

# Turning Good Employees Into Great Managers

A Guide for New Managers and Soon-to-Be Managers



**TALENT MANAGEMENT**



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# Turning Good Employees Into Great Managers

## A Guide for New Managers and Soon-to-Be Managers

Think back a moment: You were so good at your job that they made you a manager. Nice work!

So, when did your “new manager” training start? If you’re like most, you probably didn’t have any. Your training began the minute you accepted the promotion.

Most new managers learn on the fly. If they’re lucky they have a good mentor they can look to for guidance.

Have 18 months? Psychologically, that’s how long it takes to get comfortable in a new role.

But you don’t have to go it alone.

The transition from worker to manager requires a new mindset and new skills. New managers must learn how to exert authority and control over what work gets done without alienating subordinates – all while managing the expectations of their own boss.

In the following pages are the keys to help prepare new managers to meet these difficult challenges.

This report lays out the traits of successful managers, the pitfalls to avoid, the keys to delegating, how to deal with differing personalities, and the time-tested techniques that build respect while getting the most out of others. It is packed with proven paths to becoming a better manager.

But first, here’s a review of some managerial basics.

### The Three Types of Managers

Basically, there are three types of managers:

1. Participative. This is the most democratic supervisor. He

## Exercise

Make a list of the previous managers you've had. Feel free to go back as far as you want – even that first summer job.

Then for each manager make a list of:

- what they did well, and
- what they did poorly.

When you think back on your experiences with each of these people, it'll be clearer which traits and styles you want to model and what you'll want to steer clear of.

Note: This might not be something you can do in a single sitting. Give yourself a few days to really think back.

involves his people in decision-making and solicits lots of input.

2. Authoritarian. Here's the autocrat. What she says, goes.
3. Laissez-faire. A hands-off manager may be popular with some staffers. Trouble is, when someone really needs direction, there isn't any to be found.

Clearly the best is a balance between Nos. 1 and 2. You'll need certain skills and styles at certain times, and different ones at other times.

## Pitfalls of Being a New Manager

Unfortunately, most new managers fall into one of two other types:

1. Micromanagers. They hover over people's shoulders and would rather jump in and take charge.
2. Undermanagers. They're sometimes tougher to spot, but these folks do just as much damage – if not more – to the people they supervise. These new managers tend to turn a blind eye to performance issues they aren't equipped to – or don't want to – deal with. Often, problems continue to get worse until the employee becomes a lost cause and is terminated.

Here's a little more on each.

### Micromanagers

As a manager, here's your job: Get the best from your team, and help your organization succeed.

A tall order, for sure. And that's why so many managers fall into the trap of micromanaging. They think the only way to get the best results is to put themselves in the center of everything.

Whether you have a team of two or 20 or somewhere in between,

it's counterproductive to inject yourself into the middle of every meeting, decision and task. People who work for you become paralyzed by it – or so aggravated that you'll never really get their best effort.

### **Sidestepping this pitfall**

So how do you avoid this all-too-common trap?

Your best bet is to keep your eye on the prize: what you want your company to achieve. Get too bogged down in the problem-solving aspect of your job, and you won't have any time for the bigger-picture thinking you're now being paid to do.

Also, you'll need to get comfortable with the fact that people will make mistakes.

Could some of those mistakes be avoided if you take a more active role? Most likely.

But your staffers will never learn from their mistakes, and their self-confidence stands to take a real hit.

### **The case for delegation**

The most obvious way out of micromanaging is, of course, to delegate.

That's easier said than done.

Here are some ideas about what should – and shouldn't – be delegated:

What should be delegated:

- routine activities – data entry, drafts of reports, collecting data.
- things that aren't your core competencies: It can be anything from computer tasks to accounting issues, depending on where you work.

What should never be delegated:

- performance reviews.
- discipline and firings.

Be careful not to delegate anything you could just eliminate instead. If you can get rid of a superfluous task, do it.

Don't keep it just because things were always done that way! And don't pass it on to someone else. Just get rid of it.

Once you've decided to delegate a task, remember: *How* you delegate is just as important as *what* you delegate.

#### 4 keys to delegating effectively

When you do decide there's a task you can let go of, be sure to keep the following advice in mind:

1. **Tell them where they need to be but not how to get there.** It's better to explain the desired outcome of a given task and let your employees figure out for themselves how to get it done.
2. **Keep an eye on progress.** At the same time, you don't want to hand off a task and not see or hear another thing about it until it's complete, or worse, too late to do anything to correct mistakes. Ask for periodic progress reports so you can catch any errors before a project gets seriously off track.
3. **Give them a long-enough leash.** If you've made the managerial decision that Tom is capable of doing this job, let him. Making him run back to you every 45 minutes for routine approvals will do more harm than good.
4. **Spread the wealth.** Be careful about finding a go-to person who gets all the delegated work. Are there other team members who can get the job done? Give them a shot at it.

## Undermanagers

Some managers are happy to let their people take over everything and won't say a word even if someone's struggling. That's the undermanager.

In a lot of ways, it's much more damaging than its opposite, micromanaging.

Many, many problems that happen in the workplace can usually be tracked back to a lack of guidance by a manager.

So why are so many managers so hands-off that their people are left floundering?

For one, it's tougher than ever to manage people. Here are a few reasons why:

- Often you get what you get. You can't always hire the superstars for the job, either because of budget reasons or because they're just not available.
- Be careful what you wish for. "Top performers" can be especially tough to manage. They know they're good and at times are *prima donnas*, or are extremely tough on themselves, both of which can be hard to handle.
- Everybody's stretched thin. That means that employees are often expected to do jobs they're not particularly fond of. So managers have to motivate people to do work they don't want to do.
- It's tougher to reward people. Gone are the days when bonuses were dealt out lavishly. Now a "nice work" and a pat on the back are often the most managers can offer. It's a lot tougher to get people to keep on performing at high levels.

## Spanning the generations

Perhaps one of the biggest changes? There are more generations in the workplace now than at any other time in history.

## Exercise

Periodically take a look at the methods you use to keep your staffers striving for peak performance.

- Not everyone responds to the same types of rewards. If you can find what motivates each person on your staff you'll have better success.
- Watch the ebb and flow. Motivation levels aren't always constant. Things like a recent layoff could cause a real dip. Being attuned to shifts and reacting fast can avoid major down periods that affect performance.
- Spot and wipe out "threats."
- No one's intentionally threatening people to perform. But certain attempts at motivating employees can backfire if they come across like there are negative consequences for not stepping up.

Here are the five generations in the office today:

- Matures: born before 1946
- Baby Boomers: born 1946-1964
- Generation X: born 1965-1979
- Generation Y: born 1980-1997
- Generation Z: born after 1997

Who values what most? You may be surprised:

- **more money:** Matures. Gen Z may be at the bottom of the pay scale, but they're not the most anxious to rectify that.
- **recognition and appreciation:** Matures and Boomers. A pat on the back will go a lot further with the older members of your team.
- **increased responsibilities:** Matures, then Baby Boomers, tend to appreciate the vote of confidence that comes with a growing job description.
- **promotions:** Gen X, followed closely by Baby Boomers, are looking to climb the corporate ladder.

Not too hard to see why some managers practice avoidance as part of their management strategy!

But that's not a long-term or viable option if you want your team – and your organization – to succeed.

## Becoming a hands-on manager

So how do you become more of a hands-on manager?

Here are a few surefire strategies:

1. **Manage every day.** It's easy to get bogged down in getting the job done: meeting deadlines, serving customers, etc. But you need to be out with your staffers and managing them every single day.



## Who should not be your mentor

When handling transitions, many new managers find having a mentor is an enormous help.

But avoid this common misstep: Picking your own boss to be your mentor.

Two main reasons for this:

1. Not all managers are good mentors. Some are more concerned with results than offering guidance.
2. Who are you going to ask for advice about dealing with your boss? Chances are, at some point you're going to have an issue with the person directly above you. And you'll need to have someone you can bounce ideas off.

2. **Go one staffer at a time.** It can be overwhelming to tackle a whole team at once. It's easier to meet your manage-every-day goal if you start with one person at a time.
3. **Up the accountability.** If staffers understand that both you and they will be held accountable for each other's actions, everyone will have to take a more active role.
4. **Track performance.** If you're going to turn up the accountability, you'll need a way to track people's progress.
5. **Offer help.** Don't leave your people guessing. That can only result in frustration. Instead, you want to tell your people what's expected of them.
6. **Don't treat all staffers the same.** Not every member of your team is going to need the same amount of attention. Give more to those who are struggling and less to those who are holding their own.

The ultimate goal is to send this message to your team:

**"You can count on me."**

Now, there is one other type of new manager: The Quitter. These managers decide they would rather just go back to their old jobs – the ones they were so good at in the first place.

## Major Transitions for New Managers

Obviously, being a Quitter is not the type of manager you want to be. Still, the desire to give up at times is understandable because there are a lot of transitions for new managers.

Here are the three biggest:

## Exercise

Sit down and for each of your employees, write down a list of five expectations you have for that person.

Then ask each employee to do the same.

Compare the two lists (with each person individually).

The differences are what you need to talk about.

That'll not only clarify your expectations, but also your definitions. It's a real eye-opener.

### Transition #1

**From: Working with things**

**To: Working with people**

In your old role, the tools of your trade were computers, equipment, tools or data. And as frustrating as those things could be at times, dealing with them can be a whole lot easier than working with people.

People, after all, are completely unpredictable.

Let's illustrate with an example involving an Information Technology department.

So you're great with computers. You can troubleshoot and fix just about anything wrong with a PC or network. Except that when you become the IT manager, that's no longer what you're being paid to do. Now you have to get Joe and Maggie to debug that spreadsheet – and do it quickly and courteously – even though they don't know as much as you do about that program.

### Transition #2

**From: Being a doer**

**To: Being a coach**

Now you're going to have to get the people who work for you to do the job you do so well (and let's face it, can probably do better). It's about getting results through people. That's where the trap of micromanaging comes in.

### Transition #3

**From: Being a friend**

**To: Being a leader**

This one can be the toughest. Jim, who just a week ago you had lunch with every day and commiserated about the boss with, is

now reporting to you.

In the classic “us vs. them,” you’ve suddenly become the them. Jealously rears its ugly head. Why did you get that promotion when your friend has been in this department a lot longer than you?

Your friends can’t really be your friends anymore, at least not in the same sense. You can’t make it look like you’re playing favorites. And there’s always the possibility you’ll take what they’ve told you as a friend and tell another boss.

This is the transition that gives rise to the undermanagers.

### Traits of the Most Successful Managers

You can see why it would take a year and a half to get your legs. But the people who promoted you clearly want results faster than that.

So how do you get those results they’re so confident you can get?

In their book, *First Break All the Rules*, Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman isolated six proven strategies that improved four key business factors:

1. productivity
2. profitability
3. customer satisfaction levels, and
4. employee turnover.

Buckingham and Coffman looked at hundreds of employee questionnaires and how the responses corresponded to those four factors. What they came up with were six things that can translate into strategies for successful managers.

Here they are in descending order of importance:

6. Develop your team
5. Demonstrate you care
4. Recognize and praise people regularly

3. Put round pegs in round holes
2. Provide the right research and equipment
1. Clarify and communicate your expectations

### Strategy 6: Develop Your Team

Even as you are developing as a new manager, be sure not to put the development of your team members on hold. Training is critical when someone new joins your team. But development should be something every member of your team gets on an ongoing basis, no matter his or her level of experience. Some of the best ways to do that:

- seminars
- coaching
- cross-training
- even the chance to observe other people's jobs.

Any type of training eats up budget dollars. So you want to be sure you're getting the most out of it.

To do that, encourage people on your team to think about training:

- **Before:** This is when "previewing" helps. Talk with the employee about why he or she was selected to attend that negotiation strategies seminar, as well as the benefit your organization expects from it (more vendor discounts). Be sure to ask trainees what they hope to gain from it, too.
- **During:** Sent Sally to the annual industry conference? Have her touch base with you daily with a snapshot of what's going on. This forces participants to think about what they're learning and helps it jell in their minds.
- **After:** You probably wouldn't send someone for training if you weren't hoping to get some new ideas out of it. Ask Sally how to modify your current policies based on what she picked up at that conference. You and other managers

## Are you at risk for burning out?

No doubt, when you are a new manager you'll encounter some very stressful situations.

So how do you keep yourself from burning out?

Here are a few ways to keep things in check:

1. Monitor how long you're working. You may feel like you need to put in a 60-hour week to get the job done, but that's probably unsustainable. Set a limit on the hours you'll work each week ... and stick to it.
2. Know your signs of stress. Maybe you reach for the doughnuts; maybe you fly off the handle; maybe you have trouble concentrating. Keep an eye out for your own warning signs.

will need to be willing to try – at least on a trial basis – what employees return with. That sends the message that you believe their training's worth it.

### Strategy 5: Demonstrate You Care

Do you care about the people who work for you as people, not just as employees? You want to – without prying – know about the things going on in their lives (their families, their outside interests, etc.).

Of course, knowing you should care is one thing – to demonstrate you care is another.

One caution: This can be a slippery slope. You don't want to get involved in the personal lives of your employees. One new manager who told a woman going through a nasty divorce "anything you need," soon found that woman taking her supervisor up on that offer – and missing work, coming up short on deadlines, etc.

### Strategy 4: Recognize and praise people regularly

Any manager worth his or her salt knows it's important to tell the people they supervise they're doing a good job. Buckingham's and Coffman's guide: Can you say that you've praised each of your people at least once in the past seven days?

May not be hard with some of your people. With others, you may really have to dig deep.

If you can't find something good to say every week or so, you may have a bigger problem on your hands – underperformers!

But, for the most part, you should be able to meet that goal.

To help you along, keep "The Three Ss" in mind.

Praise should be:

1. **Sincere.** You're probably not going to make up something to praise a staffer about. It doesn't have to be the biggest compliment in the world, but be sure it's heartfelt.
2. **Specific.** "You're doing a great job, Phil," doesn't help Phil know what to keep doing and can sound empty. "I'm really impressed with the way you kept your cool with that angry customer" does a lot more.
3. **Significant.** You don't need a major contribution to take notice. But you want the praise to be about something important to the person. If Julie's been working on a specific skill, show her you noticed how nicely she executed it last Tuesday.

### Strategy 3: Put round pegs in round holes

People need to have an opportunity to do what they do best at their jobs. It's human nature – good employees like to be "top dog." They like to do what they enjoy (which is what they're most successful at) and what they're the expert in.

True, that flies in the face of cross-training and other management techniques. But whenever you can, let people do what they're best at, and it'll pay off for you. Play to their strengths.

Need more reinforcement to let your people do what they do best? Here are a few:

1. **Nobody gets their toes stepped on.** In any group dynamic, you want to respect people's jobs and let them be in charge of a specific task.
2. **Projects just get done better.** It's common sense: If people are doing what they're good at, the end result will be a better one.
3. **People are happier.** No one wants to feel like a failure. And expecting them to master things they might just not be

good at puts a lot of undue pressure on them. Yes, you want people to take on new challenges from time to time. But most of the time they should feel set up for success.

### **Strategy 2: Provide the right research and equipment**

You need to make sure the people who work for you have the equipment they need, the resources they need, the funding they need – whatever it takes to do their jobs well.

This is when you have to go to bat for your people. Little will deflate people more than not having what they need to get their work accomplished and thinking their boss isn't doing everything under the sun to get it for them.

To make it mean even more, be sure to ask the people from time to time whether they have everything they need to get their jobs done as effectively as possible. And if not, what would make things better?

### **Strategy 1: Clarify and communicate your expectations**

Communication is the top influencer on productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction and low employee turnover: Let people know what's expected of them. That means making sure they understand:

- how their work is going to be judged
- when they're supposed to be at work
- what they're supposed to do when they're there
- when they're supposed to go home, and
- how they're supposed to contribute to the team.

## **7 Common Tough Calls New Managers Must Make**

This formula for success is just that: a formula. So, how do you best put it into play? You're bound to face plenty of difficult questions and run into tough situations.

What's next is a series of common – and tricky – scenarios with an action plan for each.

### **Tough call #1: Inherited discipline problems**

*"An incident occurred with someone on my team before I came on board. This person was never disciplined, and now it's up to me to lower the boom."*

Your best course of action: You'll have to take action on this one – leave it unchecked, and the person may think he or she may be able to get away with it again.

Say something like "I have to follow up on this":

- what's happened
- here's what's happened thus far since, and
- here's what needs to happen from now on.

No point dwelling on the past. Gear your conversation toward the future. Even if someone needs to be suspended for three days without pay or suffer some other serious consequence, keep the focus on how you can work together and prevent problems going forward.

### **Tough call #2: The 'bad' employee**

*"I have a bad apple on my team. Is it better to try to salvage her or just get rid of her?"*

Clearly if the person can do the job and just isn't trying or is goofing off, you want to put some energy into salvaging that individual. And as a new manager you may think you can – and should – try to save everyone.

But don't spend too much of your time on it.

The top commodity you now offer to your organization as a manager is your time. And if you waste too much of it on a lost cause, you're turning yourself into overhead and others you manage will notice.



To simplify, you can break your employees into three categories:

- Eagles: top performers who fly and soar.
- Robins: folks who come to work and get the job done, but who don't rise to the top.
- Turkeys: self-explanatory.

Ask yourself: Where am I spending the majority of my time and energy? Nine out of 10 managers will say the lion's share goes to the turkeys – and that's not good!

Best approach: Spend most of your time encouraging your eagles to keep soaring and developing your robins to become eagles.

And spend just enough time with the turkeys to let them know they need to get better – or else.

### **Tough call #3: Unmotivated employee**

*"I have someone on my team who is happy to stay where he is and never move up through the ranks."*

Is that always the worst thing? If this person is a solid soldier and is good at what he or she does, maybe it's fine to leave well enough alone. Every organization needs worker bees. Not everyone wants to be – or can be – a leader. They stay productive, and there's no issue.

### **Tough call #4: How much fun is too much fun?**

*"How important is levity in a group and how do you keep it from going too far?"*

Levity's critical. And the research supports it – when people have fun at work, they're happier and stick around longer. Of course, you have to keep an eye on it so we don't become "all play and no work."

Think of it like you're chairing a meeting. Watch how things progress, and be ready to be the person who puts everyone back on track. That means you may have to say "OK, let's get back to

## Rules for humor in the workplace

OK, so you know what you can't joke about in the office: religion, politics, ethnicity, sexuality. Practical jokes are a no-no, too.

So what is fair game?

1. **Yourself.** Self-effacing humor is always safe. The way you hum at the copy machine or your 10-year-old filthy coffee mug can take a shot now and then.
2. **A common situation.** Big computer conversion coming up? That's a great target for jokes.
3. **Low-impact personal characteristics.** Tom has handwriting you'd need the FBI to decipher? That's probably a safe topic to poke some fun at. But be an equal opportunity jokester so no one person feels picked on.

work" now and then. The key is to do it without coming off like an ogre.

Here are three ways to lighten the mood even in the face of heavier workloads:

1. **Break it up.** Every job has its fair share of tedious work. Not much funny about data entry! That's why an occasional break – preferably a humorous one – can do a world of good. Studies show a break doesn't distract from tasks that require concentration – people are actually more productive after it.
2. **Lighten up the atmosphere.** Forget that poster of the little kitten with the words "Hang in there" on the department wall. Not funny. But how about a list of the best (or worst) excuses companies have ever heard for calling out sick?
3. **Set the tone.** No one wants a boss wearing giant shoes and a big red clown nose, but employees will follow your lead to see how much humor's appropriate. Two guides: no joke you wouldn't want to hear about yourself or a loved one, and no activity you wouldn't want your sister to participate in.

### Tough call #5: Bad attitude employees

*"There's someone here who is good at what she does but doesn't have the best attitude. Some of our long-term people rally around this individual, while others complain she's lowering morale."*

You have two ways to approach this: unofficially and officially.

Unofficially you'd take the person aside and say, "Look, you seem to be unhappy and here are a few examples." Always have examples. Maybe she rolls her eyes during staff meetings or never offers to lend a hand to a swamped

co-worker. But you want this heart-to-heart to leave the person understanding there's a behavior that needs to be changed and there are consequences if it isn't.

Officially, you need to identify what this bad-attitude employee is saying or doing more formally – and specifically. Once you've identified the problem behaviors, you'll need to outline what specifically needs to be changed and what you'd like to see instead. Example: "If you have concerns about how we do something, don't make snide comments to your co-workers. Please come to me with your beef."

If the attitude doesn't improve? You may have to show some people the door even if they're good at what they do. Sometimes the expertise has to be sacrificed for the good of your whole team. (Be sure to consult HR or Legal to make sure you've given the appropriate warnings, compiled a solid paper trail of documentation, etc.)

### **Tough call #6: Employees trying to be the boss**

*"One of my employees has a very strong personality – in fact, he's trying to take over my job."*

Everybody wants to feel important. So if that person's trying to make "big decisions" and she's within her purview, just let it happen. But you'll have to keep a close eye on it. If this person simply likes to dominate and is stepping on other members of your team, you'll need to raise a hand fast. Because that type of personality can cause big problems if left unchecked.

### **Tough call #7: How to toe the company line**

*"A company policy's coming down that I don't personally completely support. Yet I'm expected to sell my own team members on it."*

You're the boss now, and part of your job is to implement company policies. Will you buy in to every single one? Not likely. And you can feel free to respectfully communicate that up to your own boss. But you'll still have to present that new policy to the people that work

for you. You don't have to lie and say you support it. Some good neutral language: "There are some reasons why this is being done." Just be sure you don't do or say anything to undermine it.

**The choice is yours.**

Ultimately you have three choices:

1. accept it
2. don't accept it and work to change it, or
3. leave.

Those are your options as a manager – and also the options of the people under you.

Maybe you'll encounter some of these challenges in your first week of new "manager-dom" – others you may not hit until you've been doing the job for several months.

But hang in there – you were promoted for a reason and you can get the job done.

Remember you are not alone.

There are other managers out there handling the same types of issues. Some will make a great support group.

Good luck!

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and other Essential Insights at  
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