

HUMAN RESOURCE ASSOCIATES

HR Consultants to Management

# PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

*For Your Most Important Resource*

## IS MANAGEMENT A PROFESSION?

What is a manager? A reasonable answer might be “One who controls actions, functions, or people in some process intended to produce a predetermined outcome.” In today’s workforce, we often confer the title of manager on people as a reward or a status symbol and sometimes even to people who don’t actually manage anyone or anything. However, on most federal forms (such as Affirmative Action Programs (AAP) or EEO-1 reports) the title means that the person manages and evaluates the performance of other people. You can proffer the title on anyone you wish even though the government may not recognize them for overtime exemption. To follow the government path, we might more properly say that “Management is achieving predetermined goals through other people.”

### **What skills should we look for when selecting a manager?**

Now here’s where most of our troubles start. Many of us tend to select managers based on two things. The first is chemistry; that is, we select someone in our own image. (“If he is a lot like me, and I know I’m good, then he will be good too. Besides, I know we’ll get along well.”) The second is technical know-how; that is, we pick the best worker. (“If she’s the best at

doing the staff job, she’ll be the best at managing the staff jobs.”) But most of us have found that being the best worker doesn’t always mean being the best manager of other workers. It can mean that beyond losing our best worker we now have an incompetent manager in charge of our most important asset, our people.

### **Why doesn’t this work?**

The answer is clear with even a basic analysis; the skills needed for management are very different from the skills needed for a technical or production worker. Sure, we know the technical skills needed for the technical job, but shouldn’t we then identify the skills needed for the job of the manager? Although picking a manager who knows the technical work to be managed is a logical decision, there are certainly some separate, universal traits for us to consider that apply to all managers. What are they?

### **The five basic skills of managers**

Let’s recognize that although knowing the technical functions of the work they are going to manage is a plus, a good manager lets the *people manage their work, he or she manages the people*. Following are five basic skills of people who manage people:

## 1. Time Management

Time management means organizing, planning, being efficient, coordinating the efforts of many people, getting things done on time, and meeting deadlines.

## 2. Knowing the outcome desired

Managers must have a clear picture of what they intend to end up with. They must identify these questions: what is the goal, which direction will they be taking, what are the milestones to identify, and, when will each be hit? The manager is at a distinct advantage if she already knows how to perform the tasks required, but her job is seldom to instruct people *how* to do their job and more so *what* the job is and the end result desired. The people being managed almost always do better without being told how to do their job. Good management rarely is micromanagement.

## 3. Delegation

A manager should be able to divide the work into doable bites and assign each to the right individual based on the individual's skills and ability to perform the task. If someone is unable to perform the job, the manager then needs to determine why. Is it a lack of knowledge? Does the employee lack the skill? Are the right tools not available, or is it a lack of materials? Whatever it is, the manager's job is to provide it. Delegate someone to show the employee how to carry out the task, provide the necessary training, supply the tools, locate the materials, assign someone to go get them, or reassign the work to another employee. In any case, the answer is not to have the manager do that job. Every one of those jobs the manager does reduces the value of that managerial position. The manager's job is to delegate. A manager wants to multiply him- or herself through delegation.

## 4. Interpersonal skills

It's a fine line that separates the qualities of being respected, liked, or feared by those who report to you. Good managers need to manage a balance of these traits. They should not be fearful of their employees or instill fear in them. Employees know that much of their well-being is in the hands of their manager and a certain level of fear exists as a result, but that should not be a tool or weapon in the hand of the manager.

Managers should move, speak, and act with confidence. They know how to communicate, and how to share information with and seek information from their people. They give constant and honest feedback, and they know to praise in public and criticize in private. They communicate freely, are good listeners, and respect their people and their opinions. But, managers must stay focused on the goal — keep their eyes on the prize.

Good managers do not see their employees as extensions of themselves or as a means to make themselves look good. They are not trying to duplicate their singular traits. The best managers pull together the skills, talents, and abilities of each person on their team to multiply the quantity and quality of the outcome.

## 5. Objectivity

Objectivity is defined as "*dealing with facts without the distortion of personal feelings or prejudice.*" Good managers are not motivated by a desire to be liked, by self interest, or by prejudice. They do not let personal friendships or personality determine their decisions and actions. They do not use harsh, arbitrary, or unfair treatment against others. They are objective and make decisions based on considerations such as, who is the best performer, who really earned the assignment, or who is the best person to fill the demands of the promotion? It is not about picking the next door neighbor or the bowling buddy. Managers should not be rigid or closed-minded. They should

consider employee suggestions, requests, and needs. The decision they arrive at may not be popular, they may have to defend it, and they may even have to take a little heat for it, but they should always strive to do the right thing. They can make exceptions to a rule when it's called for, and they should be able to justify the reason as well as the end results.

Those are some of the basic manager skills, but let's take a more in-depth look at what we know about the characteristics of managers.

**Managers** emphasize rationality, logic, order and control. Wherever his/her energies are directed, the manager will be a problem solver. He or she asks, "What problems have to be solved and how can we solve them in a way that will cause people to participate and contribute?"

They tend to be persistent, tough-minded, intelligent, and analytical, and they believe in hard work. When an issue arises, they focus narrowly and concentrate on it. They usually exhibit tolerance and good will, interact well with other people, and have many casual friends.

**Managers** are impersonal, almost to the point of being passive, toward their goals. Most goals arise out of necessities, not desires or emotions, so they react to needs and ideas. It is not their emotional desire to obtain the goal. It is simply necessary to achieve it and move on.

**Managers** see work as an enabling process that involves people and ideas coming together to establish strategies and make decisions. They facilitate the process by anticipating difficulties, heading them off, and reducing tensions. They are enablers in the sense that they negotiate, coordinate, bargain, and use rewards and punishment when necessary to get the job done. They tend to approach problems conservatively with a desire to avoid conflict.

**Managers** prefer to work with people. They avoid solitary activity because they need to collaborate with others. They seek to stand out by being at the center of things. In training sessions, when asked to write stories about a given subject, managers' stories are usually populated with people. They focus on human activities but with very low levels of emotional involvement. People achieve goals and are rewarded and respected by others, but neither tragedy nor ambiguity has a place in the manager's stories. Using intuition to sense the feelings or thoughts of others is normally seen as a hindrance or barrier to the job at hand.

In difficult situations, managers will seek to accomplish a balance of power and will use tactics to accomplish a win-win result for all parties. Those tactics will be designed to help get *this* decision made as opposed to finding new problems or new solutions. Subordinates however, sometimes interpret all this as being inscrutable, detached, and manipulative.

Managers are the creators of the phrase "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

**Managers** tend to see themselves as people who have had some control over their lives. They have adjusted to life and see the world as more harmonious and orderly than most, and they see themselves as conservators and regulators. Their sense of self worth is enhanced by supporting and strengthening the institutions of which they are a part. They feel that they are performing a role that is in harmony with their ideals of duty and responsibility. Managers are like orchestra leaders.

**Managers** are motivated by accomplishments, by getting things done. However, perfection is not their goal; it's about completing the task and gaining the satisfaction of upper management, peers, and subordinates. You motivate and work with managers by getting to the point quickly, offering them a limited selection of choices, and helping them get things done. They are

influenced by facts, logic, and comparative values.

All this is designed to give you a better picture of the kind of individual who makes a good manager and the things you should consider when selecting one.

This is not to say that you should ignore technical skills in place of managerial skills. But, there are many companies that consider management a stand-apart profession and are successfully selecting managers based solely on their ability to manage even though their teams are doing work the manager has never performed. This probably won't work in every company. However, every company can gain better performance by identifying the needed skills, aptitudes, attitudes, traits, and demeanor needed in the job they seek to fill and to seek those in the person they select for that job.

So, let's take a look at some candidates:

**Candidate No. 1:** Was the best worker in his department, has five years of successful experience, and has most of the management qualities I need.

**Decision:** Hire him before someone else finds him

**Candidate No. 2:** Was the best worker in his department, has five years of successful experience, but has almost none of the management qualities I need.

**Decision:** Determine if he/she can be trained in management skills, and has the interest and desire to do so. Bring in a management consultant to evaluate the potential for management training or administer managerial aptitude testing. Possibly send him/her to a basic management training course

*before* you offer the job. In any case it is best to assure the basic management abilities are identified before making the selection.

**Candidate No. 3:** Has never worked in this field before, but has a very successful work experience as a manager and great references for management skills and results.

**Decision:** Determine if he/she can be trained in an understanding of the basic methods and functions of the work and has the interest and desire to do so. Administer aptitude testing for management abilities. Have him interviewed by another manager and possibly agree to a 90-day trial. For the right person with the right ambition, taking on part of the risk should be understandable.

Remember that the primary skills needed for the position are management skills. Having a management instead of a technical skill set assures a much higher likelihood for success in the position. And good managers are harder to find.

For some companies, management is a profession and more companies are adhering to that concept. However, the overriding message is that the best carpenter may not always be the best manager of carpenters.

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Have An Employment Question?

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