Everyone Deserves a Great Manager

What's in it for me? Learn how to become the type of manager every employee hopes for.

Congratulations! You've just been promoted to your first management role! Excited? You should be! The professional ambitions, workplace deliverables, and daily happiness of a whole team is now your responsibility. Intimidating, right? Well, don't worry. Your boss reckons you're up to the challenge. So why should it matter that you've never had any leadership training? Being a manager is a huge responsibility but it's also an opportunity to help others thrive. Just think – you're in a position to foster talent, fuel success, and support your team through challenges. If you want your entire team to flourish, you'll need to develop your leadership skills, fast. These blinks explore six key practices that will transform you into the ideal manager. In these blinks, you'll learn

why you should encourage your team to make mistakes; one thing you should never say to your employees; and the hard truth about burn-out.

Managers don't innately know how to lead well.

When the author, Scott Jeffrey Miller, was just 27, he received one of the biggest wake-up calls of his career. After just three months in a sales job at the Covey Leadership Centre, he was promoted to managing a team of client-service coordinators. Miller was delighted, and determined to be the best leader ever. And to him, that meant producing staggeringly impressive outcomes. So the author announced some new rules. There were to be no personal appointments during work hours, and start and finish times would be monitored. He even asked a coordinator to check voicemails on her honeymoon. What was the result of these new rules? Three weeks later, he was demoted because of his terrible management style. He may have been brilliant at sales, but he wasn't manager material – yet. If you're a first-time manager, you probably started off a similar scenario – as a high performer who'd caught your boss's eye. One day, you were promoted internally, and suddenly found yourself responsible for a whole team of employees. If you think about it, this is pretty ludicrous. You wouldn't get on a plane being flown by an untrained pilot. So, why do employers think you'll have the skills to be a manager just because you were good at your job? Unfortunately, this is common practice in the business world. In fact, an article in the Harvard Business Review claimed that the average age of a first-time leader is 30 – but that that person won't get any leadership training for another twelve years! That's over a decade of flying in the dark and managing by trial and error. It's harrowing to think so many people are being led by managers without any official training. After all, employees' career growth, skills development, emotional well-being, and mental health are all affected by how their bosses lead. And the responsibilities of the role have a huge impact on you as leader, too. If you want to manage your own stress levels, take care of yourself and your team, and achieve those workplace goals, you need to know what you're doing. Whether you've been freshly promoted or you're a senior leader wanting to become more effective, the practices you will learn in the blinks ahead can serve as your foundation. They'll allow you to help your team thrive – without your job taking its toll on your

Focus on your team's success – not your own.

Carolyn – a colleague of the author's and a fellow salesperson – was the obvious choice when a leadership position opened up at her workplace. She was a high performer, consistently exceeding her sales targets each quarter. Upper management was excited about her team potentially doing the same. But they were bitterly disappointed. Carolyn's team didn't seem to be developing. And worse, they didn't trust her. What was going wrong? Carolyn was always trying to save the day. If it looked like a deal was slipping away during a client meeting, she'd swoop in, put her sales skills into action, and close the deal. She thought this was the right thing to do, because her focus was still on sales targets. Carolyn had forgotten that she wasn't in sales anymore. Her job now was to support her team. If you're a first-time leader, you might think it's your job to fix all the problems you encounter. But by taking over when things look precarious, you sabotage your team's opportunities to learn. Imagine how different things would have been for Carolyn's team if she'd let them make mistakes. Sure, they would've lost a few sales. But afterwards, Carolyn and her team could've explored what they could do differently next time. This would've helped team members develop their sales skills, improving results over time. And, perhaps most important, it would have shown the team that Carolyn trusted them, building their confidence. Stepping into the leadership role means changing your definition of results. Your results won't arise from your own work anymore – like Carolyn's impressive sales records. They'll arise from your team's achievements. So what does that mean, exactly? It means that your main focus must be supporting your team. If your team is developing and working well, you're doing your job properly. Your personal deliverables need to take a backseat, so you can prioritize your team's growth. After all, what's the point of having a sales team if the manager is closing all the deals? That's not going to achieve sustainable results long-term, or increase the overall volume of sales. Get into the habit of regularly asking yourself what type of manager your team needs in that moment to be the best they can possibly be. Is there something you need to learn so you can support them? Maybe there's even something you have to unlearn – so that you don't end up like Carolyn.

Regularly hold 1-on-1 meetings with every member of your team.

Joanna was one of those dream employees: reliable, consistently hitting her targets under budget, and leading a thriving team. She was the perfect combination of low maintenance and high performance – and she did it all remotely, too. That was why it was such a shock when she handed in her notice. Horrified that the company was losing such an asset, its Chief People Officer, Todd, cleared his calendar to meet with her. He was determined to make her stay any way he could: with a raise, bonuses – whatever it took. As they chatted, Joanna told Todd why she wanted to move on. It wasn't the work she was doing or how much she was earning. Joanna didn't feel like her boss saw her as a person. Their catch-ups felt rushed and perfunctory. And since Joanna worked remotely, it was even more important to feel like her boss cared about her. No one wants to feel like she's a cog in the machine. As a leader, it's your job to make your

team members feel seen as people – individuals with professional ambitions, personal goals, and private lives. If you can do this, your employees' engagement levels will soar, improving their performance. The best way to achieve this is by holding regular 1-on-1 meetings with your team members. Don't use 1-on-1s for project status updates. That'll just make your team feel like part of a production line that you're monitoring. Instead, use these meetings as a chance to provide individual coaching. If you've established trust with your team, you'll find that employees will feel comfortable raising all kinds of worries with you during their 1-on-1s. These could be anything from needing help with their presentation skills to dealing with conflicts with colleagues. This will not only give you the chance to support them, it'll also provide you with insight into other issues that are holding your team back. The most important thing for you to do during 1-on-1s is listen. Don't jump into fixing mode, or use the meeting to share your own experiences. Remember: you're there to help your team grow. Keep your lips sealed until your team member has finished speaking. You can then work together to figure out a plan.

Connect your team with the company's vision.

How would you feel if your boss told you to do something without explaining why? Enthusiastic, or uninterested and confused? Now, imagine you asked why that task was important. If your boss responded with, "Because I said so," would you feel any better? Or would you feel like a kid being ordered to eat his vegetables? When employees don't understand why the work they do is important, motivation plummets. They might carry out their tasks, but they won't have a sense of ownership over their work, so its quality will drop – and you'll waste time picking up the slack. But if your team members understand how their contributions support the company's goals, they'll be infused with purpose. They're no longer just shuffling papers for the sake of it. They're shaping a memorable customer experience, or maybe helping a business recover a debt so that jobs won't be lost. And that's motivating. Your team won't be clear on what your company's goals are if you don't know them yourself. If you don't know, check in with your boss. Ask her what the priorities are, then think about what your team could do to support them. Once you know where you're all supposed to be heading, call a meeting and share the company's goals with your team. Then, as a group, explore different ways you could help achieve those goals. This is how you create deep buy-in. If a team has designed its own goals, its members will be more motivated to put in the hard work. As soon as they have a sense of purpose, they'll stop just going through the motions and take ownership. When you've finished workshopping, choose three goals, then create briefs for each. Appoint specific team members to work on different aspects of the project, with clear accountabilities, so everyone knows what you expect of them. Hold brief, regular meetings to check in on action items. This'll keep your team focused as you work toward your goals. Meetings like this build momentum by creating a sense of progress. They also help everyone keep their eyes on the ball amid the inevitable interruptions and distractions of daily work life. And they're a great opportunity to reconnect everyone's contributions with the company's vision, to keep your team inspired.

Learn how to give feedback effectively.

When the author was a college student, he worked as a waiter at the Sunset Grill in

Florida. A whizz at memorizing orders, he'd whirl into the kitchen, make his demands, and have food on customers' tables in a flash. He finished every day laden with tips. But he made the kitchen staff stressed and his fellow servers resentful. The author's boss called him out on his behavior by handing him an index card that said he needed to improve his teamwork. The author was shocked and indignant. If the manager had focused on helping him change his behavior, instead of bluntly pointing out what was wrong, the feedback would've been much more effective. Feedback – the very word can make your blood run cold, whether you're giving it or receiving it. But if you're a manager, it's an inevitable part of your role. And unless you want to sabotage your employees' confidence and productivity by making a mess of your feedback sessions, you'll need to become an expert in it. Luckily, giving feedback is a learned skill – one you can develop to help every team member shine. Many managers think the purpose of feedback is to criticize or fix an employee. But it isn't. Its purpose is to guide people in developing their skills. There are two different ways you can do this. The first is by using reinforcing feedback, which highlights outstanding behaviors or contributions. It lets team members know you've noticed what they're doing right, and that you hope they'll continue to do it. For instance, you might say, "Cameron, the way you've reorganized the data capture has simplified a confusing system. Well done!" Then there's the more challenging redirecting feedback, which takes a lot of courage and restraint to do well. Sometimes, you'll need to tell a team member that he's not meeting your expectations. But instead of seeing this as giving criticism, think of it as believing an employee has the capacity to improve – and that, with your guidance, he will. Before you meet with your team member, plan out what you'll say, keeping any judgment out of it. You'll need to clearly identify the behavior you've noticed, and articulate what impact it's having on the team or project. When you communicate this to your team member, he'll react with anything from shame to aggression. Give him time to process these emotions – then work together to create a plan that will address his behavior.

Become an expert at navigating change.

Change. It's inevitable. Head Office will initiate it, a client will demand it, or an economic shift will force it. And, as leader, you're there to support your team through whatever's going on. Leading a team through change doesn't just mean helping employees jump through the hoops of training programs or implementing new processes. It means exploring the emotional aspects of change as well. Many leaders ignore how their teams react to change, and that only increases stress and worry. This is the surest path to disaster – and to a huge drop in productivity. Workplace changes typically go through four phases, whether the change is using new sales software or merging with a competitor. An effective leader will guide her team through each phase as quickly as possible, to reestablish stability and productivity – sooner rather than later. In the first phase of change, your status quo is shattered. Everything's puttering along as usual, when – bam! – the carpet's pulled out from under you. At this stage, no one will know exactly what's going to happen, so everyone will be anxious. Get your team together immediately and tell them change is on the way. Reassure them that you'll keep them informed as soon as you're updated. This will help your people feel supported, even if you're all in the dark together. The second phase causes panic. Senior management announces the change and what it means. Anxiety runs rampant and performance deteriorates. As a leader, you need to gather all the information you can about how the change will affect your team, then develop an action plan to move

your employees through the change. By asking for their input, you'll help them regain a reassuring sense of control. In the third phase, the dust settles, and the team accepts that the change is happening. You roll out your plan and your team starts learning to do things in a new way, like working in a new office space or taking on different responsibilities. During this time, put any non-essential projects on the backburner so people can find their feet. Once the change has been implemented, you've reached phase four – adjusting to a new normal. Even if you don't think the change was for the best, you'll have emerged more resilient. You can use the knowledge you've gained the next time change knocks on your door.

Manage your energy and time effectively.

Have you ever been happy you were sick? You've kept your nose to the grindstone, pulling long hours and canceling weekend plans so you can deliver that project faster, under budget, or with astonishing results. But then your body falls apart. You wind up with the flu, and your only choice is to crawl into bed. "How nice!" you think. You can finally do some binge-watching and take afternoon naps. Most of us struggle to strike a work-life balance. In fact, business consultancy Gallup found that an astonishing two-thirds of the workforce suffers from professional burnout. That potentially means two out of every three people on your team. But you don't have to join this weary majority. By creating a plan that helps you thrive at work, maintain your relationships, and take care of yourself, you'll strike that elusive balance. Everyone's plan will look a little different, depending on personal commitments, lifestyles, and interests. But to work, your plan must manage two key areas. The first is energy. The key to high performance is understanding your body's natural energy rhythms. When do you feel fully charged and ready to go? When do you hit a slump? Pay attention to the rise and fall of your energy levels and see whether there's a pattern. Then, plan your work according to your energy. Use your peak hours for work that needs your full focus, and leave more procedural tasks for times when your batteries naturally run low. That way, you'll get more done, reducing the risk of late nights in the office. Next, learn to manage your time. It's easy for managers to get swamped with tasks. From project deliverables to supporting team members, the day can slip through your fingers. And that's why it's crucial that you learn how to say no – no to any tasks that don't align with your core priorities. To find out what your core priorities are, ask yourself what kind of leader you want to be. For example, do you want to help everyone on your team advance their careers? Maybe you want to make innovation flourish. Whatever's at the heart of your leadership, use it to evaluate each request that comes your way. If that request supports your priorities, say yes wholeheartedly. If it doesn't, say no. Doing this will keep you firmly on the path that leads to what you care about most.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: Your actions as manager will have a huge impact on your team's productivity – not to mention its members' happiness and health. When you're a new leader, it's easy to get swept up in your own ambitions. But if you want to be an effective leader – one who can help employees reach their full potential – you need to let go of thoughts about your personal success. To be an effective leader, you must focus on supporting your team. That's the true purpose of a manager – and the

only way to do your job well. Actionable advice: Praise team members in a way that speaks to them. When it comes to being praised, everyone has personal preferences. Some employees will love it if you applaud them during a staff meeting. Others will be mortified by this type of public attention, preferring you to say thank you during a 1-on-1. Make it your mission to discover how and when you should deliver your praise to each individual on your team. That way, you can tailor your approach, and make sure your words of gratitude and encouragement hit the right note every time.