

# Human Resource Associates

*Employment Consultants*

## The Skills of Top Managers Part I

Your personal aptitudes are not the same as your personal skills. Your Personal aptitudes are about who you are; personal skills are about who you want to be. Your attributes can get you almost anywhere. Your skills are what can keep you there.

Personal drive, values, and willingness to work and learn can get you moved up into the ranks of manager. But the *skills* that got you there are not the same skills you will need when you get there.

Managers no longer are responsible for performing functions. Your staff is responsible for carrying out functions. At this level, you're accountable for the end result of all those functions. You're no longer doing *your piece* of the big picture; you're accountable *for* the big picture. And that takes a different set of skills.

Everyone uses the abilities he has to do his job. Some managers get end results by being good delegators. They assign the right things to the right people and organize the process. Others rely on technology and controlling its efficient use, and still others get their end results by simply working harder, faster, and longer. But most managers rely more on their

innate aptitudes and one or two skills instead of the toolkit of skills that top managers need. But if you're going to move up in management and want to be there for the long run, shouldn't there be an identifiable list of skills on which you can focus?

There are many authorities with many opinions on this question. But Harvard Business School should certainly be a reliable source. Under its "Harvard Business Essentials" program, it has identified 13 skills that managers need to succeed:

### 1. Setting Goals That Will Inspire Others

Goals should emerge from the business strategy of the company. Know where you want to go. Identify the milestones you think will get you there and assign goals that take you to those milestones.

Choose goals that are:

- Recognized by everyone
- Clear and easy to understand
- Written down in specific terms
- Measurable and framed in time

- Aligned with the organizational strategy
- Achievable but challenging
- Supported by appropriate reward

## 2. Hiring The Best

Hiring the right people today is often the difference between coming in first and not finishing at all. Don't hire to fill a job. Hire with outstanding success in mind; bring in champions!

Define the job requirements carefully. Consider the responsibilities, the tasks, and the personal characteristics best for this position. Is this a job for a loner or a team player, more thinker than doer, good communicator or good strategist, more analytical or decisive? Consider the management style of the person you will be reporting to or who will be reporting to you. Learn interviewing skills to bring out the answers to your questions. Ask the right questions.

And:

- Consider current employees.
- Look outside your organization to bring in new outlooks, skills, and experiences.
- Know the kind of person you're looking for if you want to have a good fit.
- Remember that the surest sign of future successful performance is past successful performance.
- The right education/training + the right experience + a compatible personality = the right hire.

## 3. Keeping The Best

The true cost of turnover is so enormous that most of us don't really believe those are real dollars. But for an example, one auto manufacturer's annual cost of losing one sales rep with eight years' experience

and replacing him with one who had one years' experience was almost \$500,000. A Half-million-dollar cost in one year for one resignation!

True, not all turnover is bad. Sometimes it's just not a good match and sometimes periodic turnover gives you an opportunity to move other people up in your organization.

General strategies for retention:

- Get people off to a good start with proper orientation.
- Create a great environment with bosses people respect.
- Share information.
- Give people as much freedom from supervision as they can handle.
- Challenge people to stretch.
- Design interesting jobs.
- Identify potential defectors early and talk to them.
- Be a retention-oriented manager.

## 4. Delegate With Confidence

Stop feeling guilty about doing less than your staff does. Your job is to assure the end results, not to spend time doing what you used to do for recognition. Delegation is not dumping chores you don't want to do. It is assigning to the right people work that leads to the milestones.

Some tips for effective delegating:

- Recognize the capabilities of your staff.
- Focus on results; let go of any urge to dictate how tasks should be accomplished. Be a coach not a cop.
- Use delegation to develop the skills of your staff or to position people favorably with senior management.
- Explain assignments clearly and provide the resources needed for successful completion.

- Provide feedback to your staff and support them through their mistakes.

## 5. Managing Your Time

Procrastination may be your greatest labor-saving strategy, but it can ruin your career. Where does your time go? Like your household budget, you cannot plan and control your time assets unless you understand your current spending habits. How much of your time is spent on paperwork, on the telephone, in travel? Get an accurate picture of your time-spending habits and you'll begin to understand better how to budget this precious asset.

Managing your time budget:

- Keep a log for several days to determine how you are spending your time now. Organize it into categories: meetings, telephone, travel, time wasters, redoing something, handling the same mail for the second or third time, etc.
- Use our goals to guide your time allocation. How much of your time is spent directly on your established goals?
- Schedule your tasks using a priority tool such as a day planner or to-do list once you've identified your priorities.
- Leave room in your schedule for unanticipated events. If those events don't happen, use that time for other priorities.
- Stop creating your own time-management problems; overreaching or volunteering to do more than you or your staff can handle. Avoid reverse delegation; as occurs when your staff manages to move the work back up to you and steer clear of too many useless or time wasting meetings.

## 6. Managing Teams

Although individual thought and input are the source of most innovative ideas, teams of people working together are generally your organizations best instrument for turning ideas into marketable services and products. The purpose of a manager is not to spend time doing things as best as he or she can, regardless of how well it's done. The purpose of a manager is to multiply his effectiveness many fold by managing a team to do things more efficiently.

A team is not just a collection of individuals herded together to process work — that's a gang. A team is a small number of individuals with complementary skills committed to a common purpose with agreed-upon goals and collective accountability.

Managing teams:

- Teams are particularly effective when organizations have tasks that require a particular knowledge or skill, the work is very interdependent, there is a defined deliverable, and the task has a specific end result.
- Selecting team members is the most important part of team design. Look for individuals who represent the right blend of technical/functional expertise, problem solving and decision-making talents, interpersonal skills, and team skills.
- The key characteristics of a team are competence, commitment, common goals, contributions by all members, an enabling and supporting environment and well thought out alignment.
- The biggest challenge to compensating teams is finding the best balance between team and individual rewards.

## 7. Appraisal and Coaching

People need and want appraisal of the work they are doing. They also see coaching as part of, and necessary to, that process. There are fewer things in life more satisfying than always knowing how you are doing on your journey. A major complaint from employees when leaving a company is that they just never knew how good or bad they were doing. Performance appraisal, done well, does that for us.

Busy managers don't like doing them mostly because they aren't comfortable acting as a boss, a parent, or a coach. They don't like telling employees face-to-face that they're not doing their job as well as they should. And of course, it's time consuming.

It's often said, and rightly so, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." Performance appraisal is a measurement of progress. It is fundamental to the job of being a manager. Acting as a coach for an employee is also.

Some basics:

- Performance appraisal is a formal method for assessing how well people are doing with respect to their assigned goals. You and your company will need these assessments when you make decisions on pay and promotion.
- The eight steps of effective performance appraisal are:
  1. Advance preparation for the appraisal meeting
  2. Designing a two-way communication appraisal meeting
  3. Identifying gaps between actual and expected performance
  4. Finding the root causes of the gaps
  5. Planning how the gaps will be closed

6. Re-evaluating goals
7. Documenting your meeting
8. Following up

- Coaching is a two-way activity in which the parties share knowledge and experience in order to maximize and assure an individual's potential and to help that person achieve agree-upon goals.
- Coaching begins with observation, moves on to a discussion of observed problems with the employee, involves two-way feedback and an action plan and ends with follow up by the manager.

For more information on doing performance appraisals visit HR University Personnel Notebooks on your association's Web Site.

In Part II of this Personnel Notebook "The Skills of Top Managers," we will cover items numbers eight and nine.

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