

The First-Time Manager

What's in it for me? Hit the ground running in your new management position.

So you've been promoted to management. Congratulations! Now comes the hard part. Some colleagues may believe that they should've been promoted instead of you. Or maybe your predecessor was such an excellent manager that you feel the pressure of having big shoes to fill. Before long, you'll realize that the skills that made you a standout team member may not help you excel at management. And few companies provide new managers with the tools and training to hit the ground running. But that's where these blinks come in! By learning trusted best practices, you'll develop confidence as a manager, gain your team's trust, and achieve results that will set the tone for a successful management career for years to come. In these blinks, you'll learn why it's important to give praise; what trait to look for in new hires; and how self-improvement can help you excel at managing people.

Prioritize building confidence and trust as a new manager.

As a new manager, it might be tempting to wield your new authority just for the sake of displaying your power. Some new managers feel like they need to play the part of the boss by making drastic departmental changes or issuing extensive orders. In most cases, though, using this kind of authority isn't necessary. Instead, it shows your employees that your new power has simply gone to your head. And that makes it difficult to gain their trust going forward. However technical your job may be, successful management comes down to having good people skills. How others perceive you impacts their motivation to work for you. So, it's especially important upfront to make an impression that builds confidence and trust in your abilities. The key message here is: Prioritize building confidence and trust as a new manager. During your first week as a new manager, avoid making any major changes. Give your employees some time to get used to your presence. Then, at some point over the next two months, schedule an initial conversation with every person on your team. This could be a casual meeting in your office, a lunch, or a coffee. But it's important that the conversation happens in person and isn't rushed. This meeting isn't meant to assert your agenda, though. It's meant to open the line of communication between you and your direct reports. So avoid doing all the talking! Establishing this open communication is crucial not only for your team to gain trust and confidence in your abilities, but also for them to see that you have trust and confidence in theirs. And to build confidence in your team, it's important to show them how much you appreciate their contributions. Though most people like to feel appreciated for their performance, this doesn't mean you should constantly praise your employees. On the contrary, giving too much praise comes across as insincere. Rather, show appreciation only when you truly believe someone deserves it. You should be specific about their behavior and describe how the impact of their performance benefits the company. You'll want to do this in private so you don't accidentally make other employees feel undervalued or jealous. Building confidence and trust doesn't happen overnight. But by listening to your team's concerns and showing

your appreciation for their work, they'll come to see you as honest, decent, supportive, and ultimately trustworthy.

Adapt your management style to each person and situation.

Unfortunately, we still see the old-school autocrat in management. This autocratic manager wants complete control over everything and expects robot-like performances from his team. Autocrats believe that they should make every decision. They also believe that a softer approach is a sign of weakness. On the other hand, diplomatic managers spend time explaining what and why things should get done. Diplomats know that involving their teams in decisions pays off in productivity. As a result, their teams feel like they're working with their boss rather than for their boss. Though you might naturally lean towards one of these approaches, neither is sufficient. In reality, different people and situations require different management approaches. So, it's important to cultivate an awareness approach when developing your management style. The key message here is: Adapt your management style to each person and situation. As a manager, your primary responsibility is to make sure your employees have what they need to do their best possible work. This requires a balance between control and encouragement. You have control when assigning work, explaining the work, and ensuring the work gets done. And you provide encouragement by motivating, listening, and helping the team meet expectations by running interference when needed. Different employees will need different amounts of control and encouragement based on their circumstances. By adopting the awareness approach, you focus on each team member's motivation and competency before customizing the amount of control or encouragement you give them. So, if someone is motivated, but lacks knowledge, that person mostly needs control from you. And if they're not motivated, but have the skill, then they mostly need encouragement. The amount of control or encouragement you give someone may change based on their situation. Say you have a staff member, Andy, who usually excels when working alone. After being put on a team project, you notice that he's struggling to work with others and that his enthusiasm is waning. While Andy usually needs little encouragement or control, in this situation he requires substantially more of both in order to transition into a teamwork environment. Similarly, you may need to adapt your overall management style in certain situations. If you've been given an emergency project, you might consider taking a more authoritative approach to meet the quick turnaround. But, since you'll only exercise this kind of power occasionally, your team will understand this shift as an exception rather than viewing you as a dictator.

Successful managers use delegation to develop their employees.

One of the keys to successful management is learning how to delegate. Delegating means giving a task, project, or job to an employee in order to develop her skills and increase the organization's overall effectiveness. New managers are often hesitant to delegate because they're more confident in their own abilities than that of their employees. Still others harbor insecurities that their employees will outperform them. But what many managers misunderstand is that delegation is a crucial tool. It isn't

about doling out work when you're feeling short on time. It's about helping your employees learn and grow. As a result, they'll feel more motivated and involved with the organization. The key message here is: Successful managers use delegation to develop their employees. So, delegation is a powerful training tool, right? But what if you don't know what to delegate? Start by assessing your current jobs, tasks, or projects and select the ones you might be able to give someone else. But don't use delegation as an excuse to pass off work you don't like. The goal is to develop your team while giving yourself more time to focus on the big picture. And there are some jobs that should never be delegated, like salary reviews, performance appraisals, coaching, and terminating employees. Next, consider which employee would feel motivated by the task, may have the time, and has demonstrated the required skills – or could benefit from developing them. Also, use your discretion to determine if an employee is ready to take on the task. Once you've determined who would best fit the assignment, meet with her to describe the task thoroughly. If she lacks the required experience, take this into consideration and spend more time clearly outlining the work involved. During the meeting, agree on any required outcomes and the timeline for completion. You might ask the employee to send you a follow-up email detailing what you've agreed on. This is a good way to make sure she completely understands the assignment. Having a written agreement is especially important if the task involves multiple review dates or outcomes. When delegating a task, remember that your employee's perspective, experience, and creativity are not the same as yours. She's likely going to perform the task differently than you – and that's okay. Successful managers know that not all tasks need to be completed to perfection. Accepting some less than perfect results is more important than taking on all the work yourself.

Run efficient meetings by setting an agenda and sharing the floor.

Have you ever attended a meeting that felt like a complete waste of time? Well, as a manager, you can learn to plan, lead, and participate in meetings in a way that's more effective for your team. The fact is that meetings are expensive. For ten people with an average salary of \$80,000 a year and two weeks of vacation, a two-hour meeting costs approximately \$800. Though it can be nice to bring your team together, meetings should be used sparingly. If you're simply disseminating information, an email with attachments is a better use of everybody's time. But some meetings are unavoidable. When you have tasks or topics that require a group discussion, schedule a meeting with a clear agenda and try to keep the participant list as small as possible. The key message here is: Run efficient meetings by setting an agenda and sharing the floor. In order to maximize the productivity of a meeting, send participants a proposed agenda a few days in advance. By giving enough time for them to prepare, those who attend will feel more engaged with the discussion. The meeting agenda should include every topic to be discussed and a time frame for each – it's important that you stick to these times. People are more likely to focus on the topic at hand when they know there's a fixed ending time in sight. Start your meetings promptly so you don't waste anyone's valuable time. Prioritize the most important discussion points first to make the best use of everyone's time together. But if the end of the meeting approaches and you haven't covered every topic, ask participants if they'd like to go over time, reconvene, or take care of the issues over email. When possible, delegate the different agenda items to others. Not only will they feel more involved, but it'll help them develop their leadership skills. Consider yourself a meeting facilitator whose job is to move the conversation

forward and make sure everyone is heard. You shouldn't be the person speaking the whole time! And always be aware of your position as the manager. If you'd like to hear everyone's opinion on a topic, hold off on sharing your own ideas until after everyone else has spoken. This will ensure that no one plays up to you or withholds information that might go against your opinion. Plus, by listening to your team members, you'll learn the value of hearing different points of view.

A good attitude is the key ingredient to hiring.

Making a bad hiring decision costs time and money. Not only do you risk having to rehire the position, but you also have to solve the problems the bad hire caused. So when it comes to hiring, it's important to get it right the first time. Your decision must be based on actual data, references, tests, and any other tool available to you. Most managers focus on education, experience, and qualifications when considering a potential candidate. But the most important ingredient is a good attitude. An employee with the best qualifications can become a problem if he has a bad attitude. Conversely, an employee with a good attitude who lacks qualifications can become an outstanding employee with the right training. The key message here is: A good attitude is the key ingredient to hiring. So, you need to hire someone. Let's assume your company's human resources department takes care of initial screenings, leaving you with the ultimate decision-making power. When interviewing a candidate, your priority should weigh his attitude against his education, experience, and skill. It's normal for job applicants to feel nervous, so start an interview with some small talk. Then, ease into giving the candidate an idea of the company and its people – but keep it brief. You want to make the candidate comfortable, but you won't learn anything about his attitude by doing all the talking! After giving the candidate the opportunity to ask any questions, it's time to investigate his attitude. One way of doing this is by asking questions, like, What did you like best about your previous job? If he focuses mainly on the company's happy hour and other social activities, it might be a sign that he's more interested in socializing than being a productive employee. But if he delves into educational opportunities and the challenges of his previous position, you can assume that he values a healthy working environment. Similarly, you can discern a candidate's attitude by the questions he asks. Those inquiring about training programs or in-company promotions are likely going to be better staff members than those focusing on vacation time. That being said, don't discredit applicants for asking about your company's health insurance policy or working hours. In these cases, they're likely trying to accommodate other commitments such as children, rather than indicating a bad attitude.

Try to help your employees succeed before dismissing them.

There will inevitably come a day when you need to terminate a staff member. In some cases, they might have been violent or dishonest, calling for immediate dismissal. But more often than not, there will be some kind of formalized process before expulsion. Most effective managers are extremely conservative about terminating someone because of the mounting costs associated with severance pay, outplacement assistance, replacing the role, and more. But for when it's unavoidable, learning how to sever the

tie is an important skill shrouded in discomfort for both parties. And if you do your job correctly, the terminated employee might thank you for it in the end. The key message here is: Try to help your employees succeed before dismissing them. Unless an underperforming employee's actions fall within guidelines for immediate dismissal, set a plan to get on the same page while also giving her a chance to prove herself. When discussing her performance, outline the current situation, the expected level of performance, and how to bridge the gap between them. Be explicitly clear that her job is in jeopardy but also provide encouragement and support. Let her know that you want to see her excel and you're willing to help her if she's committed to trying. Once you've agreed on the goals and required actions for improvement, discuss when to check in next. It's crucial to write everything down. Then ask her for a signature and provide a signed copy. Before you part, restate that you're available to help as needed. So, if someone has been making five errors a day, you might agree that the errors need to be reduced to three per day by the end of the month. That means the first progress check would be around 3 weeks to a month later. If she's showing improvement when you regroup, you may push out the next progress check a bit – if not, then schedule it much sooner. This cycle should go on until the employee has met the agreed-upon goals or you decide to dismiss her. If the underperformer fails to improve, having the signed documents showing your process is critical to counter any potential lawsuits. But most likely, the employee will also realize that she's not a good fit given how much time you worked with her. She may not enjoy being dismissed when it happens, but eventually she'll be grateful that you forced her to find a better fitting job.

Align your employees' interests with your company's needs to boost motivation.

As a manager, one of your main responsibilities is to motivate your team. You want them to want to perform well. Doing this is a surefire way to improve your working environment and your team's performance. But don't confuse motivating with leveraging your power. Using fear tactics might seem effective in the short run, but eventually, it undermines your authority. Your team will try to do the least amount of work to get by without punishment. In some cases, your employees might genuinely be interested in your organization's success. But the reality is that people are primarily motivated by their self-interests. As a manager, it's your job to align your team's personal interests with your organization's goals. The good news? To find out what motivates your employees, all you have to do is ask. The key message here is: Align your employees' interests with your company's needs to boost motivation. Everyone is motivated by different things. One employee may be motivated by the prospect of a promotion, while another may want to gain the manager's approval. Whether it's to become the best performer in the department, seek a salary increase, or simply out of personal pride, their goals will likely benefit your company. How? Through dovetailing. Dovetailing is a management technique that joins your individual team member's aspirations with the company's goals. The first step involves getting to know your direct reports. As you gain their trust, you'll learn about their personal interests and professional goals. And feel free to ask them about their professional goals directly. For example, you might ask what they'd like to be doing in three years. During these conversations, pay attention to whatever information they offer about their personal lives too. You might be surprised by how non-work-related interests could serve your

company. That's where the second step of dovetailing comes in. Say your employee wants to learn Spanish. Then, in a staff meeting, you learn that there's a company initiative to partner with a Central American corporation. By matching your employee's aspiration to learn Spanish with the company's need for Spanish-speaking employees on the initiative, it's a win-win situation. And your employee will be motivated because it ties to his personal goal. The bonus for you is that you'll get to be a part of the new initiative as well.

Cultivate emotional intelligence and a positive self-image.

Imagine a direct report is dealing with personal problems at home. One day, he snaps and begins to yell at you. How do you respond? Calmly? Or would you start yelling back? If you've been an individual contributor up until your recent promotion, you're probably more used to managing tasks than emotions. So, you're not alone if you find the most challenging part of your new job to be managing people. While not everyone was born to be a manager, anyone can improve their people skills through self-development. And as most successful managers can attest, self-development is worth your time since it directly impacts your ability to help others while staying calm in stressful situations. The key message here is: Cultivate emotional intelligence and a positive self-image. Today, the top management training programs include a module about emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is your ability to understand your own emotions and having excellent people skills to boot. Unlike IQ levels, which have no proven link to managerial effectiveness, experts have found that managers with a high emotional quotient, or EQ, are more likely to succeed in their roles. If you're in tune with your own emotions, you're able to stay calm in stressful situations, or you just seem to know what other people are thinking and feeling, you likely already have a high EQ. But if not, don't be alarmed. Emotional intelligence is a learned behavior and your EQ can rise drastically over time . . . with some work. Apart from emotional intelligence, your ability to manage others also depends on having a positive self-image. That's not to say that you should be arrogant. But projecting quiet confidence will increase your likelihood of success. At some point during your management career, you're bound to make a mistake. If you have a healthy self-image, you'll be more likely to handle these situations with ease. Instead of trying to cover up your mistakes or blame them on someone else, you'll be able to admit to them and move on. You can improve your self-image by practicing positive self-talk. Whether you realize it or not, your brain sends thousands of messages to yourself each day. By wiring your brain with positive messages, you're able to improve your ability to handle challenging situations. So, during such situations, say self-affirming statements to yourself like, I can handle this. Doing this regularly helps your brain build a positive sense of self. And that helps you become someone that your staff will trust and follow.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: As a manager, it's your job to provide your staff with what they need to excel – even when they're underperforming. By aligning your employees' personal interests with the needs of your organization, you boost their motivation. And helping them grow by delegating will make your staff members feel appreciated and supported. In turn, their trust and confidence in you will propel them to

contribute hard work to your team. Got feedback? We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to with The First-Time Manager as the subject line and share your thoughts! What to read next: Welcome to Management, by Ryan Hawk You've just learned that management requires a different skill set than what it takes to be a top-performing team member. And if you've recently been promoted to a leadership role, there's still more to learn. Welcome to Management is a guide written specifically for top-performing contributors transitioning into team leadership positions. Welcome to Management spans case studies, personal anecdotes, and interviews, revealing what effective leadership looks like in a variety of professional fields. To find a practical framework for developing yourself into a leader and carrying your team to sustainable success, head over to our blinks for Welcome to Management.