

Ten Rules For Success As A Manager

Wayne Turk

Recently a young man who had worked for me a few years ago called. He'd been promoted into a new management position and was looking for advice. He wanted to know if I had developed any "rules" for being a good manager. After over 30 years as a manager and management consultant, I have learned a lot—and not always from doing the right thing. I gave him ten rules that I've distilled from my experiences. They are certainly not original or all-inclusive, and none of these rules is absolute. As I told my caller, there will always be exceptions. Managers are chosen for their judgment—and that will inevitably mean knowing when to ignore the rules.

1. Hire good people.

Having good people makes being a successful manager easy. Be selective in whom you hire. Remember that personality and attitude are sometimes more important than experience or skills. If you inherit employees, even mediocre employees can be improved with patience, training, and effort on the manager's part—but it requires time and work.

2. Give them the tools that they need.

A carpenter can't build much without the right tools. The same goes for any employee. If it's a good computer and the right software—get it. If it is a certain piece of equipment—get it. Whatever they need (and I emphasize need, not want)—get it. Training is one of those tools. Make sure that your people are trained well. Frustration on the part of an employee who cannot do his or her job because of a lack of tools can destroy morale and productivity. It may cost money to get the tools and training, but it pays off in the end. Remember that a penny saved can cost you a dollar later. You may have to fight to get your people their tools, but it's a fight well worth engaging in.



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3. Tell them what you want done, not how to do it.

Tell your employees the results that you want, and get out of their way. Their way may not be how you would do it, but so what? Many times they will have better ideas about how to achieve the needed results than you would have. Listen to employee suggestions on how to do something or how to improve it. If they need help or guidance, give it to them. If they still can't or don't do the job, get rid of them. A nonproductive employee is a drain on resources, not to mention a negative impact on productivity and the morale of the other employees.

4. Set high expectations for employees and yourself.

People have a tendency to live up to—or down to—expectations. If you set high but reachable goals and share those expectations with your employees, they can attain them. The key is “reachable”: when goals are unrealistic, many people have a tendency to give up before they ever get started. But don't set expectations too low. Sure, your employees will attain them, but it may not help you meet Rule 5.

5. The mission is first priority.

Getting the job done, and done right, has to be your top priority as a manager. That means knowing what the mission is, what the needed outcomes or results are, and how those results will be measured. Every manager has a boss, too. Most of the time, more than one. Getting the job done, meeting the boss's goals, and meeting—if not exceeding—the organization's expectations, should all mean getting the same results. Make sure that you know what those results are and find a way to reach them. If there is a conflict over what's expected, find a way to resolve it.

6. Plan, measure, and plan again.

Being without a plan is like driving somewhere new without a map. You may get to your destination in the end, but it will most likely not be by the best or most expeditious route. As part of your plan, you need some way to measure how you are progressing. Develop some metrics. Make sure that they are the right metrics and provide you with data that are both relevant and useful. Whether it's something as simple as checkmarks along a timeline or a more complex set of measures like earned value management, look at where you are compared to where you should be. Replan and adjust to make any necessary changes. Then begin the cycle again.

7. Take care of your people.

Taking care of your employees can encompass rules 2, 3, and 4. It means recognizing them when they do something good and correcting them when they do something bad. Do remember the old maxim, “Praise in public, correct in private.” Let your people know when they do well, and do it in public, preferably in front of their peers and your boss. But take them behind closed doors or out of

the work environment to talk about areas for improvement.

It also means rewarding employees in some way when they go above and beyond. Put people in for awards or recommend them for promotions or new jobs that will help them and the organization. It can be as little as a word of encouragement or “good job” noted on a document. If they know that you do these things, your employees will work hard for you. And when your people look good, whether it is to outsiders or others with the organization, you look good too.

8. Go Walkabout.

“Management by wandering” is a great way to find out what is really going on with your people, to see how they are doing and where the problems are. People are more willing to talk in their own space where they are more comfortable. If employees have to come to you, reality is that they rarely will. So walk around, but don't overdo it. If you take them away from doing their jobs or appear to be hovering, they will resent it and resent you.

9. Don't ask anybody to do things that you wouldn't do yourself.

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't ask employees to take on special projects or do other tasks that you as the manager can't do. It does mean *not* asking them to do personal things for you or things that are not a part of their jobs. Think before you ask an employee to do something. And be prepared to work overtime right along with them or work with them on tasks.

10. Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Communicate up the chain, with your peers, and with your employees. No one likes to hear bad news, but there's truth in the old saying: “Bad news does not get any better with age.” Keep your boss informed of the good and the bad. Let him or her know what's happening, who's doing really good work, and who isn't. Communicate with your employees. Tell them what's going on, what changes are occurring, and why. It's failure to communicate that gets rumors started. The truth is always better, even if it is bad news.

“Knowledge itself is power,” something Francis Bacon knew in the 16th century, holds just as true—if not more true—today. Knowledge is the new coin of the realm. If you share it, everyone benefits. It pays dividends to a manager to share knowledge, because other knowledge comes back.

Editor's note: The author welcomes comments and questions. Contact him at Wayne_Turk@sra.com.