

10 Steps towards a stress-free introduction into Management

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Introduction

Becoming a manager for the first time can be an unnerving and sometimes stressful experience. In many cases, organisations expect you to immediately jump into the role and begin to perform as if you have been there for years. Also, you may have been promoted "out of the blue" and as such have not taken part in any "succession planning" that would have prepared you for the management role.

If you follow the ten steps outlined then you will put yourself in a much better position to develop into your management role than perhaps may have been the case.

Step 1 - Be yourself

It is important that you do not try to act like your predecessor. You will have your own style of management and it may be that the previous manager had a particular style that you were not comfortable with. You will have an idea of what the best management style is for any given situation but this will only come with time, perhaps through training and coaching. The best thing you can do is to look at yourself and decide what you want out of the management role and what you need to do in order to build your capabilities in that role.

Step 2 - Go easy to start with

Although there is always pressure on a new manager to take up where the last manager left off, don't go rushing into things. Do not be the "new broom that sweeps clean" all previous procedures away. Ensure that you reassure your team that it will be "business as usual" at least until you get the opportunity to speak to each team member about what their fears and hopes are as regards you being their manager.

Step 3 - Talk to people, listen and gather information

It is vital that you talk to each member of your team. Sit down with them and "contract" with them. How do the two of you want to work together? What are their expectations of you as their manager? What are their hopes, fears and aspirations? What are their motivators and demotivators? It is important that this is a two way process and you should be asking them the same questions so as there is mutual understanding. Also ask them what they think needs to be done to make the team or department more effective - seek their input right at the start.

Although it is important to talk to the team, it is also vital to talk and contract with those senior managers who will have a "stake" in your actions. They must be comfortable and if you "contract" with them as you would with your own team then you will have greater understanding of them as they will have of you.

Step 4 - Ensure you get coaching and mentoring from your own boss

Once you have established a working relationship with your own manager then ensure that within this "contract" he or she builds in time to coach and mentor you through, particularly the early days. As a new manager you should know exactly what is expected of you in terms of both your business objectives and your development objectives. You should have a development plan that highlights your strengths and development areas in respect to your new role and with the support of your manager you should start to implement that plan immediately. Your manager should have the coaching skills to ensure that you maintain your progress and deliver against your plan.

Step 5 - Know the Boundaries, Policies and Procedures

In many "new manager" situations teams, or individuals within teams, attempt to "change the rules" in relation to what needs to be done and how it is done. There will be company rules and procedures and these need to be adhered to, until at least the time they have been reviewed and any change negotiated and implemented. Don't let you being the "new boy" be an excuse for teams or individuals to take liberties. Let people know where they stand; what they can do without asking; what they need to ask to do, and what they cannot do.

Step 6 - Be Available and Visible

Make sure you are available and visible. It is very easy to be "available" over the phone or through e-mail but you cannot beat a good "face to face" very so often. It is vital to your team's development and progress that you make time to sit down with them and have regular face-to-face chats. As a manager you will be their coach and mentor and as such you should make time to coach them through their business objectives and challenges. Don't hide behind "important meetings" as many managers are apt to do.

Step 7 - Avoid Favourites and ensure Consistency and Fairness

You may be now managing the team you were once part of. You will have had friends in that team and perhaps had some people you did not get on with. You now have to ensure that you do not let your personal preferences get in the way of you effectively managing that team and the individuals within the team. Avoid favouritism at all costs and ensure you treat everyone equally, fairly and consistently. The minute you take sides the team starts to disintegrate.

Step 8 - Keep communication high and as open as possible

It is important that you keep communication levels high, letting your people know what is happening whenever possible. Avoid being secretive where possible as people naturally jump to conclusions, usually the wrong ones! Make sure you praise when you see something good done. Praise is the most powerful form of feedback and unfortunately managers do not use enough of it! Consider starting a newsletter and although you instigate it and perhaps write the first couple of editions, let the team take over and start to delegate the tasks involved to the team.

Also, ensure that you ask for regular feedback from both your team and from your boss. How are getting on in relation to your new role? What do you still need to develop? What's going well?

Step 9 - Be Pro-active and start to make your own decisions

Many first time managers continue to go to the "boss" to ask for permission to do things. This does not raise their profile with either senior management or with their own team. You are the boss! You can make your own decisions, so you must know what the boundaries are in relation to what you can do and what you can do. In your early contracting with your own manager ensure you know where you stand and then be pro-active about moving your business forward.

Step 10 - Encourage the team to work together

The outputs of a well-disciplined and effective team will always be greater than the individual outputs of the team members and to this end you have to encourage the team to work effectively together. You have also to get them to understand that you are learning the management game and that you will need their support as well. If you can get the unit working cohesively together they will support you through your early management days.

Bonus Step - Take time out to relax and reflect

In the attempts to get the job done, many new managers do not take time out to relax, wind down and then reflect on their progress. They go thrashing about from task to task never stopping to ask for feedback. This can be dangerous to their health and also to the wellbeing of the team as a whole. Make sure you take a break occasionally. Your coach and mentor will ensure that this happens - or will they?

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