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Managing People

What exactly do we mean by management? Different textbooks give different definitions, but people skills – handling staff, colleagues, customers and the boss effectively – are at the heart of good management.

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Hot tip

The conventional definition of management is getting work done through people, but real management is developing people through work.

What is Management?

There are many different definitions of management. Many are along the lines of “achieving desired goals through planning, organizing, directing and controlling.”

A shorter – and perhaps better – definition is “getting results through other people”.

An organization may have an inspiring mission statement, clear goals, a compelling strategy, realistic and challenging work targets, and excellent systems and procedures. But none of these count for much unless it has enthusiastic, committed people. Handling and motivating people is at the heart of effective management.

People skills are the most important attribute of any manager. But they’re not enough on their own. The following chapters cover the core management skills needed by anyone operating at any level in any organization. People skills help you to put them all into practice. More advice about team-working and managing teams is given in Chapter 7.

Plain common sense

There are no secrets or magic formulas in this book. Most of it is just obvious common sense. But if you’re a conscientious manager, working your socks off in the interests of your organization, you can be so focused on the job in hand and so determined to meet your deadlines, that it’s easy to lose sight of some of the basic tools and techniques of effective management.

Most of this book is not about text-book solutions, but about simple, practical things that have been put into practice in the real world and shown to work where it matters – in the workplace.

It’s a combination of plain common sense and the kind of unofficial tips that are rarely written down, but which go a long way towards making a decent, effective manager.

Essential Qualities

You don't have to know the latest management theories to be an effective manager. Theories and fashions come and go. Most of the important qualities have been around for years and years, and are likely to endure for many more years:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Truthfulness
- Industriousness
- Reliability
- Accountability
- Loyalty
- Trustworthiness
- Dedication
- Resilience

And don't forget plain common sense.

Walking the talk

It's not difficult for a manager to lose the respect of colleagues or staff. All (s)he has to do is to tell them one thing, and then to do another himself/herself. For example, make it clear that you expect everyone to be in the office by 9 o'clock on the dot; then roll up yourself at 10. It's pretty obvious that this won't do much for staff morale, but it's surprising how many senior managers don't make the connection.

Being honest and straight

Honesty is important. Don't make promises you won't be able to keep. If you have to pass on bad news, don't shirk the responsibility. Choose the right time and the right way to do it. Do it carefully and sensitively. But do it. Occasionally there may be circumstances which prevent you from telling your people as much as you know yourself. If that is the case, just tell them what you can and stop there. They may not like it, but they will like it even less if you mislead them.

Don't forget



People skills are the most important attribute of any manager.

Don't forget



Remember: deeds always speak much, much louder than words. Setting a good personal example – modeling the behavior and the standards you expect of others – is arguably the most important attribute of any manager.

Avoiding a blame culture

Don't blame people – especially not in public. It's never, ever a good idea to humiliate someone or undermine their self-respect. It's always better to build people up rather than knock them down. A blame culture is unhealthy - and it won't help you to achieve results.



Saying what you think

There may still be a few top managers around who like subordinates who carry out their wishes without question. But most organizations today value managers who think for themselves. Don't be afraid to say what you think – provided, of course, that you have the facts and the arguments to back up your opinion. Once your views have been heard and a decision has been taken, it's your job as a manager to implement that decision, even if you don't like it.

Keeping your cool

Of course, you're allowed to be angry. If someone makes a bad mistake, or fails to carry out an important task, you're going to be very annoyed. That's human nature: it's what you'd expect of any manager who cares about the reputation of his/her unit and its ability to deliver the goods. If something has gone wrong, you need to find out exactly what happened and why – and to do your damndest to make sure it does not happen again. But all this is best done when you are in a calm, cool frame of mind and you can address the issues clearly and objectively. Losing your temper will not help.

Beware

A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.

Tools and Techniques

Manage by walking about

Management by walking about (MBWA) is one of the best management tools around. If you're closeted in an office, hunched over a desk or have your eyes glued to a computer screen, you won't see half of what's going on. MBWA is the way to see what's really happening and to find out how people really feel. It also helps your team to see what you're interested in, what your standards are, what you like and what you don't like. You can apply MBWA outside your own team – in other departments and other organizations. Go and see what they are doing! You'll almost certainly learn something.

**Hot tip**

Informal networks can tell you more about what is really going on than anyone will ever tell you officially.

Networking

Do all you can to make contacts and to cultivate informal networks: look beneath the surface and you'll find them everywhere – in your own department, in the rest of the organization, and in the outside world. The grapevine often tells you more about what is really going on than anyone will dare tell you openly or officially. If you're faced with a particularly difficult problem, the chances are that someone somewhere else will have come up against something similar. Networking is the way to tap into that kind of informal knowledge and experience. The more networks you are plugged into, the better. Obviously some will be more useful and more reliable than others. Most successful people have an extensive range of personal contacts which they have built up over the years. A good contacts list is worth its weight in gold.

Asking questions – and listening to the answers

Never be afraid to ask questions or to challenge assumptions. The journalist's stock questions are often the best:

- Why?
- When?
- Who?
- Where?
- How?
- What if?

Asking the same question of different people is often a good tactic. You can learn a lot from getting different perspectives on the same issue. Once you have asked the question, listen very carefully to the answer. If that sounds obvious, remember that active listening can be hard work, especially if the person answering goes on a bit!

Avoiding micro-management

The more you can let people manage both themselves and their own work, the better. Don't be afraid to let go. You need to keep an eye on things, of course; to make sure that things are running smoothly and that people are on course to meet their targets. But if you can't see the wood for the trees, you're never going to be an effective manager.

In the middle

In any organization, a manager is in the space somewhere between top management and staff who are carrying out day-to-day tasks. That can be an uncomfortable place to be – especially when ridiculous edicts come down from the top of the organization. You may have to stifle your own reservations (or, at least, not groan too loudly) and persuade your people to accept or do something that everyone – except those at the top – knows is nonsense. But that's your job: you're the manager. You've just got to grin and bear it and get on with it.

Hot tip



You can learn a lot by putting the same question to different people.

Don't forget

Sometimes the people you're working with will have things other than work on their minds.

Beware

Don't try to change your personality.

Being Human

Getting to know them

The better you know someone, the easier it is to get on with them (OK, there might be the odd exception!). Make a real effort to get to know the people you work with. Take an interest in their families and their lives outside the office. Who knows, you might discover a mutual passion for Renaissance art – or the Bactrian camels of Mongolia! An occasional get-together after work, with an opportunity to talk to people in a less stuffy, more relaxed environment, can be good for building personal relationships – and even for getting to grips with some work-related problem that is too sensitive to discuss in the office.

Being yourself

Don't pretend to be someone you're not. Trying to change your personality to suit what you think the organization wants is almost certainly doomed to failure. The best approach is to understand yourself and your preferred working style(s) as clearly as you can, perhaps using one of the personality profiling models mentioned in Chapter 7. If you really know yourself – how you relate to others, how you deal with information, how you tackle problems – you should be able to adapt your approach to accommodate the needs of those you're working with.

Enjoying work

Enthusiasm can be very infectious. Every job ever invented has its lows as well as its highs. There are bound to be some aspects of your work that are less enjoyable than others – and probably some



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that are no fun at all! But being as enthusiastic and upbeat as you can is a good guiding principle. So do all you can to enjoy your work – and help others to enjoy theirs. If you've got a positive attitude, there's a good chance that this will rub off on others, and that they will follow your example.

Taking the job seriously – but not too seriously

You won't be an effective manager if you don't take the job seriously. Meeting your targets, making sure that your team works effectively and efficiently, maintaining high standards, seeking continuous improvement – it's all very important: it's what you're paid for. But it's worth remembering that work is not the be-all and end-all of life. Sometimes the people you're working with will have other things on their mind. Keep a sense of proportion and perspective. Occasionally you'll need to recognize that there are more important things than work.



Sense of humor

Management is a serious business, but the most serious subjects on earth sometimes benefit from a little humor. If you doubt that, listen to any Government debates. Having a sense of humor does not mean cracking jokes. And it definitely does not mean laughing at colleagues or making fun of them. Nor does it mean treating serious issues lightly or flippantly. It simply means recognizing that you don't need to be deadly serious all the time; taking the opportunity now and again to lighten the mood; and being prepared to see the funny side of things.

Beware



If things are going badly, don't take it out on other people.

Don't forget



You don't have to be deadly serious all the time.

...cont'd



Don't be a manager behaving badly

It's easy to be abrupt or offhand or even downright rude towards those around you.

Perhaps you're in a bad mood for some reason – it happens to us all – or you've had some bad news, or you've just had one of those days when absolutely everything has gone wrong.

Or maybe you're just focused on the task in hand, striving to meet a tight deadline, and you resent anything and anyone who breaks your concentration.

Whatever the reason for your bad behavior, just stop and think about the effect on other people. If you're having a bad day, don't take it out on those around you.

Showing passion

If you're passionate about your work and you care – really care – about what you're doing, some of that passion is bound to rub off on those around you.

The chances are it will help them to believe that what they are doing is worthwhile and relevant to the real world, and that it can make a real difference to people's lives.

Influencing and Persuading

Whether you're dealing with your staff, colleagues, customers or your boss, influencing and persuading is an important management skill.

There are usually four key stages:

- 1 Make sure you thoroughly understand the case you're making: be clear in your own mind about the facts and the arguments.
- 2 Check that your facts are 100% accurate and make sure that your arguments really stand up.
- 3 Put yourself in the shoes of those you're seeking to influence or persuade. Try to understand "where they are coming from". That will help you to decide what approach to take and which facts and arguments to use.
- 4 Put your points across (whether orally or in writing) as clearly and concisely as you can.

Beware

Don't keep your boss in the dark.

Handling the Boss

Keeping the boss informed

Don't try to pull the wool over your boss's eyes, or keep him/her in the dark. If there is bad news, be up-front about it. If you're not, the chances are that, sooner or later, (s)he'll find out about it from someone else anyway. There are few things senior people dislike more than getting a sudden, nasty shock about which they have had no prior warning, even though the unpleasant facts have been known for some time at a lower level in the organization. Don't keep bad news to yourself.

Understanding your boss

Take time to understand your boss. Find out:

- How he or she sees their role;
- What makes him/her tick;
- What his or her real priorities are;
- How he or she spends most of their time;
- What pressure he or she is under;
- Where the pressure comes from;
- What he or she really likes;
- What he or she dislikes;
- What he or she finds really annoying!

His problems: your opportunities

We all have our good points and bad points, our strengths and our weaknesses - even the boss. It's your job to help the boss. If you can make him/her look good, it won't do your relationship any harm. If your own strengths can compensate for some of the boss's weaknesses, that's great: you'll make an excellent team. If your boss has a problem, it's a real opportunity to show how helpful and resourceful you can be. If the boot's on the other foot and you have a problem you need to take to the boss, try not to present it to him/her without suggesting how it can be solved.

Dealing with a difficult boss

No-one is perfect. The chances are, you won't like everything your boss does or agree fully with the way (s)he operates. Whatever

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kind of boss you have, you've got to survive and to make the best of it. So you might just have to follow Churchill's advice. KBO - keep buggering on!

If life becomes intolerable and your boss is consistently acting in a way which is unfair or unreasonable, you'll have to do something about it. If you don't and you end up totally stressed out, your health is bound to suffer.

Try the following:

- 1 Make a note of the key points you're going to make.
- 2 Arm yourself with the chapter and verse of some specific examples.
- 3 Rehearse both the key points and the specific examples.
- 4 Try an informal oral approach.
- 5 If that does not work, put your concerns in writing. Keep it clear, concise and specific. Avoid any biased judgments or comments: be as factual and objective as you can.

If this does not produce a result, it may be time to call for the cavalry: copy your note to your boss's boss. If whatever you are complaining about is happening consistently, (s)he may already have heard about it. Your complaint might confirm existing suspicions and convince him/her of the need to take action. Stranger things have happened.

Don't be afraid of the top team

However senior your colleagues are, remember that they are just fallible human beings like the rest of us. Just like you, they have to get out of bed in the morning, wash, dress, eat, drink, urinate and do everything else human beings do.

If you're meeting the CEO or MD for the first time, try not to be overawed. (S)he won't eat you alive.