

# Management 101

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What is a manager? According to Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, a manager is "one who has the conduct, or direction of anything."

The Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2003 is more practical and more direct in today's terms. It defines a manager as "somebody who manages business: somebody who is responsible for directing and controlling the work and personnel of a business, or of a particular department within a business".

Both use the word "direct". A manager must direct or guide events and people. It is important to note that the word "do" is not used. A manager must accomplish his or her work through others. They direct another worker to actually do the work, although they retain responsibility for the final product.

This simple distinction is key, in my view. It is also the usual stumbling block of the newly minted manager, particularly one who has been promoted from among his peers to change roles and manage those peers. Known in my business experience as a battlefield promotion, it is the toughest way to step into management. Such new managers are dealt a double whammy. First of all, they must begin managing people who were former peers. They had better have a good working relationship with those peers and command respect as a peer before they will be given a fair shake at reestablishing that respect as a superior.

Secondly, they have most likely been promoted because they excelled at doing the actual job. The most common mistake of these star workers as they attempt to become managers is to cling too hard to the work itself. To be successful managers, they have to let go of the task themselves and allow their new subordinates to accomplish the task. They must direct rather than do.

As a corporate management candidate myself, I was given the lead position on a team of peers tasked with a major product development project. The experience was both exciting and humbling. The project was very large, the resources limited, and the time frames impossible. As team and project leader, I had to organize the huge task, then get my teammates to accomplish their portion of the job, which required no small effort on their parts! To accomplish the task in the time allotted required superhuman effort from all of us. For the better part of six months, we worked seven days a week. On the weekends, we took it a little easier, only putting in about 10 hours a day. Weekdays were incredibly long and incredibly tense.

This experience really tested my mettle in every way imaginable. More than anything else, however, it taught me how to manage people. I had to get an incredible amount of work out of these people, and in the jargon of my company, I didn't hold their "PA" or personnel cards. In other words, I couldn't give a direct command. Instead, I had to be indirect. I developed a technique I still call the creative wheedle. I had to encourage, follow up, track

progress, keep them on task and on target, check with them again and again, push, twist arms, celebrate success and avoid failure. In short, I had to be diplomat, cheerleader, drill sergeant, and parent.

To add to the challenge, I also had to manage my management. I learned not to say, in desperation, that the task was impossible given the available resources and due date. Instead, when asked if I could meet the due date, I said, "Absolutely!" Then, I presented a detailed analysis of the task, in terms they could understand, and translated that into what I needed to meet that date. The approach worked. We compromised. They gave me somewhat fewer resources than I had requested, but pushed the date out to something at least somewhat more attainable. As the project progressed, my job in dealing with my management was to deflect any undesirable issues or additional workload from my project team. I had to become their protector and advocate. I sang their praises and tried to get them enough space to fix their problems before they became management problems.

I was totally immersed in this project, sometimes more like drowning than immersion, but I grew. I developed invaluable skills directing and working effectively with people. In short, I became a viable management candidate, not simply someone who had hung around long enough to demand a management crown. One of the most satisfying compliments I received from my own manager after the project was this. When I was selected to lead that team, one of my colleagues went to our manager and voiced real concern about that selection. He said that he didn't think he could work with me as the project leader because I was too much of a perfectionist. Our manager encouraged him to give me some time. During the project, to his credit, he never let on to me that he had any concern at all. At project completion, he went back to our manager and said he had been wrong. There had been no problem. That small bit of peer recognition, received second hand, was more important to me than public kudos and awards.

I went on from that position to take a first line management job. I still remember my shock when, as a brand new manager, I asked an employee to do something. I delivered it in my best diplomatic, creative wheedle style. When he "jumped to" and did it, without any further encouragement, I was stunned. It was my first experience of my role change from peer to superior. I managed not to show my surprise, and went on to be a very good first line manager. It was one of the most draining and demanding jobs of my career and also one of the most satisfying.

Out of all of this, what wisdom would I share with a new manager now? My thoughts:

- You don't do the work yourself anymore. You direct others to complete the task.
- Your way of doing the work is not the only way. It may not even be the best way. Give people the space to use their methods and judge based on results.
- Communicate the goals and define the task to be done. It is easier to work with a purpose.
- Follow-up, but don't micromanage. These are responsible adults, remember. Just help them stay on the correct road to reach the designated destination.
- Give them the tools they need to do the work.
- Do everything you can to remove obstacles and roadblocks from their paths.
- Turn them loose and let them excel.
- Let them know when they aren't performing. Do them the courtesy of a chance to fix their errors.
- Let them and your own management know when they are successful.

An executive walks past the office of a manager with an effective and productive team. The manager's desk is completely clean. An instant reaction might be to think that the manager isn't working. Why isn't there some paperwork spread around? Some evidence of activity? The clutter of work in progress?

I submit that what the executive has just witnessed is a manager doing a fabulous job, a manager accomplishing significant amounts of work through a dedicated, well-directed, satisfied team. Such a manager is a rare commodity. Treat him or her well!

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