**5 Tips That Will Help You Become a Data Science Manager**

So you want to be promoted? So does everyone else. How can you stand out from your peers?

On top of my passion for data science, I have always been interested in people management. I have always wanted to help others achieve their career goals (hence the Medium account), and I love to get the big picture and learn about/help decide how a team fits into the company’s broader ecosystem.

When I started my new job a year and half ago, I was hoping for a promotion to manager soon since I had a couple of years of individual contributor (IC) experience under my belt and I thought I would be able to find some general guidance online about how to make this transition possible. But interestingly enough, while the internet is filled with [interview guides](https://towardsdatascience.com/the-ultimate-interview-prep-guide-for-data-scientists-and-data-analysts-18621db1da47) and [general career advice](https://towardsdatascience.com/5-mistakes-i-wish-i-had-avoided-in-my-data-science-career-6c22a44304a1), there’s not much written about how to make the IC → manager transition. Everyone’s path to manager will be slightly different since there are a lot of variables in play here. But thanks to my manager’s coaching and guidance, I was able to distill some general lessons from my experience and hopefully will be able to help out some aspiring DS managers.

**Take initiative**

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned in this process is — **you don’t get a promotion and THEN start to perform at the next level; you perform at the next level IN ORDER TO get a promotion**.

So when you notice a gap somewhere, even if it doesn’t necessarily fall into your current role description, don’t be afraid to bring it up to your manager and discuss whether you can/should take initiative to help plug the gap. You manager will for sure appreciate ICs who can notice those things and can help brainstorm solutions.

The best way to notice gaps and in turn take initiative is to be a good listener and constantly communicate with your partners & stakeholders about their teams’ work and pain points. Generally, the more you know about other teams’ work and how they collaborate with each other, the easier it is for you to identify ways to improve things.

**Mentor a peer**

One of the biggest responsibilities of a manager is to help other team members in terms of prioritization, guidance and general mentorship. So you should start practicing these when you are thinking about making the transition.

If you have **new members joining the team**, great, offer to be an **onboarding buddy** to guide them through their first few weeks. See if you are able to provide general context about stakeholders, tech stack and projects of the team and help with more detailed questions. This will also help you get a better understanding of your knowledge gaps and help you improve as an IC.

If there are no new members joining the team in the near term, you can still help out current peers on the team when they need someone to **brainstorm a solution** or when they don’t know which team to reach out to about a question.

**Step out of your immediate scope**

As a manager, you will need to **elevate from a single IC’s scope and instead be in charge of several IC’s work streams** on a higher level. Take this potential transition period as your risk-free practice.

If you have bandwidth outside of your day-to-day work, talk to your teammates to learn more about their projects. Occasionally you will find opportunities for collaboration between team members to improve team efficiency; these would be great suggestions to bring to your manager.

The same thing is also possible on an inter-team level. If you are able to pay more attention to [conversations that are seemingly unrelated to your immediate scope](https://towardsdatascience.com/productivity-tips-for-data-scientists-eb66242fde27), you will be able to quickly make connections between different projects and initiatives and help improve the efficiency of collaboration across teams.

**Get involved in team-level activities**

Managers always appreciate a helping hand in team-level activities such as **sprint planning, quarterly planning** or even just timely suggestions. This will be a great opportunity to test your knowledge about other team members’ work and other teams’ requests for your team. It will also give you some **exposure to the manager’s plan and vision** for the team. Similarly, volunteering for **culture initiatives** is a great way to practice thinking about the team as a whole and start building a muscle that you will need to flex as a manager.

I have seen a lot of ICs with great ideas that they implement in their own work; whether it’s having a product design doc for the data product they develop, or having an SLA agreement with their partner teams. What would be even better is to codify the best practices you use in your own work so the whole team could benefit from it. This is in the same spirit as “step out of your own scope”; adopt a manager mindset and help out the whole team.

**Have open, timely feedback conversations with your manager**

As a data scientist, you should know the importance of metrics to track your progress. So how do you establish a metric for your transition to a manager? Having open and timely conversations with your manager is key here.

Every company has slightly different leveling guides for different roles. So it’s very important to understand the criteria you need to meet as a manager. Ask for the **leveling guide** when you have the initial career development conversation with your manager. And make sure you mention **your aspiration to be a manager** as soon as possible (don’t be shy) as well as your aspired timeline that you are working towards. At the same time, ask your manager for **candid feedback** with regards to their assessment of your readiness to become a manager, and any gaps that they think you need to address. Similar to the “build in public” mentality, don’t be afraid to put yourself out there for those type of things; even if you fail, it’s a great learning experience.

In followup career development check-ins, ask your manager to provide feedback for you against the leveling guide. This will provide clarity for both you and your manager in terms of your progress toward the goal.

**Summary**

Not sure if you have noticed, but communication is key in a lot of the things mentioned above. Communicate openly and often with **your teammates, your stakeholders and your manager**. It’s also important to get **your manager’s support** in this whole process. I wouldn’t have been able to do any of these without my awesome manager Dennis’ help and mentorship. Remember, your manager will be your biggest advocate in all of those promo conversations, so it’s important to bring them on the journey and get their honest feedback along the way.

Besides that, remember to **step out of your immediate scope** to so you can **get involved with more team-level work, mentor a peer,**or just **take more initiative in general.**

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