll be resented. In addition to being disquieting to your team, your actions can be construed as being arrogant and an insult to your predecessor. Many young new leaders make their own lives more difficult by assuming they have to use all their newfound power immediately. The key word should be *restraint*. It is vital to remember that you're the one who is on trial with your subordinates, not they with you.

This is a good time to make an important point about your own attitude. Many new managers communicate rather well upward to their superiors,

but poorly downward to their direct reports. However, your direct reports will have more to say about your future than your superiors. You are going to be judged by how well your team functions—the results your team delivers—so the people who now work for you are the most important people in your business life. Believe it or not, they're more important to your future than the president of your company. This bit of knowledge has always seemed obvious, yet many new managers spend almost all their time planning their upward communication and give only a passing glance to the people who really control their future.

USING YOUR NEW AUTHORITY

If there is one area where many new managers blunder, it is the use of authority. This is particularly true of new managers navigating their way through a self-directed “sink or swim” method of on-the-job training. This is due to the flawed belief that because you now have the authority of management, you have to start using it—and you must use and display it in a big way. This may be the biggest mistake that new managers make.

View the authority of the new position as you would a limited inventory. The fewer times you draw on the inventory, the greater is the supply that remains for when it is *really* needed.

The newly appointed manager who starts acting like “the boss” by issuing orders and other directives is off to a bad start. While you may not hear the remarks directly, the typical comments made behind the back of such a misguided manager might be, “Boy, is she drunk with power,” or “This job has really gone to his head,” or “He sure is fond of himself since he was promoted.” You don't need this kind of problem.

If you don't draw down your inventory of authority too often, the authority you may have to use in an emergency is more effective because it is infrequently displayed. The people you lead know that you are the manager. They know that the requests you make carry the authority of your position. The vast majority of the time, it is unnecessary to use that authority.

There is a term in the creative arts called *understatement*. For the most part, it means that what is left unsaid may be as important as what is said. This is true with the use of authority. A direction given as a request is a managerial type of understatement. If the response you are seeking is not forthcoming, you can always clarify your request or add a bit of authority.

On the other hand, if you use all your authority to achieve a task, and then discover by the reaction that you have used too much, the damage is done. It is difficult, if not impossible, to de-escalate the overuse of authority.

In short, do not assume that you need to use the authority of your position. Perhaps the greatest by-product of this softer approach is that you are not building a negative image that may be nearly impossible to erase later.

HAVING THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Sometime during the first sixty days in your new management position, you should plan on having a personal conversation with each of the people in your area of responsibility. Don't do this the first week or so. Give your people a chance to get used to the idea that you're there. If you try to do it immediately, you risk overwhelming or intimidating your team members. When it comes time to talk, ask them into your office, to lunch, or out of the office for coffee for an unhurried discussion about anything that is on their minds. Do no more talking than necessary. This first discussion is not designed for outward communication with your team members; it is designed to open lines of communication from them to you. (Have you ever noticed that the more you allow the other person to talk, the higher you'll be rated as a brilliant conversationalist?)

Although the employees' personal concerns are important, it is preferable to restrict the discussions to work-related topics. Sometimes it is difficult to define these limits because problems at home may be troubling an employee more than anything else, but at all times you must avoid getting into a situation where you're giving personal advice. Just because you've been selected as the boss, it doesn't make you an expert on all the personal problems confronting your people. Listen to them; often that's what they need more than anything else—someone to listen to them.

Do not think for a moment that this can be done by email or by a phone call. Not a chance. Both methods are unacceptable substitutes for an in-person conversation. Neither allow the connection you are seeking to establish to occur. If you have staff working remotely, you may have to start with a video call if it is not possible to have an in-person conversation in the first sixty days. If you do have to resort to a video call make it clear that the conversation will be continued in-person as soon as possible.

GETTING TO KNOW THEM

The purpose of having a conversation with the members of your team is to give them the opportunity to open the lines of communication with you. It is important that you show a genuine interest in their concerns and learn of their ambitions within the company. Ask questions that will get them to expand on their points of view. You can't fake genuine interest in others; you're doing this because you care about the employees' well-being. Such attention is advantageous to both sides. If you can help employees achieve their goals, they'll be more productive. It is even more important that they see that they're making progress toward their goals.

So your goal in these early conversations is to let your team members know you care about them as individuals and you're there to help them achieve their goals. Let them know that if possible you want to help them solve the problems they are facing in their job. Establish a comfort zone in which they can deal with you. Make them feel that it is perfectly natural for them to discuss challenges with you. By discussing small problems and small irritants, you may be able to avoid larger problems.

You'll discover in your first few months as a manager that your technical abilities are not nearly as important as your human abilities. The majority of your problems are going to revolve around the human and not the technical aspects of the job. Unless your responsibilities are technically complex, you'll discover that if you have strong human skills, minor technical deficiencies will be overlooked. Conversely, even if you are the most technically competent manager in the office, without human skills you'll have great difficulty.

HAVING FRIENDS IN THE DEPARTMENT

One of the problems many new executives confront is handling friendships with people in the department who now report to them. This is a difficult situation to which there is no perfect answer. One of the most common questions new managers ask is, "Can I still be friends with the people who used to be my coworkers and now report to me?"

It is obvious that you shouldn't have to give up your friendships simply because you've received a promotion. However, you don't want your friendships to hurt your performance or the performance of your friends.

It is a mistake to allow your friendships to interfere with your method of operation. A direct report who is truly a friend will understand the dilemma in which you find yourself.

You must be certain that coworkers who were your friends before you became their supervisor receive the same treatment as everyone else. And that doesn't just mean not favoring them over other workers. They also must not be treated worse merely to prove to the others how unbiased you are.

Although it is certainly true that you can be friends with people, you cannot expect to be friends with them in the same way in the context of work. As a new manager, you will need to establish some expectations of how you will work with all of your team members, whether they are friends or not. You need to hold all individuals to the same standards of performance, behavior, and accountability. Also keep in mind that what might look like friendship to you can often look like favoritism to others.

There is a temptation to use your old friend in the department as a confidant, but you don't want to give the impression that you are playing favorites. In fact, you must not play favorites. If you do need a confidant, it is preferable to use a manager in another department or section of the organization.

You may want to consider having a conversation with a friend and former colleague about their moving to another department. Regardless of how hard you work not to display favoritism, it may be nearly impossible and best for both you and your friend if they do not report to you. This may be the best alternative if you truly value the friendship that is at risk because of your new role.

STRUCTURING YOUR ORGANIZATION

With time, you will want to consider whether you can improve the structure of your organization. Unless you are particularly familiar with your team members and their roles, it is best not to do this too soon. Restructurings tend to be very stressful for all involved. It is best to do them less often and well. While you can always correct a mistake in structuring your organization, it is best not to make the mistake to start with.

As you look at the reporting relationships within your team, you will need to pay particular attention to how many people are reporting directly to you. This number is referred to as your span of control. In recent decades, information technology has allowed organizations to have

fewer but broader layers. This *flattening* of organizational structures has had many positive results. Executed well, it has allowed for more efficient communication and improved decisionmaking. As with anything, there needs to be balance when creating a flatter structure.

Less experienced managers sometimes make the mistake of an excessive span of control. It is easy to do. Nearly everyone would like to report directly to you. It gives them better access to the ultimate decisionmaker and brings with it a certain status within the organization. The problem is that you can only effectively manage a limited number of direct reports. When managers allow an excessive number of people to report to them directly, it becomes a free-for-all. They can find a line at their door every morning and an email inbox full of messages. They can spend their entire days trying to respond to all the needs and questions of their direct reports. They are rarely successful getting through all the requests for guidance and decisions, then start the next day behind; they rarely have time for any long-term thinking and planning. An excessively broad span of control is a setup for failure.

So, what span of control will work for you? There are a number of variables you need to take into account. One is the physical location of your direct reports. You can handle a little broader span of control if they are located in the same facility as you. The ability to meet with them in-person will ease communication. Another factor is the level of experience; a direct report who is a proven performer is not likely to require as much of your time. A new employee or one who has recently been moved into a new position or given additional responsibilities will probably require more of your time, at least for a while.

A good rule of thumb is not to have more direct reports than you can meet with once a week. By meet, this means actual one-on-one face time. The meeting may be in-person or a video call, but it needs to be a face-to-face, one-on-one meeting—not a staff meeting. Given that you have a lot to do in addition to meeting with your direct reports, five is a good maximum number. This allows you to have one of your one-on-one meetings each day of the workweek if that suits your purposes.

Be careful about letting these meetings slip—they are a vital part of your being able to manage well and efficiently. If your direct reports know they'll get face time with you every week, they will be able to save up items they need to discuss until that meeting. It is much more efficient to address issues in this setting than when passing in the hall, on a phone call from the airport, or by trading text messages or emails.

If your employees cannot count on having a regular opportunity to communicate directly with you, they will be more inclined to track you down whenever anything comes up that they think requires your attention. The negative results are twofold: a lot more ad hoc contacts that do not facilitate thoughtful decisionmaking and more issues being brought to you than necessary. If you can abide by weekly meetings with your direct reports and train them to hold as many issues as possible until those meetings, you will be surprised and pleased to see how many things they learn to resolve themselves that they otherwise would bring to you.

MANAGING YOUR MOOD

People who report to you are very aware of what kind of mood you're in, especially if you tend to have significant mood swings. Temper tantrums have no place in the work habits of a mature manager—and maturity has nothing to do with age. Letting your irritation show occasionally can be effective, as long as it is sincere and not manipulative.

All of us, from time to time, fall under the spell of moods that reflect situations outside the office that are troubling us. Many books on management tell us we must leave our problems at the door, or at home, and not bring them into the office. That attitude is naive, because few people can completely shut off a personal problem and keep it from affecting how they perform on the job.

There is little doubt, however, that you can minimize the impact a problem has on your work. The first step is to admit that something is irritating you and that it may affect your ability to work effectively with your colleagues. If you can do that, you can probably avoid making other people victims of your personal problem. If an outside problem is gnawing at you and you need to deal with an employee in a critical situation, there is nothing wrong with saying to the employee, "Look, I'm really not in the greatest mood today. If I seem a little irritated, I hope you'll forgive me." This kind of candor is refreshing to a subordinate. And it is far better to disclose that you are distracted than to risk a team member thinking he is the cause of your distant or agitated behavior.

Never think for a moment that others don't have the ability to judge your moods. By showing dramatic changes of mood, you become less effective. In addition, your direct reports will know when to expect these changes

and what the telltale signs are, and they will avoid dealing with you when you're on the bottom swing of such a mood. They'll wait until you're on the high end of the spectrum.

MANAGING YOUR FEELINGS

You should work hard at being even-tempered. But it is not a good idea to be the kind of manager who is never bothered by anything—a person who never seems to feel great joy, great sorrow, or great anything. People will not identify with you if they believe you disguise all your feelings.

Keeping your cool at all times, however, is another matter. There are good reasons for keeping your cool. If you can always remain calm, even in troubled situations, you're more likely to think clearly and be in a better position to handle tough problems. But you can show feelings—without losing your cool—so that people won't think you're a management robot.

To be an outstanding manager of people, you must care about people. That doesn't mean taking a missionary or social worker approach toward them, but if you enjoy their company and respect their feelings, you'll be much more effective in your job than the supervisor who is mostly task-oriented.

This, indeed, is one of the problems companies bring on themselves when they assume that the most efficient worker in an area is the one who should be promoted to management. That worker may be efficient because she is task-oriented. Moving these kinds of workers into areas where they supervise others doesn't automatically make them people-oriented.

3



BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IS A GRADUAL PROCESS. One of your main goals is to develop the trust and confidence of your employees, not only in their own abilities but in their opinion of you. They must have confidence that you are both competent and fair.

THE SUCCESS HABIT

Building confidence in employees is not an easy task. Your goal is to help them establish a pattern of success. Confidence is built on success, so your job as a leader is to give them tasks at which they can succeed. Especially with new employees, assign them tasks they can master. Build in them the habit of being successful, starting small if needed, with smaller successes.

Occasionally a team member will perform a task incorrectly or just plain blow it. How you handle these situations has a great impact on the confidence of your employees. Never correct them in front of others. Definitely abide by the credo, “Praise in public, criticize in private.” It will serve you well.

Even when you talk to a team member in private about an error, your function is to train that person to recognize the nature of the problem so the mistake is not repeated. Your attitude about errors will speak louder than the words you use. Your statements must be directed toward correcting the misunderstanding that led to the error—*not* toward any sort of

personal judgment. Never say or do anything that will make the employee feel inadequate. You want to build confidence, not destroy it. If you get pleasure from making team members feel foolish, then you'd better start examining your own motives, because you can't build yourself up by tearing someone else down. Examine the error based on what went wrong, where the misunderstanding occurred, and go on from there. Treat the small error routinely; don't make it bigger than it really is.

Let's briefly discuss the "praise in public" part of the credo. This concept used to be taken as gospel until managers found that it could also create problems. The individual on the receiving end of the praise feels warm and fuzzy about the compliment, but others who were not equally commended could react negatively. Their disappointment can then be directed at the employee who is praised. In addition, praising a team member in front of her colleagues can make her uncomfortable. This is why it is important to be cautious about praising in public. Why make life tougher for employees by creating jealousy or resentment among their coworkers? If you really want to praise someone expansively for outstanding performance, do it in the privacy of your office. You'll get the pluses without the negatives of resentment and jealousy from coworkers. On the other hand, if you have a group that works well together, respects the efforts of each member of the team, and is accomplishing its goals, praising in public will be a morale booster for the entire team.

For now, let's amend the credo to read: "Praise in public or private (depending on the preference of the individual and the dynamics of your team), criticize in private."

You can also build confidence by involving your people in some of the decisionmaking processes. Without delegating any of your supervisory responsibilities, allow employees to have input into matters that affect them. A new task about to be performed in your area presents the opportunity to give your subordinates some input. Solicit ideas on how the new task might best be worked into the daily routine.

When you request input, you send the important message that you value your employees' thoughts and ideas. You are also serving yourself well when you invite discussion. Your team members are likely closer to the situation than you are and may have insights that escaped you.

It is vital that you make it clear that you are genuinely interested in the input you are requesting. If your people sense you are going through an insincere exercise, you will be wasting time and risking a loss of trust.

Your challenge is that some of the input you get will not be useful. As a leader, you need to make it clear that you see value in the ideas being offered and appreciate them. When you get input you cannot implement, you will be wise to briefly explain why you will not be going in that direction. When you do, make sure you do not allow yourself to be critical of the advice or the person offering it.

Given this kind of participation, the new method is much more likely to succeed because it is everyone's method and not just yours. This doesn't mean your staff is making decisions for you; by involving your people in the process that leads up to your decision, you'll have them working with you rather than passively accepting new systems imposed on them. The result is likely to be a higher level of buy-in and less pushback.

THE EVILS OF PERFECTIONISM

Some managers expect perfection from their employees. They know they won't get it but they feel they'll get closer to it by demanding it. By insisting on perfection, you may in fact defeat your own purposes. Some employees will become so self-conscious about making a mistake that they will slow their performance down to a crawl to make absolutely certain they don't screw up. As a result, productivity goes way down and employees lose confidence.

Another drawback to being a perfectionist is that everyone resents you for it. Your direct reports believe that you are impossible to please and you prove it to them daily. This also shatters employee confidence. You know what the acceptable standards for work performance are in your company—no one can blame you for wanting to be better than the average—but you'll have far more success if you get the employees involved in helping decide how to improve performance. If they have ownership in the plan, you have a significantly better chance of achieving your goal.

You can also build confidence by developing esprit de corps within your own area. Make sure, however, that the feeling you build is supportive of the prevailing company spirit and not in competition with it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING TRUST

In addition to allowing mistakes and helping individuals see their errors, giving praise and recognition, involving others in the decisionmaking process, and avoiding perfectionism, you, the manager, can build trust in many other ways.

You can share the vision of the organization and the department with your team members. Doing this gives them a clearer picture of what the goals are and how they are helping to meet them.

You can give individuals clear directions. This shows that you know what you are doing and are keeping things on track.

You can share examples of how you have succeeded and what mistakes you have made. Doing that builds rapport and makes you real to your team.

You can talk to each of your team members to learn what each one wants from the job. By doing this, you are demonstrating that you really care and you are serious about helping them advance professionally.

All of these additional strategies, and others that you devise, can build a trusting environment.

4



SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

IN CHAPTER 3, THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING positive feedback or praise was emphasized. It is one of the best methods for motivating individuals and building a positive work environment. Many managers do not give their direct reports praise, which is a big mistake. Praise lets employees know that you care about what they are doing. It also lets employees know that their work is important. If you think about it, it probably takes only seconds to give someone praise and it costs nothing. It does have a big impact on most employees, though. You can praise people face-to-face, over the telephone, with an email, or in a text message. Face-to-face is always the best method for giving feedback, but if you have employees in other locations or cannot get to them in a timely manner, use the telephone, email, or a text. The nice thing about doing it with a text message is that the team member is likely to receive it almost immediately. Most of us can't resist checking a new text message as soon as it is received.

Some managers might not show their appreciation because they never had appreciation shown to them by others, but you can stop that cycle. Show appreciation. Some managers feel that employees are supposed to perform well because they are getting paid to do well, so there is no reason to praise them for doing so. This is not good reasoning. Those managers should bear in mind that if they praised their employees, they might perform even better. Considering it costs nothing and takes very little time, why not do it? Your goal as a leader is to inspire your team members to perform at the top of their ability. Praising them in an appropriate way when it is deserved is part of providing this inspiration.

There are many managers, especially newer ones, who are uncomfortable giving praise. This is to be expected because it may be a new skill for them. In order to become more comfortable expressing appreciation, you have to do it. The more you practice it the easier it will become. Consider some of the following points when giving praise or showing appreciation:

- ✍️ **Be specific.** If managers want certain behaviors repeated, they need to be specific in the type of positive feedback they give. The more detailed the manager is, the more likely the behavior or action will be repeated. Don't just say, "Great job last week." Say, "You really handled that difficult situation last week with diplomacy and good judgment."
- ✍️ **Describe the impact.** Most team members like to know how their work ties into the bigger picture or the larger scheme of things such as meeting the objectives of the unit, department, or organization. If it did, let them know how their contributions had a positive effect beyond your team.
- ✍️ **Don't overdo it.** Some managers go to extremes and give their team members too much positive feedback. When this occurs, the impact of the feedback is diminished and the praise may seem insincere. Make sure the praise is on target and deserved or it will lose its value.

THE ACTUAL SKILL

Giving praise or appreciation involves two steps. First, you specifically describe the behavior, action, or performance that deserves the appreciation. For example, "You did a good job with the new design for the cover of our products catalog." Then you describe why it deserves your appreciation and the business impact of the contribution. For example, "The new design will very likely increase sales."

To underscore this point, at a group of thirty attendees in a management seminar, the following two questions were asked:

1. What is the best example of enlightened management you've ever seen?
2. What is the worst example of management you've experienced?

It was no surprise that nearly all the responses had to do with some form of appreciation either received or denied when the staff member felt it was deserved. What was surprising was the depth of emotion displayed about the subject.

One answer was a classic: A young man recounted that he was asked to drive a pickup truck fifty miles to an outlying facility to make an important repair. At 10:30 p.m., when he had just returned home, the phone rang. It was his manager. "I just called to make sure that you got home okay. It's kind of a bad night out there." The manager did not even ask about how the repair went, which indicated her complete confidence in the young man's ability. The manager inquired only about his safe return. The incident had taken place more than five years earlier, but to the young worker, it was as fresh as though it had just happened.

In a poll conducted by a major company in the United States, employees were asked to rank work attributes they considered important. Salary came in sixth. What came in first, by a wide margin, was "a need to be appreciated for what I do."

If appreciation is important to you in your relationship with your manager, realize that it is equally important to the people you manage. When people deserve appreciation, do not withhold it. It does not cost you or your organization and is in many ways more valuable than money.

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