

PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource

MANAGER'S NOTEBOOK

I. Managing People Is a Tough Job

The older folks among us have spent much of their career in an environment where people saw promotions as an acknowledgment of outstanding performance, an endorsement of value, or a sign of respect, and, to most, it was the brass ring in the world of work. But, a surprising trend has been developing for several years. More workers are refusing to accept supervisory or managerial positions!

The larger view is that younger people and students have come into the workforce with distrust or dislike for the corporate culture, authority, being part of the system, being judgmental, or being the responsible one in charge. All of which can be inherent in the job of managing people.

In reality, this problem exists in only a small percentage of the workforce. There are however real problems that make today's managerial job tougher.

Bruce Tulgan, author of books on managing the differences in workforce generations, says that it's getting harder to manage people. He identified the following three reasons for this based on 12,000 interviews over 12 years.

1. Generations: The workforce is both aging, with the Baby Boomers now reaching their 60s, and seeing a surge of workers who are just completing college. This means the

workforce is becoming more diverse, and one management philosophy may not fit all.

2. Work Systems: The old idea of employees working in a pyramid structure with one boss at the top overseeing multiple layers of management has changed. Workers now work in a flexible, multi-responsibility work structure, where the job and the work assignments are determined on an as-needed basis.

3. Loyalties: Workers no longer stay with the same company for life. Their loyalty is less to the company and more to their careers, the technology, their personal lives, and their families. They will change entire careers as often as their parents use to change jobs.

In his research, Tulgan found that today's job candidates often interview the company as much as the company interviews them. New employees expect to be heard and to make a difference right away. They expect to perform better, and when they do, they expect to be rewarded quickly. The new workers, he said, are more high energy and better performers, but they are also high maintenance. They need lots of attention, recognition, and special handling.

His advice to managers in their tougher new role includes the following five items:

1. Know your people. As individuals, each has his or her own motivators and de-motivators. Know their names, strengths, weaknesses, potential, and more.

2. Document performance. Write down accomplishments and failures. Reward high performers and let low performers go.

3. Do not treat all employees the same. The conventional wisdom is that the “fair” thing to do is to treat all employees the same. But, not all employees give the same performance. Treat each one as an individual and reward each based on his or her performance.

4. Hold employees accountable. If after helping them to improve their work, they still cannot meet the company’s standard of performance, let them go.

5. Get rid of low performers. Bruce ends by saying that there are several reasons to do so:

- High performers do not want to work with low performers, and it will affect their work and morale.
- High performers have to make up for the work of low performers.
- They are being paid for subpar work and have become an expense.
- You set the standard based on the work you accept. If you are rewarding bad performance, you will always get more of what you reward.

II. Be the Best Manager You Can Be

Recognizing the challenges of the new job you have been promoted to and the need to understand the people you are managing, you must also address the necessity of doing this job better than anything you have ever done before.

There are hundreds of tips that can improve your management skills, but sometimes the basic steps are so obvious we don’t see them. Following are 10 things you can start doing now to become a better manager, improve your team’s productivity, advance their careers and yours, and assure your company’s chances for survival and success.

Pick one now and start it today! Pick another one tomorrow. In two weeks, you will be a better manager!

1. Select the right people. Cheat, stack the deck in your favor. Instead of relying on just your own talents and efforts, pick really good people. Pick the best right from the start.

2. Be a motivator. We all do things because we want to. Sometimes we want to do them because of the consequences of not doing them. But, we do our best because of what we get out of it. It’s no different at work. People will do good work for the pay, the recognition, the prestige, or the satisfaction of doing something new or even to impress someone. There are many motivators. Identify the motivators for your team members, and show them how to get what they want by doing what you want.

3. Build your team. “Doing your own thing” is highly overvalued. There are very few jobs where the lone wolf, individualist is called for. If your company just wanted its employees to “do their own thing,” it wouldn’t need you as a manager trying to mold them into a team. Developing the team concept instead of creating lone wolves is part of being a leader.

4. Be a leader and a manager. You’ve built the best team from the best available employees. You’ve motivated them to get what they want by doing what you want. Now, you must communicate the vision, provide the direction, and identify the goals. That’s the start of leadership.

5. Be a better communicator. This may be the manager’s most important skill. After all, everyone depends on it. You can’t be an effective leader if you can’t communicate your vision. You can’t motivate people if they can’t understand what you want. Learn to communicate. First, be sure of what you understand, and then be sure that you are understood.

6. Manage money better. Your company won’t stay in business if it can’t make a profit. That means people like you bringing money in the door and spending less than you bring in. Understand labor costs, material costs, overhead, budgeting, and profit. You can’t be a successful manager if you can’t make money.

7. Be a good manager of time. The only thing you have less of than money is time. The better you are at managing time, yours and your team's, the more effective you will be as a manager. Find out where you're wasting time. Create time management goals. Prioritize ruthlessly and learn to delegate.

8. Set ethical management as your standard. Enron-like scandals have driven home the point about how important ethics are in business. Ethics and principles should become a habit, a way of life. Don't ruin your future by taking unethical shortcuts today. Lead by example. Your team will do as you do.

9. Take care of yourself. Learn to handle your stress. Whether it's through mental or physical means, don't let stress rob you of your health and your future. Ulcers are no longer a badge of success; confident, in-control management is. Stressful people become less tolerant. They snap at people more. No one wants to be near someone like that. Give yourself a chance to relax and recharge your batteries. If you can't take care of yourself, you won't be able to take care of your team or your company's business for long.

10. Improve you. It's not just about developing and improving others; it's also about making you a better you. Identify your strengths and your weaknesses. Improve both. The fact that you are reading this shows that you understand the concept.

Management is a skill that can be learned. You can get better at it every day. Start now and see how far you've improved in two weeks.

III. Surviving and Thriving in Your New Job

Understanding your people and your responsibilities leads you to your next concern; that is, "What do I really need to know to survive in this new world, and how can I improve my chances for success?" Here are a dozen things to do:

1. Look the part. Keep your clothes (or uniform) clean and neat. Look professional. You represent your company and your department. Make that first impression a good one to everyone you meet. You will be evaluated every day by everyone. Taking pride in your appearance is taking pride in who and what you are.

2. Ask questions. Don't assume anything. Executives report that one of the top mistakes made by new supervisors (and new employees) is not asking questions. You're not expected to be an expert on everything. Don't assume that you must be. Whether you're confused about an assignment, company policy, or what is expected of you, just ask. One good question to remember is "What is the end result you want to see?" You might avoid an embarrassing mistake.

3. Go beyond your job description. Even if it isn't your specific job, if you see that something isn't done or isn't done right, get it done. If you need to bring in someone else to do that, get that done. For some, this might mean loading a truck or grabbing a shovel. For others, it may be making the coffee or refilling the paper tray in the copier. No job is demeaning if you do it well.

4. Timing is important. Be on time. If a meeting is to start at 10 a.m., be there on time and be prepared. Traffic delays and bad weather will not be seen as reasons to be late, but rather as excuses for bad planning. Plan ahead and be on time for everything.

5. Don't procrastinate. We all want to push that tough job back until later. Most of us will spend our time doing small things because we get a feeling of accomplishment doing a lot of them instead of the important project that takes so much time. Turn that big project into small chunks and complete it one piece at a time. Procrastination may be our greatest labor-saving device because so many jobs that get postponed never get done at all. Ask yourself, "What is the most valuable use of my time right now?" And then do that.

6. Under promise and over deliver. If you tell your customer, your boss, or your teammate that you'll have the job done by Friday when you're already overextended, you'll wind up doing a poor job or missing the deadline. Set a reasonable deadline, such as Tuesday by 5 p.m., and deliver it on Monday by noon.

7. Proofread everything. Proofread your email, your worksheets, your material list, the client's instructions, the orders you give, and the orders you receive. Check everything: spelling, addition, dates, times, and dollars. Carelessness is time wasting, expensive, and embarrassing.

8. The company party is not a party. Picnics and Christmas parties may be opportunities for establishing friendships, building team players, and enjoying yourself. But, they are not fraternity parties or weekend furloughs. Think of company social functions as an extension of your workplace. Your behavior is still watched by others. Enjoy yourself, but act professionally. This is not an opportunity to make jokes about the boss's bald head or to have a drinking contest. Many a budding career has been washed away by bad behavior at the company party.

9. Learn to say no. Turning someone down can be tough, and even tougher if it's your boss or a coworker. But, saying no when it's the right thing to do can be crucial to you, your career, and your company.

Don't over commit to do the job well. If you're the guy who can be depended on to do everything you've committed to do, and to do it well and on time, you will be much more successful than the guy who says yes to everything, is always running at a frantic pace, and ends up doing a sloppy job or not doing it at all. It can take a lot of courage, but you want to be that first guy.

10. Don't take rejection or criticism personally. Every successful person has been rejected and corrected many times. Even if the

person who gives it to you doesn't do it gently or professionally, you can still learn or gain from this. Put things in perspective, what did you do or what should you have done, and was that the best way to do it? This is not about you, it's about the work.

Consider that you can now eliminate one wrong way to do this job. Do you now have a better idea of the right way? If so, you have gained something valuable. Will you use this rejection or correction to demoralize yourself or to improve yourself? Will you be petty or professional?

11. Always have your business card with you. If you don't have one, get one. You will always be running into your next client, your next contact, or maybe even your next employer. Let people know about your company and its business. Give them an opportunity and/or a reason to bring business to your company and to you. Keep cards in your purse, wallet, or briefcase as well as in your car.

12. Work like you owned the company. You are an important part of this company, and the company *is* the people who work for it. As the people change, so does the company. You are only going to be successful in this company if the company is successful. The company can only be successful if you make it so. If this was your company, how would you do your job differently? How would you handle that customer? Would you send that product out? Would you sign off on that project? How would you talk about your company?

Your new management position is a different job that requires different skills. What got you up the ladder won't keep you there. You need a new set of eyes and a new set of rules.

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Have An Employment Question?

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