Managerial Skills for Computer Scientists

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Summary

In her article *Becoming the Boss* (Hill, 2018), the author describes the struggles first-time managers face. Succeeding as a manager requires a different skill set than succeeding as a individual. New managers first need to understand the nature of their new role, which usually happens in a "learning by doing" or even "try and fail" process. New managers are often thrown into their first management position without support from their superiors – even though they used to be former first-time managers, too, and know the struggles a first-time manager is facing.

Authority does not come with the position, but must be earned. Especially talented subordinates do not just follow orders blindly, but question their new boss and scrutinize him for hidden motives. A manager focusing on technical problems could become a micromanager and a "control freak". Showing off technical skills can even undermine a manager's credibility. The manager's role is not about solving technical problems, but about managing interdependencies.

Managing a team is not the same as managing a bunch of individuals: Every decision concerning a team member affects the team as a whole. Granting privileges on a single team member can have a negative impact on the team as a whole, for every other team member feels worse off without those privileges. A manager should focus instead on shaping team culture, which can unleash the team's problem-solving prowess.

A common misconception is that the boss is supposed to have all the answers. New managers often tend to avoid questions, because they are afraid to look "dumb" in front of their superiours or subordinates. Asking questions can help to clarify open points, and ensures that both parties involved talk about the same thing. Once clarity about an issue is established, nobody can try to sneak out under the pretense that he or she understood it differently. A new manager's success is not only important for a single team, but for the organization as a whole.

Sources

Hill, L. A. (2007, January). Becoming the Boss. *Harvard Business Review*, January 2007 Issue

Questions

1. How can you tell when you are facing ordinary adjustment problems and when it is your actual wrong-doing? What are key indicators?

2. Aren't these adjustment problems a neccessity to prepare you as a manager for worse situations?

3. What are some of these problems that almost always occur when transitioning to a first manager position?

4. Will becoming a manager stay equally hard when many companies are themselves transitioning from hierarchical to more flat organizations?

5. Aren't there also situations where neglecting all forms of authority in order to build better relationships with subordinates become a problem in itself?