HOW TO BE A GREAT MANAGER OF PEOPLE

The manager is the leader in an organization who is responsible for ensuring his or her team fulfills the mission and core values and upholds the highest standards of performance. This tool addresses the roles of supervisors and managers and offers some general rules of behavior and goals to achieve.

The manager/supervisor must act as a leader, a teacher, and a mentor for the team. The supervisor does more than hand out deadlines; he or she must develop his or her staffs' abilities to maximize the performance of the organization. There's no easy guide that addresses every possible scenario a supervisor will face. Every person brings a unique combination of skills, experience, and personality to their job, so each person supervised needs a unique approach to oversight, assistance, development, and challenge.

The following skills may be applied in any organization and with all types of staff. If you master the techniques below, you will find management to be highly rewarding – and help your organization establish a pool of future managers and leaders.

1. Show staff the way

Even if you are a new front-line supervisor, your staff will look to you as their leader. Be one. Being a leader means expanding your sense of responsibility and taking ownership for your team's performance. Your staff's ability to see the workload ahead and to view the context that gives meaning to their work may be limited by their lack of experience. Help them see how their role and the work they do fit into the larger picture. Guide them. Provide them context. Why are these our priorities? Give your staff specific directions and expectations for performance. Think through what obstacles they might encounter and what assistance they might need. Foster an environment where it is safe and comfortable for them to ask questions and seek clarification. Plan ahead. Get yourself organized. Review the workload that you know will be coming. Think through how you want to handle that workload. Think about who will get what assignments and what dates should be set for deadlines.

2. Communicate your expectations clearly

Give your staff a standard to achieve. Without it, they will only be guessing at what you expect from them. It is your obligation to make sure they understand what you want, why you want it, and when you want it. These expectations may be yours personally, your manager's, or the general expectations of the organization as expressed in its "Core Values" or other statements of policy and direction. These expectations could cover the full range of staff's performance, from how they should conduct themselves in an adversarial situation, to who you want copied on the memo you've directed be drafted. Understanding not only what you want, but why, can help them fill in the gaps on how they should proceed if you're not around to ask.

Once you have laid out your expectations, supervise in a manner consistent with those expectations. Also, be sure your behavior and performance matches that which you expect from your staff.

Sometimes, you may find you are not sure yourself specifically what you need or when, because of the vagaries that confront you. Let staff know this in a positive manner. Acknowledge the uncertainty of the situation and commit that you will struggle through the situation together, and as the understanding of the need becomes clearer, so will your instructions.

3. Develop their abilities and competencies

The more competent each member of the team is, the easier it will be for the whole team, including the supervisor. Provide staff with your assessment of their skills and abilities. Without these assessments, it is difficult for staff to determine how to focus their efforts to grow. Acknowledge their strengths as well as areas for improvement. Praise accomplishments freely. Ask them what skills they are most interested in developing. Foster an environment where feedback can be exchanged without it feeling like criticism or failure. Provide feedback regularly. Do not just give feedback during annual evaluations (see 'Give feedback').

Ensure that your staff has time to participate in mandatory training. Strive to provide them with time to undertake optional training and pursue site visit opportunities. Give them opportunities to assume responsibility and authority for projects that will develop their ability to work independently. Be alert to opportunities for them to work on something new that could expand their breadth of experience. Keep them challenged. Be careful, however, about overwhelming them. Help your staff acquire the skills that make them ready to move to the next level and enhance their readiness for promotion.

4. Give feedback

Feedback is the surest way to help a person understand what others see. Armed with that understanding, it is much easier to assess what conduct or skills are working and which need adjustment. Feedback needs to be nonthreatening, honest, timely, and specific in order to be useful. Feedback should also be given frequently. Waiting to give feedback only at annual evaluations results in lost opportunities to reinforce positive behaviors and reduce counterproductive ones.

One model of feedback developed by the Center for Creative Leadership is called Situation, Behavior, Impact (SBI)®. The SBI model provides a three-step "structure that helps keep your feedback focused and relevant, and increases the likelihood it will be received in a clear, non-defensive manner by the recipient."

"When practicing SBI feedback, you will:

Situation: Describe the situation where the observed behavior occurred. The more specific you can be about the where and when, the better.

Behavior: Help the individual understand exactly the behavior you're talking about.
Think of playing back a videotape, only using words to describe what you saw.
Avoid judgments here, such as 'You weren't listening to me.' Instead, simply describe the person's behavior: 'When I was talking, you pushed your chair away from the table and gazed out the window.'

Impact: Share with the individual the impact of the behavior on you and/or others who were present. Impact is what you or others experienced; you're now making that internal experience known to the individual."

"Most often, a description of the impact will start with, 'I felt…' or, 'I was' or, 'It appeared to me others were…'. If you find yourself saying, 'You were…', you're probably on the wrong track. An impact statement is *not* an interpretation of *why* the individual showed that behavior, and it is especially important not to label the behavior in a psychological way or go make a judgment about the person."

"Some examples:

'Chris, at the end of the team meeting this morning [situation], you gave a summary of the key action steps we had discussed [behavior]. I was really glad you did that [impact on me], and it seemed to bring a good sense of closure to the meeting [impact on others].
(Instead of, 'Chris, you were really effective in the team meeting today—thanks!')'

'Pat, during our conference call yesterday afternoon [situation], I noticed that you interrupted others and me on several occasions [behavior]. I felt frustrated at the time [impact on me], and I sensed that others were irritated by it as well [impact on others]. (Instead of, 'Pat, you were really rude yesterday.')'"

Part of the feedback process is to give out praise freely where warranted. But like suggestions for improvement, praise is most effective if the reason it is being given is specific.

If you encounter a situation in which your feedback is not resulting in needed performance improvement, or if you encounter a serious personnel issue such as harassment, inform your manager and seek guidance from Human Resources.

5. Solicit and accept feedback

Everyone benefits from constructive specific feedback. Seek to learn perceptions of your performance from your staff, colleagues, and managers so that you can reinforce those skills that are productive, and work on changing those that are not.

6. Empower your staff

Commensurate with your confidence in their proficiency. Give them areas of responsibility for which they have complete (or near complete) authority to act. Responsibility joined with the

authority to act will instill accountability and increase "ownership" of decisions. Cultivate your staff's pride in a job well done and enhance their confidence by acknowledging their successes as individuals and as a team. Be sure to direct toward the team any credit attributed to you for the team's work.

At times, you may not want to or be able to provide your staff with the degree of autonomy they have expressed a desire to attain. It may be because in your assessment, they have not yet sufficiently developed their skills, or perhaps it is not clear to you that allowing such autonomy would be acceptable to higher levels of management. Whatever the reason, explain it to your staff.

7. Oversee the quality of your team's work

As the leader of your team, you are ultimately responsible for the team's work products. Consequently, it behooves you to review staff's work to ensure it meets the needs of the organization—that it is competent, suitable to the audience, consistent with established policy, and that it communicates clearly. However, your level of oversight will vary with the competencies and experience of individual staff. In some instances, you will need to check staff work in detail. For more experienced staff who have demonstrated their reliability, your oversight may consist of checks for the "reasonableness" of their work. Knowing when and in what degree to give staff more latitude and less oversight requires judgment, and it can be one of the most challenging experiences for new supervisors.

Supervisors must balance the sometimes-conflicting objectives of ensuring the quality of the team's work, and developing in staff the sense of ownership that comes with being responsible for a work product. It is a balance between oversight and empowerment.

Complicating the balancing act can be competing demands on the supervisor's time, constraining his or her ability to thoroughly review staff work in the timeframe available. When your time is tight, if you have experienced staff capable of reviewing other's work and the nature of the work product lends itself to it, consider delegating the review to an experienced member of your team.

Keep your staff apprised of the status of your review. If you are not going to be able to get to your review for some time, let them know that. If you have approved what they submitted and moved it forward, let them know. Do not leave them wondering about the status of their work. Also, try not to keep your staff waiting after hours for your review. Sometimes this is unavoidable, but in situations when any revisions that might be necessary would not have to be done before the next business day, release them to go home.

Supervisors also need to be sensitive to the distinction between reviewing staff's work, and tinkering with it. Reading a work product closely does not take anything away from the person who prepared the work. Indeed, close review can enhance the person's understanding that their work is noticed and taken seriously. However, making changes to a work product that do not materially add value to it tends to create an environment in which the staff person can feel like simply a helper to the super-technician supervisor. Such an environment does not foster

ownership of the work product by staff. If the supervisor feels it's necessary to make a change to staff's work, the supervisor should discuss with staff how the change might enhance the value of the work product, and be open to alternatives that staff might present to you in response.

Perfection in oversight is not likely to be achieved. Mistakes are inevitable and some of those mistakes will not be caught before a work product is forwarded to the next level for review. A supervisor's review regimen that occasionally allows minor errors to get through to higher levels of review is normal and not a cause for concern. However, a regimen that allows minor errors to frequently appear in other levels of review, or that allows any major mistakes to go forward, is problematic and should alert a supervisor to examine his/her approach to oversight. Also, it is never acceptable to simply pass your staff's work on to the next level of review assuming any deficiencies in the work product will be caught there.

If you do become aware of an error after a work product has been moved forward from your desk, alert the higher levels of review immediately. Acknowledge errors without trying to deflect responsibility. Focus on correcting the mistake, not assigning blame.

8. Be knowledgeable about your assignment

Management will look to you for advice about your area of responsibility. So will your staff. Develop and maintain that expertise. If you assume responsibility for an area about which you have limited knowledge, it is understandable that your capacity to provide advice and direction will be limited at first. However, you are responsible for acquiring that knowledge in a timely manner. You should not be afraid to say: "I don't know." However, supervisors should know a great deal about their areas of responsibility and not always have to rely on staff to get information.

It is impossible to define exactly how much knowledge a supervisor should have in their immediate grasp. Generally, though, supervisors should be conversant on all major policy issues in their assignments. It is also expected that supervisors will develop and maintain contacts and other resources that will allow them to readily obtain information that they do not know immediately.

9. Identify alternatives and make recommendations

When a problem lands in your lap, try to identify alternative solutions and a recommended course of action before taking the matter to your manager. Do not hesitate to involve your staff in exploring options. Do not be afraid to "think outside of the box." In the event the issue is so new to you and your staff that you are not sure what avenues to explore for a solution, then by all means consult with your manager or someone else who can give you guidance (see 'Don't be afraid to ask questions'). Generally, however, you should take an issue forward with alternatives for resolution and your recommendation for the best solution.

10. Keep managers apprised of what's going on in your assignment and with your team

Much of what happens day-to-day in your assignment area does not need to be communicated to your manager. However, significant issues and events—be they programmatic or personnel-related—should be communicated to her/him promptly. Your manager should not be surprised by issues that reach her/his attention. Different managers may have different thresholds for how much detail they want about events in your purview. If your manager has not made his/her preferences in this regard clear, you should ask for clarification, and meet that expectation.

Also ensure that your staff know your manager's expectations so they can meet them if you are not around to oversee their work. Be sure they know what to take forward in your absence and that your manager is kept apprised of the status of projects when you are not around. Generally, if you are going to be gone, you should designate a lead person among your staff to be responsible for your team's communication with and connection to your manager.

11. Keep your staff informed

Be sure you share with your staff all they need to know to most effectively do their job and feel included as part of the overall team of the organization. Think expansively about the scope of information you may possess that should be passed on to them. It may include business updates, recent management decisions on organizational operations, or the schedule for upcoming meetings. It is easy to forget that your staff are not present when you receive a good deal of the information that comes your way each day. Stop and reflect on what they need to know or would like to know. If it is not confidential, pass it on. The more of this information you share, the more alert your staff will be identifying issues that you need to know about, and the more they will feel a part of the larger picture of the organization and not confined to a narrow view of specific tasks within their assignment.

12. Don't be afraid to ask questions

Whether it's how to accomplish a task or clarification on your manager's expectations of you, ask. Your knowledgebase will only grow if you seek answers. Seek answers in all directions by looking to your peers, your managers, and your staff, as well as others inside and outside the organization. Don't burden other people's time by asking them for information that you know where to find and is readily accessible; but if you don't know how to find the answer easily yourself, by all means ask someone for help.

13. Network with your fellow supervisors and others

Share your experiences and perspectives with your colleagues and others in the organization. Seek their views and advice on issues you face. Exchanging information and ideas may provide you with additional solutions to your challenges. Be careful, however, as you share information to maintain the confidences of others.

14. Draw on the experience of your staff

Just because you are the supervisor does not mean you have all the answers. Especially if your staff have more time on the assignment than you do, do not hesitate to draw on their experience

to enhance your own knowledgebase (see 'Don't be afraid to ask questions.'). Also, let the superior experience or knowledge of your staff shine. If a member of your staff is the one most knowledgeable about an issue, let that person be the one to do the presentation on the matter to management, or teach others in your unit or the organization. Provide them with opportunities to garner recognition.

15. Don't let others be afraid to ask you

Cultivate approachability. Your staff needs to learn by asking questions. Be sure they perceive that it is 'ok' and comfortable for them to come to you. Keep your door open as much as possible. Be careful not to convey an impression that you are too busy to help them with a question. Make sure your colleagues and staff in other units see you as approachable (see 'Network with your fellow supervisors and others.').

16. Respect the chain of command

Communication should flow freely in the organization. However, the decision-making process should respect the chain of command. Take your issues to your manager for discussion and let your manager decide whether the matter should go forward beyond that.

17. Be respectful of your staff and others

Do not talk down to or about your staff or anyone else. Recognize that viewpoints other than your own are valid. Treat people fairly and equally. Be courteous.

18. Foster a team environment, not only among your own staff, but also throughout the organization

Within your own group, work to evenly and fairly distribute workload. To the extent possible, cross-train your staff so they can cover for each other—and for you—during vacations or other absences. Establish an environment in which such covering for each other is not just something the staff has to do, but want to do for each other. Ensure the coverage is fair. Everybody gets their chance to be the one covered for, and has to take their turn at covering for others.

With respect to other groups in the organization, do what you can to assist when they need help. When they request information, be responsive. If there is a question about which group should be taking on some workload that may cross group responsibilities, discuss it logically and fairly. Find a reasonable way to share responsibility. If the weight of the evidence suggests your group should take on the bulk of the responsibility, accept it; don't try to dodge it.

19. Pitch in for the benefit of your team and the organization

Oversight of your staff's work is not your only task. If your team's workload is too great, you should take on some of your team's work personally to ensure the job gets done in a timely manner. Also, there may be times when your staff do not have the requisite expertise to do a task given to your team, and because of a tight deadline or the scope of the task, it does not

make sense to view the assignment as a good candidate for a staff developmental exercise. In such circumstances, you must do the task yourself.

In addition, you should, at times, participate in a role other than your immediate supervisory one. The organization may need members for a task group to work on a special project, or someone to conduct training, or represent the organization on a committee. If your experience or knowledge would make you a good candidate for such an ad hoc assignment, volunteer. Your personal workload will always be a factor to consider before volunteering, but you should try to make time for such organization-wide team efforts. Taking on such assignments is not only your responsibility as part of the organization-wide team; it can also be an opportunity to enhance your personal growth. Furthermore, volunteering sets an example for your staff about the importance of participation in team effort.

20. Earn your pay

A strong work ethic and commitment to working the hours for which you are being paid are basic expectations of every employee. At times, working more than 40 hours a week is essential to meet workload and deadline demands. Supervisors need to exhibit a firm work ethic and commit to doing what is necessary to meet the demands of the job. While this is true of every employee, it is especially so for supervisors, since they set the example.

21. Strive for work-life balance

While a strong work ethic is expected, it is also important for the supervisor and his or her staff to maintain an overall work-life balance. Make an effort to ensure that vacation schedules are adhered to so your staff can count on the time they have planned to be off. If one of your staff has an important personal matter to attend to and needs some unplanned time off, seek to be flexible with workload and deadlines if possible.

22. Be a role model

Next to doing, observing is probably the most powerful teacher. Model for your staff behaviors and qualities you expect. Demonstrate by your actions and your words that you support the core values of the organization; and remember, "Titles are granted, but it's your behavior that wins you respect."