

Human Resource Associates

Human Resource Consultants

MYTH BUSTERS FOR MANAGERS

As you set your sights on a successful career with your company, you may be looking forward to the day when you are promoted to management in recognition of and as a reward for your hard work and good results

Then you will have the authority to make things happen your way. The company will have granted you a position with the formal power to control your direct reports and to lead by building individual relationships with the members of your team.

That's the way the story usually goes. But like many stories this one's a myth. When you talk to senior executives (and if you get an honest answer) it may sound more like the one given by Linda Hill, Wallace Brett Donham professor of business administration at Harvard University: "On day X minus one, you do not have a child and you are not pregnant. On day X, you are suddenly a mother with three growing children who all believe they are smarter than you." New manager tales are usually about a feeling of disorientation, and for some, overwhelming confusion. Is this

because they're incapable or impaired or is it that their company is dysfunctional?

No. These are ordinary people facing ordinary problems of adjustment. Most will survive the transition and learn to function in their new role. But what is that transition? What needs to be adjusted? The answer to both questions starts by identifying the cause of the problem. And the cause of the problem is that your reference to success is no longer valid.

What you depended on for success in your prior job was your personal expertise and actions. As a manager you are now responsible for setting and implementing an agenda for a whole group. And there's been little training or experience in how to do that so far. Let's understand that as a new manager, this will be a stretch assignment. It will likely be even more demanding than you expected. These are new skills you'll be learning, and you'll be discovering new ways of measuring success and deriving satisfaction from your work.

Let's take a look at the five most prominent myths we need to bust.

SUBJECT

1. Defining Characteristics of Your New Role

2. Source of Power

3. Desired Outcome

4. Managerial Focus

5. Key Challenge

MYTH

Authority

“Now I have the freedom to implement my ideas”

Formal Authority

“I will finally be at the top of the ladder”

Control

“I must get compliance from my subordinates”

Managing one-on-one

“My role is to build relationships with individual subordinates”

Keeping the operation in working order

“My job is to make sure the operation runs smoothly”

MYTHBUSTER

Interdependency

“It’s humbling that someone who works for me could get me fired”

Everything But

“Everyone was skeptical, and I had to earn authority”

Commitment

“Compliance is not the same as commitment and doesn’t produce the same results”

Leading the Team

“I needed to create a culture that would allow the group to fulfill its potential”

Making Changes That Will Make the Team Perform Better

“I am responsible for initiating changes to enhance the group’s performance.”

Hill has done extensive research on the myths of management, and she provides some insights and quotes from managers on these five myths.

**Myth Number 1 —
Managers need to wield significant power**

When new managers describe their role, they tend to talk about the rights and privileges that come with being the boss. They assume the position will give them new authority, freedom, and autonomy to do what they feel is best for the organization. They may think, “I will no longer be burdened by the unreasonable demands of others.”

More often they find that they are hemmed in by their dependencies on so many others. Instead of feeling free, they feel constrained. They find themselves in a web of relationships not only with dependencies on their subordinates but also with their bosses, peers, and others both inside and outside the organization. Most managers begin to feel that they are not in control of anything. “The only time I feel in control is when I shut my door. But then I feel that I’m not doing the job I’m

supposed to be doing, which is being with people.”

The people most likely to make a new manager’s life miserable are those who do not fall under his/her authority: outside suppliers, other department heads, and even customers. The myth buster is the reality that managers need to negotiate interdependencies. They need to identify and build relationships with the people who are key to the success of their team.

**Myth Number 2 —
Authority flows from the manager’s position**

Recognizing the interdependencies that restrain them, new managers still do have power to use. The problem is that most of them mistakenly believe that that power is based on their formal authority.

New managers, however, often learn that when direct reports are told to do something, they don’t necessarily respond. In fact the more talented the subordinate, the less likely he/she is to simply follow orders. After a few uncomfortable experiences, new managers come to the realization that their

usable power is “everything but formal authority. “I sometimes felt I was talking to myself.” They find that authority emerges only as they establish credibility with subordinates, peers, and superiors. But most managers aren’t aware of the three primary qualities that create credibility:

A. Character. *It’s the intention to do the right thing!* Integrity and principle are noticeable. Subordinates will analyze every statement and non-verbal gesture for signs of who and what you are.

B. Competence. *It’s knowing how to do the right thing.* Technical know-how is important, but more important is the ability to bring your staff into the action. “It’s amazing how often the people doing the job know more about it than I do.” For someone who is managing people, true competence comes from learning from and with them.

C. Influence. *It’s the ability to deliver and execute the right thing.* “There’s nothing worse than working for a powerless boss who can’t get things done” As you establish the right, workable relationships and your team gets things done right and on time you

begin to see how real authority is established.

**Myth Number 3 —
Mangers must control
their direct reports.**

Most new managers, in part because of their insecurity in their new unfamiliar role, try to impose compliance from their people. They fear that if they can't establish this early on their direct reports will just walk all over them. They therefore rely on their formal authority, which is not nearly as effective as they expect.

But when people simply comply with authority so much is left out. There is no commitment to results or to the manager. Compliance is not commitment. People won't take the initiative. They won't make the decisions or take the calculated risks that lead to change and improvement. They're not part of the solution or the process. They haven't bought in. Managers who ignore this find that they leave a lot of support on the table. Both you and your staff should feel free to ask questions of each other. Let team members build their own credibility.

**Myth Number 4 —
Mangers must focus on
forging good individual
relationships.**

Managing those necessary interdependencies and exercising informal authority based on your personal credibility will require managers to build trust, influence, and mutual expectations with a wide variety of people. Ultimately the new manager must figure out how to harness the power of a team. Simply building one-on-one relationships undermines that effort.

Too many new managers focus on individuality instead of team building. They communicate with and spend too much time on, a small number of trusted individuals or friends ignoring the need for group forums. They see people management as managing a few individuals instead of managing a team. Consider and develop individual skills and commitment but don't focus on individual relationships to the detriment of the team.

**Myth Number 5 —
Managers must ensure
that things run smoothly.**

This one is partly true. It's misleading, however, because it's often assumed

that this is the actual purpose of the job, and some even think it's the only reason the job exists. "Keep on keeping on."

But you won't be finding new ways to improve or to enhance your team's performance. Successful managers find that they need to challenge the organization's processes and results. Few managers see themselves as change agents but they should. That includes change both inside and outside of their areas of responsibility.

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