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Team Management Skills

The Core Skills Needed to Manage Your Team

So you've just got a new job as a manager. Congratulations! Or maybe you've just been given the task of pulling a new team together. What a challenge!

Either way, whether your team exists already or it's your responsibility to create it, what do you do next?

This article looks at some of the key things that team managers need to do if their team is to thrive and succeed. These range from choosing the right people and deciding who does what, to communicating with, developing and motivating people. It also covers some of the most common pitfalls to be avoided.

First Things First

But before that, some definitions are useful. What is management, exactly? And how does it differ from leadership?

A good starting point is the Warren G. Bennis quote that "Leaders are people who do the right things; managers are people who do things right." Leadership involves creating a compelling vision of the future, communicating that vision, and helping people understand and commit to it. Managers, on the other hand, are responsible for ensuring that the vision is implemented efficiently and successfully.

Of course, these two roles overlap – and, to be fully effective, you need to fulfill both roles. However, the focus of this article is on the specific skills and responsibilities of managers, and

on the tools available to them. After all, there's no point energizing people to work towards a fabulous vision of the future, only to fall flat on your face when it comes to implementation.

The Importance of Delegation

The top priority for team managers is **delegation** . No matter how skilled you are, there's only so much that you can achieve working on your own. With a team behind you, you can achieve so much more: that's why it's so important that you delegate effectively!

Successful delegation starts with matching people and tasks, so you first need to explain what your team's role and goals are. A good way of doing this is to put together a **team charter** , which sets out the purpose of the team and how it will work. Not only does this help you get your team off to a great start, it can also be useful for bringing the team back on track if it's veering off course.

Only then will you be in a position to think about the skills, experience and competencies within your team, and start matching people to tasks. Read our article on **task allocation** for more on how to do this, and to find out how to deal with real-world challenges, such as managing the gaps between team members' skill sets.

Motivating Your Team

Another key duty you have as a manager is to motivate team members.

Our article on **Theory X and Theory Y** explains two very different approaches to motivation, which depend on the fundamental assumptions that you make about the people who work for you. If you believe that they're intrinsically lazy, you believe in Theory X, while if you believe that most are happy and willing to work, you'll tend towards Theory Y. Make sure that you fully understand these theories – they will fundamentally affect your success in motivating people.

You can find out much more about motivation with our quiz **How Good Are Your Motivation Skills?**

This helps you learn a number of core approaches to motivation – **Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory**, **McClelland's Human Motivation Theory** and **Sirota's Three Factor Theory** are particularly useful.

Whatever approach you prefer to adopt, you also need to bear in mind that different people have different needs when it comes to motivation. Some individuals are highly self-motivated,

while others will under-perform without managerial input. Use our article on **Pygmalion Motivation** to understand how to manage these different groups of people.

Developing Your Team

Teams are made up of individuals who have different outlooks and abilities, and are at different stages of their careers. Some may find that the tasks you've allocated to them are challenging, and they may need support. Others may be "old hands" at what they're doing, and may be looking for opportunities to stretch their skills. Either way, it's your responsibility to develop all of your people.

Your skills in this aspect of management will define your long-term success as a manager. If you can help team members to become better at what they do, you'll be a manager who people aspire to work for, and you'll make a great contribution to your organization, too.

The most effective way of developing your people is to ensure that you give regular **feedback** to members of your team. Many of us are nervous of giving feedback, especially when it has to be negative. However, if you give and receive feedback regularly, everyone's performance will improve.

Beyond this, our article on **Understanding Developmental Needs** will help you develop individual team members, so that they can perform at their best.

Tip:

If you have to bring a substantial number of new people into your team, read our article on **forming, storming, norming and performing** to learn about the stages you can expect your team to go through. You can do a lot to help your people through this process!

Communicating and Working With Your Team – and With Others

Communication skills are essential for success in almost any role, but there are particular skills and techniques that you'll use more as a manager than you did as a regular worker. These fall under two headings: communicating with team members, and communicating with people outside your team. We'll look at each in turn.

Communicating With People in Your Team

As a team manager, you're likely to be chairing regular sessions as well as one-off meetings. Meeting of all kinds, and regular ones in particular, are notorious for wasting people's time, so it's well worth mastering the skill of **running effective meetings** □.

Many meetings include **brainstorming** □ sessions. As a team manager, you'll often have to **facilitate** □ these, so you'll need to be comfortable with doing this. There's more to this than simply coming up with creative ideas, as you do when you're just a regular participant in such a session: read **our article** □ to find out how to run brainstorming sessions. Make sure that you understand where they can go wrong, and what you can do to avoid this.

Active listening □ is another important skill for managers – and others – to master. When you're in charge, it can be easy to think that you know what others are going to say, or that listening is less important, because you've thought of a solution anyway.

Don't fall into this trap. Most good managers are active listeners: it helps them detect problems early (while they're still easy to deal with), avoid costly misunderstandings, and build trust within their teams.

Communicating With People Outside Your Team

Your boss is probably the most important person you need to communicate with. Take time to understand fully what your boss wants from you and your team – if you know exactly what she likes, and how she prefers this to be delivered, you'll be better able to meet with her approval.

Don't be afraid to ask your boss to coach or mentor you: you can usually learn a lot from him, but he may not be proactive about offering this. If you're approaching your boss for advice, make sure that you've thought things through as far as you can. Introduce the subject with a summary of your thinking, and then say where you need help.

Also, as a manager, part of your job is to look after your team and protect it from unreasonable pressure. Learn skills like **assertiveness** □ and **win-win negotiation** □, so that you can either turn work away, or negotiate additional resources.

Another part of your job is to manage the way that your team interacts with other groups. Use **stakeholder analysis** □ to identify the groups that you need to deal with. Then talk to these people to find out what they want from you, and what they can do to help you.

Managing Discipline

However much you hope that you won't have to do it, there comes a time in most managers' careers when they have to discipline an employee. Discipline may be subtly different from basic feedback, because it doesn't always relate specifically to the employee's work. You can

give feedback on their phone manner, for example, but handling problems with timekeeping or personal grooming can need a different approach.

Obvious breaches of the law or of company policy are easy to identify and deal with. But what of other situations? On one hand, you don't want to seem petty. On the other hand, you can't let things go that should be dealt with.

Use these rules-of-thumb to decide whether you need to take action. If the answer to any is yes, then you need to arrange a time to speak to the employee in private.

1. Does the issue affect the quality of the employee's deliverable to the client (internal or external)?

A graphic designer regularly gets into work late, although he stays late to make up for this. Customers are sometimes frustrated by not being able to get through to him at the start of the day, particularly when he's working on rush jobs.

2. Does the issue adversely impact the cohesiveness of the team?

Individual designers tend to work on their own projects, with few meetings between design team members, so cohesiveness is not impacted. However people are noticing his lack of punctuality, and other people's timekeeping is beginning to slip.

3. Does the issue unnecessarily undermine the interests of other individuals in the team?

The designer sitting next to the latecomer is unhappy that she has to field calls from clients before he reaches the office, and is unable to give a firm answer to the question "When will he be in?"

In this situation, the design team manager decides to speak to the latecomer because of the impact on his co-worker. They agree that coming in to work late is not a problem (he has a long commute, with heavy traffic en route) but that he will commit to being in by 9.30 a.m. every day to reduce the number of calls his co-worker has to field, and also give her a fixed time to give clients. He will work late to make up time, and will take on a task she doesn't like to make up for her extra phone handling.

When you are faced with a potential discipline issue, take time to gather information about the situation, decide what you're going to do, and act. Discipline issues rarely go away of their own accord, and they usually get worse, often causing considerable resentment amongst other team members.

Traps to Avoid

There are a number of common mistakes that new managers tend to make. Take care to avoid them!

These are:

- Thinking that you can rely on your existing job knowledge and technical skills to succeed as a manager. It is essential that you take the time to develop good management and people skills as well – these can be more important than your technical skills!
- Failing to consult regularly with your boss, in a misguided attempt to show that you can cope on your own.
- Approaching your boss without having thought a problem through, and without having considered how the problem could be solved.
- Embarrassing your boss, or letting her get a nasty surprise. Follow the "no surprises" rule.
- Doing anything that requires your boss to defend you to others. This can cause your boss to "lose face" with his peers and superiors, and it makes it look as if his team is out of control.
- Failing to talk to your customers (whether internal or external) about what they want from yourself and your team.
- Using your authority inappropriately – make sure that everything you ask people to do is in the interests of the organization.

Many of these points sound obvious, however, it's incredibly easy to make these mistakes in the rush of everyday managerial life.

Key Points

When you move from being a worker to a line manager, you need to develop a new set of skills, and make use of new tools and techniques. These will help you with the key management activities of organizing, motivating, developing and communicating with your team.

Above all, learn how to delegate effectively. However, also learn how to motivate people, develop team members, communicate effectively with people inside and outside your team, and manage discipline effectively.

And make sure that you avoid the mistakes that many new managers make!

This site teaches you the skills you need for a happy and successful career; and this is just one of many tools and resources that you'll find here at Mind Tools. Subscribe to our **free newsletter**, or **join the Mind Tools Club** and really supercharge your career!