

## ***From Managing Self to Managing Others***

When people are appointed to their first management positions, they often think they have it made. All their hard work as an individual contributor has finally been rewarded, and they see a management assignment as a cause for celebration. They call their spouse, make reservations at a favorite restaurant and generally believe that they're more than ready to take on a management role.

In fact, to be successful as a first-time manager requires a major transition for which many people are not adequately prepared. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this transition is that first-time managers are responsible for getting work done through others rather than on their own. While new managers may recognize this transition intellectually, they reject it psychologically, as evidenced by their behaviors. Typically they overpower their direct reports with their expertise. For instance, a neophyte investment banking firm manager might structure a complex transaction himself rather than helping his direct report do it, relishing the thrill of showing everyone his extraordinary skill in this area. In other situations, new managers end up competing with direct reports on assignments and sometimes complete assignments themselves when they're frustrated by how their people approach it. Giving up the tasks and responsibilities that earned them a manager title in the first place is a tremendously difficult aspect of this leadership passage.

In a world where knowledge-worker companies are multiplying, this is an especially crucial passage. Today's twenty-two-year-old individual contributor in a dot.com company is tomorrow's CEO. She no longer has to wait thirty years to ascend to the top spot; she may be ready in five to ten years (or it may be even less). Plus, first-time managers in knowledge-worker companies have a tremendous impact on productivity (in terms of cost efficiency and revenue growth). If they're acting like individual contributors, their impact will be reduced. For these reasons alone, organizations must do more than just give lip service to the importance of this passage.

To help your people make this challenging passage successfully, you need to be familiar with the targeted shift in skills, time applications, and work values and how to facilitate this shift. First, however, you should understand how events at the individual contributor level have recently reshaped the skill, time, and value requirements.

### **The Rising Power and Expectations of Individual Contributors**

Front-line employees have unprecedented access to incredible amounts of information via the Internet and other sources, and they possess great freedom to innovate, affect operating results, and serve customers. But they won't use this freedom—or use it wisely—unless first-line managers recognize that the day of the “military manager” has passed.

Managers who issue orders, jealously guard information, and make unilateral decisions won't get the best performance from their people. The old-line manager who controlled people by controlling information is an anachronism. Today, employees expect to have

access to what was formerly considered privileged information and to be involved in the decision-making process. They also want a certain amount of latitude in the way they carry out assignments. In other words, they want direction but also the freedom to reach a destination in their own way.

Recognize, too, that most employees are more savvy and sophisticated about career issues than in the past. They've seen parents and friends lose jobs through downsizing, and they're aware that the only true job security is to possess in-demand skills and be knowledgeable about career paths in their profession. Because of all this, they expect career development opportunities.

First-line managers need to make the transition to these new realities and not to the old ones. This isn't always easy, in part because many of the people who are promoted to this first managerial level are technicians; they have spent their time developing great skills at carrying out a given assignment rather than being in touch with the needs and expectations of their peers. They haven't undergone the workplace socialization that would provide useful insights and experiences for a new manager.

In lieu of that socialization, they must become cognizant of the first-level leadership characteristics that will help them meet the needs and maximize the performance of their people.

### **Three Achievements of Terrific First-Time Managers**

The attached table provides an overview of the transition that must take place at this level.

As you can see, the shift here is not only qualitative but quantitative. The number of skills alone may appear daunting. A quick look at this table also demonstrates, however, that this transition can be summed up as follows: Managers must cease thinking only about themselves and start thinking about others. Of course, all this is easier said than done, especially in light of the numerous changes listed on this table.

We've found that all these changes can be boiled down to the following three areas:

1. Defining and assigning work to be done, including communicating with the boss and others about needs or expectations, planning, organizing, choosing people, and delegating.
2. Enabling direct reports to do the work by monitoring, coaching, providing feedback, acquiring resources, problem solving, and communicating.
3. Building social contracts through establishing relationships with direct reports, bosses, and support groups that facilitate open dialogues and trust.

Let's examine each area so that you can recognize the optimum skills, time applications, and values for this level as well as where first-time managers typically fall short.

### **Defining and Assigning Work to Be Done**

Job design and delegation are rarely the focus of training. Perhaps it's because people consider them inherent skills or ones that are easily acquired. It may be that organizations assume that there are natural dividing lines for work—geography for salespeople or process steps for manufacturing people—and that job assignments flow from these natural divisions. Through it's true that existing parameters make it easier to assign some tasks, there is also a need for judgment—especially when first-line employees feel tremendously overworked and cut off from their bosses. Downsizing, delayering, merging companies, and other factors have made employees feel as though they have too much to do and no one to ask how to do it. First-line managers who know how to design a job effectively can diminish employees' negative feelings and make them feel positive about an assignment; they can give employees a sense that they're developing highly marketable skills that will enhance their career prospects.

Unfortunately, many first-time managers stumble when it comes to defining and assigning work because they don't have the right discussions with the right people. These discussions should help them obtain a good understanding of what is required of their unit and create assignments so that people are working at tasks that are appropriate to them and that they can complete on time and with a high degree of quality.

The logical person for a manager to discuss these issues with is his boss. It's more and more important, however, that he also talk with peers, customers, suppliers, partners, and other relevant parties. A sales manager, for instance, can be much more effective if she is aware of what customers do with the products or services her unit sells. She can learn more about specific customer needs and make assignments recognizing which salespeople are best able to meet those needs.

These discussions take time, of course, and first-time managers who are used to spending their time *doing* rather than *discussing* may charge ahead and create assignments without sufficient knowledge.

Delegation presents another formidable challenge to novice managers. It's one thing to figure out what needs to be done and who needs to do it; it's quite another, and much more psychologically difficult, to let go of work that you were trained to do and that has helped you become successful. This is a very difficult step for first-time managers to take, and they're usually able to take it only when they realize that delegation is not abdication. They need to be trained and coached in how to delegate and become skilled at regular review and follow-up, problem solving, measurement, rewards, and coaching their own people.

As part of these defining and assigning responsibilities, new managers must learn to hire the right people to do the assigned tasks. Though many of them quickly learn how to hire people with the talent and experience to do a given job properly, they find it more difficult to hire people who “fit” a company’s work values and practices. This is an important responsibility: Most people who early in their career leave or are asked to leave organizations don’t fit. Although some people depart because they lack the talent for a specific job, most simply lack the beliefs, values, and ability to conform to an established style of working. Becoming astute about hiring people who are well matched to the workstyle and beliefs of the organization is something that can greatly enhance a first-time manager’s effectiveness.

### **Enabling Direct Reports to Do the Work**

A sure sign of a clogged leadership pipeline at this first level is high stress among individual contributors. When they feel overwhelmed and that their boss isn’t doing much to help them deal with their work, it’s likely that this manager is missing crucial first-level skill. Here are some common signs that a manager hasn’t mastered this skill:

- Views questions from his people as interruptions
- Fixes their mistakes rather than teaching them to do the work properly
- Refuses to take ownership of the success of his people, distancing himself from their problems and failures

Part of helping people do their work involves paying attention. Monitoring what is getting done and how it’s getting done is something that requires both time and effort. Managers need to engage in regular discussions with people as well as keep tabs on work flow. They have to ask questions about what’s getting in the way of completing tasks effectively or what might facilitate the process. Monitoring needs to be an active rather than a passive process. It’s not enough just to take notes. The information gleaned from monitoring should be translated into a pat on the back and positive feedback when results are good and into training, rescheduling, redesign of methods, and requests for more resources when results aren’t so good.

Perhaps the simplest skills—and the one that many new managers never valued as individual contributors—is being available. This doesn’t just mean keeping your door open and grudgingly answering questions. It’s much more an attitude rather than an event. People sense when a boss is approachable. Everything from his speech to his body language communicates accessibility (or the lack of it). This is really much more of a value and time-application issue than a skill set. When managers believe that being approachable is crucial to their leadership role, they make themselves available, both physically and emotionally.

### **Building Social Contracts**

The changes required here are primarily rooted in values. Although there is some skill necessary to build strong relationships with bosses, direct reports, customers, suppliers, and son on, the main issue has to do with a value transformation. As an individual contributor, relationship-building is often of secondary importance. In recent years, the

Internet and other factors have given individual contributors much more independence to apply their technical skills. Though they are sometimes asked to work as members of a team, they still receive great freedom to work on their own.

Managers, however, are highly interdependent creatures. They need to build trust and open lines of communication vertically and horizontally. This is a significant hurdle during this passage, not only because they may not have valued relationship building as individual contributors but also because their corporate culture may not value it. In some companies, relationship-building has political overtones, suggesting brown-nosing and other manipulative behaviors. In these instances, it takes a concerted effort by managers and strong coaching by their boss to overcome this hurdle.

The other big issue is that a manager must learn to value and build relationships with three types of people:

- The Boss (and by extension, the Management Structure). The big transition here is from an individual contributor's often adversarial view of management to becoming part of the establishment. It's not just connecting with a boss who is the lifeline to resources, information, and so on. It's connecting with the larger management structure and understanding how it works.
- Direct Reports. This isn't about liking subordinates or socializing with them but about building mutual respect and support. First-line managers need to become accountable for the success of their subordinates (and vice versa). In this way, a relationship is built that has mutual benefits. Demonstrating personal integrity is another aspect of relationship-building with direct reports. First-line managers who are perceived as devious and manipulative will never form productive relationships with their people.
- Suppliers, Customers, and Other Relevant Individuals. This type of relationship demands broader thinking and a wider perspective than was necessary for an individual contributor. Establishing "common purpose" relationships with these people—relationships in which both parties work toward the success of the business—is often a new experience. Supplying information and providing early warning on problems to an "outsider" is something that requires an adjustment in perception.

Source: Charan R, Drotter S, Noel J. *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company*. 2001; Jossey-Bass.