Harvard Business Review

Management Tips 2

Management Tips

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HBR Management Tips 2-Book Collection

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By Harvard Business Review

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About the Book

Management Tips is a compilation of the Management Tip of the Day by *Harvard Business Review*. Adapted from blog posts and other content, these tips offer quick and practical advice on how to manage yourself, manage your team, and manage your business. Please turn to the List of Attributions at the back of the book for more information on the sources from which these tips were adapted, and visit hbr.org for more tips and content.

Managing
Yourself

Create a New Leadership Vision

Now is the time to clarify and refine your leadership vision. This requires both articulating your values and reexamining your goals for the future.

Start by identifying the four or five most important episodes in your life—moments that defined who you are today. For each episode, articulate how it shaped your values.

Then draft a statement of your personal leadership vision. This is a compelling image of an achievable future. Describe the kind of leader you want to become and the major contributions you want to make to the world between now and 2025. What will you be doing in 2025, and what impact do you hope to be making?

02

Pretend You Have What You Want

Your mind is often your greatest tool, but as anyone who has been taken over by fear, frustration, or worry knows, it can also be your greatest enemy. Whether you're concerned that you don't have the respect of your peers or that a customer isn't calling you back because she's gone to a competitor, overthinking the issue only serves to compound the worry. Instead, pretend you have what you want. Act as if your peers respect you or as if the customer is loyal. These may be fantasies, but what you're worrying about may be as well. It's better to stop the worry and act confidently; chances are better that you'll get what you want.

03

Take Ownership

Autonomy, influence, and a sense of meaning are all associated with lower stress. If you need to find more joy, take on a new project that will improve your job, team, or workplace. While you may not have the same degree of freedom that an entrepreneur does, you can find ways to set the agenda and claim ownership of tasks and projects. This ownership will likely improve your job satisfaction while adding an important accomplishment to your résumé.

04

Take Responsibility for Your Growth

Responsibility for your professional development lies squarely on your shoulders. No matter your situation, use these tips to keep sharp:

- *Meet with two former coworkers each month.* Talk about your industry and where it is headed. This will keep you tapped into the community.
- *Have one major learning experience each quarter.* If your work isn't giving you the necessary challenges, seek out other opportunities. Volunteer for a nonprofit, attend a conference, or take a class.
- *Give yourself a performance review.* Reflect on your growth and performance, whether through a formal process or not. Be honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses and what you should focus on in the coming year.

05

Increase Your Desire to Learn

Don't let your ego get in the way of your desire to learn. Successful leaders keep their minds open to new things because they know that no matter how high their level of mastery, there is always more to discover. If you've become an expert in one field, seek out other fields where you can transfer and apply your expertise. When facing challenges, even ones you've faced many times before, adopt a learner's approach—ask questions or find new ways to solve the problem.

Give Yourself a Leadership Workup

Many of us wait until we're sick to see a doctor. However, preventive medical assessments have been shown to improve health, save lives, and reduce medical costs. Prevention can be beneficial to leadership assessments too. Often people are asked to see a coach or participate in a 360-degree assessment when troubles surface. Yet, time and money (not to mention headaches) could be saved if leaders underwent thorough assessments before problems arose. Ask the people around you for feedback about what's working and what's not. Be sure you understand their expectations and where you may not be meeting them, or are unnecessarily exceeding them. Having a complete understanding of where you are as a leader gives you a greater sense of control and power to shape your future.

07

Work on Your Backhand

When you're particularly good at something, it's easy to rely on that strength. For example, if your forehand is your stronger stroke, you'll position yourself to use it much more often. But turning weaknesses into strengths will give you a competitive edge and make you a more effective leader. Focus energy on improving your weak points. Think about your last performance review or ask your peers what one capability you really need to succeed in the current environment. There's no better way to impress than to reveal a killer backhand when everyone's expecting your forehand.

08
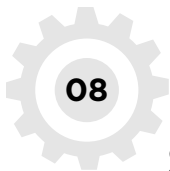
Shed Your Excessive Need to Be You

One of the worst habits a leader can have is excusing his behavior with claims like, "That's just the way I am!" Stop clinging to bad behaviors because you believe they are essential to who you are. Instead of insisting that you can't change, think about how these behaviors may be impeding the success of those around you. Don't think of these behaviors as character traits, but as possibilities for improvement. You'll be surprised how easily you can change when it helps you succeed.

09

Be Open to Criticism

Constructive criticism is essential for creativity, innovation, and problem solving. Since leadership requires all three, leaders need to be sure not only that they are open to criticism, but that they actively seek it out. Don't simply ask for general feedback but ask people—direct reports, peers, customers—to poke holes in your ideas and approaches. Critique can be a useful approach to test ideas and keep people and teams accountable.

10

Listen Better

For years, leadership experts have been encouraging managers to improve their listening skills. Good listening isn't just about making the speaker feel respected and heard; it's also about making sure you understand what's truly said. Here are three tips for better listening:

- *Think.* Engage in the conversation by thinking ahead and anticipating what the speaker is going to say. Try to anticipate the conclusions. Don't just hear the words.
- *Review.* Pause briefly and mentally summarize the points.
- *Listen.* Watch nonverbal cues that could indicate what the speaker isn't saying. What isn't said is often as important as what is.

11

Schedule Regular Meetings with Yourself

As we continue venturing into uncharted economic waters, how can you keep your job on track and deliver your best? Schedule a weekly meeting with yourself. That's right: no matter how busy you are, this is not a luxury. It's essential.

Every week, take a quiet hour to reflect on recent critical events—conflicts, failures, opportunities you exploited, observations of others' behavior, feedback from others. Consider how you responded, what went well, what didn't, and what might be more effective in the future.

Never cancel this meeting—it's crucial.

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Managing Your Energy

As organizations demand more and more from their people, time-pressed employees have to scramble to keep up. You may not be able to make the day any longer, but you can replenish your energy. Use these four simple ways to help you work smarter and prevent burnout:

- *Take brief but regular breaks.* Step away from your desk every 90 to 120 minutes. Take a walk, get a drink, or just stretch your legs.
- *Say thank you.* Being positive boosts your energy level. Regularly express appreciation to others.
- *Reduce interruptions.* Perform tasks that need concentration away from phones and e-mail. Instead, designate specific times in your day to respond to messages.

- *Do what you love.* Understand where your strengths lie and what you enjoy doing. Find ways to do more of those things and less of what tires you out.

13

Decrease Your Technology Dependence

How often do you hear someone ask, "What did we do before cellphones?" One of the many answers is: we relied on our memories. Studies have shown that using our memories improves reasoning and creativity. Yet, because of our increased reliance on technology, few of us can even recall phone numbers or appointments. Try remembering and entering numbers by hand or picturing your weekly calendar in your mind. This will not only help you use your mind in a healthy way, but may save you when the inevitable happens and your BlackBerry or iPhone goes down.

Capture Big Ideas in Simple Ways

Don't rely on your memory or BlackBerry to record and capitalize on good ideas. Go old-school with a stack of 3 x 5 index cards. Carry them with you and, when you hear a good idea, write it down. The physicality of the cards forces you to reflect on them at the end of the day, and the act of writing down the ideas helps you remember and process them. Having the blank cards in your pocket is also a useful reminder to be looking for new ideas and, most importantly, to listen.

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Combine Creativity and Results

In academia, critical thinking is the norm, and asking questions is required. On most campuses, questioning ideas is the first step, and the second is questioning the question. As a result, academia has a reputation for being too open-ended and sluggish. In industry, we prefer to set a deadline, get things done, focus on execution. We worry that thinking about an idea could hold up progress. Combine the two approaches to be sure you are both thinking creatively and getting results. Ask lots of questions but don't let the questions impede movement. The questions should drive you toward a clear, defensible outcome.

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Get Creative by Zoning Out

Studies have shown that an idle brain is more likely to come up with a new idea. Yet, we often feel that we need more focus. Try taking mental breaks from e-mail and deadlines and let your mind wander. These breaks can be critical to remaining creative and open to fresh ideas. You can take a short break during a hectic day or you can opt for a longer, creative sabbatical over a week, month, or year. Regardless of the duration, be sure you are giving your mind needed space to think for the long term and big picture.

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Make Masterful Decisions

Whether you believe in making decisions swiftly and decisively or with more caution and deliberation, try these three tips to help you reach better conclusions and avoid decision traps:

- *Get the right minds on the job.* Decision making is the process of converting input into output. To make the best decision, optimize your input by getting the opinions and insights of trusted people who know the arena best.
- *Decide how you will decide.* Bickering often happens during the decision-making process. Be clear with yourself and others involved about the steps you will take to reach the decision.

- *Demand diversity.* Too much agreement is dangerous; you need dissenting opinions. Give a minority viewpoint a voice or appoint a devil's advocate. Listening to the "other side" will give you a more robust answer.

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Trust in Your Decision-Making Skills

Yes, knowledge is power, but too much knowledge can take away your power. When solving problems, many leaders gather an abundance of information and conduct in-depth analyses to give them what they hope are the right answers. This can lead to analysis paralysis or to data-driven, but illogical, answers. Often the best answers are educated guesses informed by your past experiences coupled with new information and insight. Don't put too much faith in information analysis alone, and don't disregard your decision-making skills. Remember to always check answers with your gut feelings before acting.

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Find Extra Time

Crises and special events force us to find extra time in our day for crucial tasks. In an ordinary week, however, those hours are buried in unnecessary meetings, interruptions, and inefficiency. Don't wait for the next emergency. Here are two ways to regain wasted time:

- *Analyze your calendar.* Look back at the last month. Which meetings were truly needed to advance your goals? Then look forward at the coming month and eliminate ones that you can bypass without any consequence.
- *Ask for feedback.* Our worst time-wasting activities are often invisible to us. Ask direct reports and peers to identify tasks that you could do less often or stop altogether.

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Manage with Minimum Time

Do you strive to be a good manager or mentor, but feel you do not have the time to do it well? Don't get trapped into thinking that leadership is an extra commitment on top of your day job. How you lead, not how much, is what counts. Here are three ways to maximize your management in minimum time:

- *Turn dead time into development time.* Look for every small stretch in your day when you could be talking to someone and convert each into a coaching opportunity. Walking out of a meeting? Use those two minutes to give your direct report feedback on the presentation.
- *Show up in people's work spaces.* Once per day, get up and walk over to the desk of someone you haven't spoken to recently.

Take two minutes to ask her what she's working on.

- *Make two contacts per day.* Every day, e-mail two people you met with that day and offer "feedforward." Employees who know that you're trying to develop their skills will stay engaged.

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Increase Your Productivity

We live in a demanding and distracting world. Being productive can sometimes feel like an impossible feat. Here are three ways to get more done without burning out:

- *Keep one to-do list.* Include everything you want or need to do in one place. Writing it down helps get it off your mind and leaves you free to focus on the task at hand.

- *Do the most important thing first.* Before you leave work in the evening, decide what one thing you need to accomplish the next day. Do it first thing in the morning, when you're likely to have the most energy and fewest distractions.

- *Schedule time for non-urgent things.* It's easy to get caught up in the pressing issues of the day. Block off time in your calendar to do things that would otherwise get squeezed out, like writing, thinking creatively, or building relationships.

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Get Through Your
To-Do List

Self-discipline is hard. Try these three tips to make your work more efficient every day:

- *Get three things done before noon.* Statistics show that the team ahead at halftime is more likely to win the game. Enjoy your lunch knowing that you accomplished at least three tasks in the morning.
- *Sequence for speed.* Break projects into parts. Take on the longer pieces at the beginning and make sure each subsequent part is shorter. If you leave the longest parts for last, you are more likely to run out of steam before the end of the day.
- *Tackle similar tasks at the same time.* The mind thrives on repetition. You can build momentum by taking on similar projects at the same time.

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Prioritize Value over Volume

Research has shown that multitasking results in mediocre outcomes. By putting too little attention on too many things, you fail to do anything well. However, the answer isn't single-tasking either. Single-tasking is far too slow to help you succeed in today's fast-paced world. Instead, identify the tasks that will create the most value and focus on those. By prioritizing value over volume and sharpening your focus on tasks that truly matter, you'll increase the quality of your work and, ultimately, the value you provide. What to do with all those tasks that didn't make the high-value list? Put them on a "do later" list. If they continually fail to make it to the high-value list, ask yourself: why do them at all?

Develop a Growth Mind-set

We spend a lot of time and energy at work trying not to fail. However, most people describe their failures as an important part of learning and growing. Adapt a growth mind-set and accept that failure is part of the process of skill development. People with a growth mind-set feel smart when they're learning, not just when they're succeeding. Don't limit yourself to doing things that you know you can do—you won't grow that way. Instead, try things that are above your ability and set high goals that you aren't sure you can reach. You might surprise yourself and succeed, and if you don't, you'll learn something new.

Achieve Short-Term Goals

Development efforts often focus on how you can achieve your career goals over the long term. Short-term successes, however, are critical to making your next move and preparing for those long-term aspirations. Here are three immediate ways to build your career options:

- *Play to your strengths.* Do more of what you do best. Early in a career, it makes sense to try a bit of everything and push to improve in areas of weakness, but at a certain point, it is better to focus on your strengths.

- *Reinforce your "brand."* Choose activities outside work that develop the image you want to convey. For example, volunteer for the school building committee if you're good at managing projects. Gain broader

experience and conversational ways to reinforce your capabilities at work.

- *Create the context for success.* Surround yourself with people you need to do your work well. People have to recognize common values and goals before they're likely to share what they know, so invest in these relationships.

Give Up Control

Leaders who micromanage do a disservice to their company, their employees, and themselves; worse yet, they are often preventing their companies from growing. If you are struggling to grow your company or unit, one of the smartest things you can do is give up control. Here's how:

- *Push down decision making.* If you're making all the decisions, you're only holding your company back. Push decision making down to the lowest possible level.
- *Accept that mistakes will happen.* Sharing responsibility with others means things don't always go according to plan. Prepare your employees to avoid mistakes by being clear about your expectations and giving them the tools they need to do their jobs well.

- *Build your bench.* Making yourself comfortable with giving up control requires having people you believe in. Invest both your time and resources to develop your star employees.

Avoid Micromanaging Yourself

Training yourself to avoid micromanaging others is one thing, but handling tendencies to control your own work can be even harder. Here are three ways to keep the micromanager in you from impeding your work:

- *Keep your eyes on the prize.* Don't focus on details before the big picture is laid out. Keep the larger project goal in mind and resist temptation to dive into minutiae.
- *Don't second-guess yourself.* You'll inconvenience yourself and the people who work for you if you shift project direction midstream. Take a complete pass through a project before deciding to change course.

- *Micromanage when it's time.* Almost every project requires some detail work. When you reach that point, unleash the micromanager in you and handle it.

How to Beat Burnout

Falling prey to burnout is easy. This condition—marked by exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy—stems from information overload, perpetual "busyness," and a relentless race against the clock.

One tactic for preventing burnout is to seek out ways to use available resources more wisely. For instance, delegate responsibilities to staff members eager to develop new skills. And resist the urge to grapple with urgent but unimportant tasks (such as responding to e-mails). Instead, schedule set times during the day for checking and replying to e-mails and phone calls.

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Manage Stress by Facing It

We've been told over and over about the harmful effects of stress, but how can we handle stress if its source doesn't go away? Figure out what your reaction to stress is. If you respond to stress by doing something productive—like cleaning your house or checking in more frequently with your team—consider yourself lucky. In the more likely case that your stress reaction is unhealthy, take notice. Some common reactions to stress are micromanaging, making heavy-handed suggestions, and second-guessing decisions. If you find yourself doing these things, pause and take a breath. Paying careful attention to your behavior can help you stop the reaction before it has harmful effects.

Stop Working and Have Fun

You don't have to retire early to stop working. You just need to take the "work" out of work. Make work fun by doing these two things:

- *Find people you enjoy working with.* Of course you don't always choose who you work with, but when you do, choose projects that allow you to work with people you trust, respect, and enjoy spending time with.
- *Find problems you enjoy solving.* Again, you may not always have a choice, but try to seek out projects you find interesting and are passionate about. If you're not excited about any of your current projects, propose a new project that you can lead.

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Take a Mini Break

We all need a break. However, in the current environment, taking time off for a vacation may not be best for your company (or your bank account). Find ways to carve out smaller chunks of time to rest and recuperate. Here are three things you can do in one hour or less.

- *Exercise.* Make the time by trying an early morning class or exercising during your lunch break.
- *Turn off your BlackBerry.* Even for just an hour while you take a walk or have dinner with a friend, this "quiet" time will help you feel more focused when you power back on.
- *Do a crossword puzzle.* Research shows crossword puzzles sharpen the mind. Work on the puzzle while you eat lunch and give yourself a mental break.

Don't Let Strengths Be Weaknesses

Many of the qualities responsible for getting us where we are today can also hold us back. Watch out for these three double-edged traits:

- *Persistence.* Willingness to persevere despite obstacles has created many great innovations and is often the foundation for successful start-ups. However, persistence can easily turn to stubbornness. Stick with your ideas when you know you are right and have supporting evidence. Be willing to abandon your position when signs show you need help or redirection.

- *Control.* Early phases of company growth require the founder to be involved in all operations. But as the company scales, that maniacal attention to detail can be counterproductive. Recognize the importance of delegation and let go when it's time.

- *Loyalty.* Close ties inevitably form when people work together day in and out, and loyal relationships can yield great results. However, you need to know when loyalty is clouding your judgment in assessing capabilities and skill gaps.

Change Your Behavior

Developing yourself as a leader is not easy: behavioral change is hard, time consuming, and frustrating. However, removing the five most common roadblocks to change can make your path to self-improvement better:

- *Take ownership.* If you don't think you can change, you can't. Believe in your ability to change and take ownership before getting started.
- *Be patient.* Positive, lasting results take time, usually 50 percent to 100 percent longer than most people initially think.
- *Accept difficulties.* Real change takes real work. When setting out, be prepared to face challenges you didn't anticipate.
- *Refuse to be distracted.* Something more important will inevitably come up. You need to make your development

a priority and refuse to let distractions divert your path.

- *Maintain.* Once you've started to see traction, don't declare victory. Sustainable change requires maintenance over a lifetime.

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Fire Yourself

Management shake-ups, though disruptive, can be good for a company. They bring in fresh perspectives and require that leaders take a hard look at their own performance. Do not wait for your company to get in trouble. Instead, fire yourself. Think about what you would do in your position if you were to start anew. What would you do differently if this were your first day on the job? Taking this step back can help you evaluate the strategies and approaches you are currently using, see things that are too difficult to see when you are entrenched, and reenergize yourself for the challenges ahead.

35

Cultivate Your Proactive Brain

Studies have shown that a good memory helps you better navigate the future. And in business, the ability to anticipate and negotiate future demands is an asset. A proactive brain uses details from past experiences to make analogies with your current surroundings. It then helps you determine where you are and envision future possibilities. We are all born with proactive brains, but these three things can help improve brain performance:

- *Give your brain a lot to work with.* Create a rich pool of information to draw from. Expose your brain to diverse experiences and situations.
- *Borrow from others.* Find out as much as you can about others' experiences by talking and interacting with people, and reading about their lives.

- *Let your mind wander.* Undisturbed time gives your brain the space it needs to recall and recombine past experiences in ways that help you anticipate the future.

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Decipher and Achieve Success

Success in business is not about having the most brilliant answer. It's about having a workable solution, and that requires developing an understanding of the unwritten rules of the organization. To become more persuasive and effective, figure out who and what really matters. Ask successful people at your company what approaches and relationships helped them most. Be curious about the ways people get things done, and observe the inner workings of projects and initiatives you aren't part of by building relationships with influential people. All of the information you gather can contribute to your own future success.

Schedule Time for Second-Guessing

Questioning whether you have made the right decision can be a useful way to make sure you are on the right track. But if you second-guess yourself at the wrong time, you may feel tempted to give up on important commitments. Don't question yourself when you are most vulnerable. Instead, schedule a time to review your decision when you are in the right frame of mind. For example, don't wonder whether you should abandon a plan to talk more during meetings when you are walking into the conference room. Rather, tell yourself that you will question the decision ten minutes into the meeting, once you've had time to get used to the idea. Setting a time will also help you second-guess once rather than nagging yourself with doubts.

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Be Confident, but Not Really Sure

One of the keys to effective decision making is confidence. Even if you only have temporary convictions, act on them. If you doubt your decision while making it, trust in your leadership may erode. Strong opinions signal confidence and provide others with the guidance they need. But resist the urge to cling to your decisions. Have the humility to realize that you might be wrong if better information comes along. And be prepared to change your mind and correct your course if that happens.

Recover from a Mistake

While most people accept that mistakes are inevitable, no one likes to make them. The good news is that even large slipups don't have to be career-enders if they are handled well. Next time you make a blunder, follow these three steps to recover gracefully:

- *Fess up.* Trying to hide a mistake or downplay its importance can be fatal to your career. Be candid and transparent about the mistake, take responsibility for your part in it, and don't be defensive.
- *Make necessary changes.* Mistakes are important learning opportunities. Explain to your boss and other interested parties what you will do differently going forward.
- *Get back out there.* Don't let your errors keep you from ever taking risks again. Once the mistake is behind you, focus on the future.

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Identify Your Unique Skills

All of us have at least one disruptive skill—an ability that sets us apart from others. You may have been honing yours for years, or you may be so innately good at it that you don't even notice it. Here are three ways to identify your unique skill:

- *Watch your reflexes.* You may instinctively do what you're good at without even noticing. Ask yourself: when I feel most successful or invigorated, what am I doing?
- *Look for confluences.* A distinct skill may not be one thing, but an unusual intersection of ordinary proficiencies.
- *Listen to compliments.* Peers, managers, direct reports, and even spouses are often good mirrors of your inherent strengths. Don't habitually dismiss compliments, but mine them to discover your unique skills.

Become a Thought Leader

Everyone has a personal brand these days. But if you want to move ahead, you need to be more than the "finance guy who understands the business." Distinguish yourself as someone with a truly unique perspective respected inside and outside the organization. Here are three ways to do that:

- *Build your online presence.* The Internet is a perfect place to start showcasing your knowledge. Post comments on blogs, write your own posts, and connect with other bloggers to create a network.
- *Win some awards.* Identify awards that matter in your industry and don't be afraid to nominate yourself, or convince colleagues to do it for you.

- *Flaunt well-thought-of affiliations.* Your associations aren't always in your control, but if you have a degree from a top school or testimonials from important people, display them prominently. Credibility by proxy is valuable.

Focus on Your Distinctive Skills

When selling yourself in the talent marketplace, focusing on hard-won strengths required for the job in question can be all too easy. These skills are often the ones that many other people have too. Your most outstanding talent is probably something you do without even thinking. Ask colleagues or friends what strengths you might be undervaluing. Lead with these exceptional skills instead. Articulate to prospective employers, or to the boss who's considering your raise, your unique value proposition as an employee. Employers don't just want someone slightly better than everyone else; they are looking for someone with a truly distinctive skill set.

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Remove Your Mental Barriers

If you have your sights set on the top job at your company, organizational barriers are likely standing in your way. This may be especially true if you are a woman. However, the mental barriers holding you back may be just as strong, if not stronger. To get what you want, you need to ask for it and, in some cases, push for it. Never assume that you are going to be treated fairly or justly rewarded. You must define what you want and present the case for why the company should give it to you. Organizational bias is real, but don't let your own timidity or fear of self-promotion make you lose out on what you deserve.

Sell Yourself—the Right Way

Are whispers about layoffs in your company growing louder? If so, advertising the value you deliver to the organization is more important than ever. But selling yourself is a delicate art. Overdo it or take the wrong approach and you may look like a grandstander.

Sell yourself effectively by describing your contributions to your boss and linking them to important organizational goals. For example, "I put a lot of advance work into that new customer database, so it's really rewarding to see it pay off in greater customer loyalty and profits," or "I worked hard to organize the launch meeting because I really want to see us start major projects off on the right foot."

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Perfect Your Personal Elevator Pitch

A personal thirty-second story is not just for job seekers. Being able to talk about yourself and your unique talents is a useful skill for building relationships and projecting confidence. Here are three tips for perfecting what to say about yourself:

- *Focus on the relevant, not the recent.* Your most recent job experience shouldn't necessarily be what you talk about first. Think about your audience and lead with your most relevant skills or experience.
- *Focus on skills.* You don't have to have a background in marketing to be good at marketing. Talk about your relevant skills and how your experience is applicable to the situation at hand.

- *Connect the dots.* Your pitch shouldn't sound like a résumé but should tell a cohesive story. Bring together the richness of your experiences and demonstrate how they add up.

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Develop a
Leadership Brand

A leadership brand tells people what is distinctive about you as a leader and communicates what you have to offer. Summarizing your brand in a statement is a useful and often enlightening task. First, answer two important questions:

- What do I want to be known for?
- What results do I want to achieve in the next twelve months?

Take these two answers and put them into the following statement: I want to be known for _____ so that I can deliver _____. Once you have your statement, be sure that you are living up to it. Ask others for input on whether you are achieving your goals and whether they see your leadership brand in the same way you do.

How to Craft the Job You Want

Not engaged and motivated by your job? You may have the power to change it. Begin by identifying your motives, strengths, and passions to help you better understand which aspects of your job will keep you engaged and inspire higher performance. Then, create a diagram of your current job, including your job tasks, noting which you do most often. Next, create a diagram of your preferred job, indicating which things you want to do more or less of and which tasks you want to add. This chart can help you articulate what you want to do differently. Be sure to engage your supervisor in this process; assure her that you won't let your current tasks slide and that any new tasks you propose are central to the company.

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Ask for a Raise

Asking for a salary increase can be a nerve-racking task. Here are three tips for making the request go smoothly and increasing your chances of getting the raise:

- *Choose the right time.* It's best to discuss a raise when your status is high. Consider asking soon after your team posts good results or at the end of a successful project. Avoid making the request when your boss is preoccupied with other issues.
- *Have a plan.* Know what number you want, make sure it is realistic, and build a case to support it. Use facts about comparable roles and evidence of recent successes.
- *Be clear and positive.* Stay focused on the positive of what you have accomplished. Avoid bringing up other issues during the meeting. Be clear about what you want without issuing an ultimatum.

Control Promotion Anxiety

A promotion can feel both rewarding and stress-ful. After you've accepted all the congratulations, it's time to deal with all of the new expectations. Here are three tips to address the anxiety that most people feel when stepping into a new role:

- *Prepare support.* Identify a strong ally, mentor, or coach who you can lean on during the first few months on the job. Ask this person to give you honest and constructive feedback along the way.
- *Create a plan.* Lay out what you plan to accomplish in your first few months. Be realistic and set clear priorities so that you are prepared to make necessary trade-offs.
- *Know your limits.* A new job means new responsibilities, but be honest with yourself about what's in your control and what's not.

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Become One of Tomorrow's Top Leaders

What qualities and responsibilities will define the most effective leaders of tomorrow? And what skills and knowledge should you attain to become one of those leaders?

- *Change management.* As markets and technologies shift and advance, organizations and strategies must continually change and adapt. The leaders of the future will need to be masters at managing change.
- *Deep familiarity with emerging markets.* Tomorrow's leaders will need to identify and seize the new possibilities created as emerging markets take center stage in the global economy.
- *The ability to inspire and motivate.* In a future marked by constant change, the

ability to inspire and motivate others to work together to achieve common goals will be critical. Without alignment, change initiatives stand little chance of success.

- *Lean management.* Leaders will need to operate in—and create—lean, flexible organizations that optimize efficiencies without sacrificing quality.

Managing Your Team

01

Become an Inspirational Leader

Leaders need vision, energy, authority, and a natural strategic ability. But those traits won't help you inspire your employees to be their best and commit to you as a leader. Here are the four qualities you need to capture the hearts, minds, and spirits of your people:

- *Humanness.* Nobody wants to work with a perfect leader. Build collaboration and solidarity by revealing your weaknesses.
- *Intuition.* To be most effective, you need to know what's going on without others spelling it out for you. Collect unspoken data from body language and the looks people share across rooms to help you intuit the underlying messages.

- *Tough empathy.* Care deeply about your employees, but accept nothing less than their very best.
- *Uniqueness.* Demonstrate that you are a singular leader by showing your unique qualities to those around you.

02

Become a Creative Leader

Yesterday's leadership skills will not work in today's fast-moving and evolving world. Only creative leaders who are visionary and empathetic will succeed. Here are five things you can do to succeed as a creative leader:

- Instead of commanding, coach your team and organization toward success.
- Don't manage people; facilitate them. Often, the know-how, experience, and solutions are there; help people to discover them.
- Cultivate respect by giving it, instead of demanding it.
- Know how to manage both success and failure, not just success.
- Be gracious. Be humble about your successes and, whenever possible, give someone else the opportunity to shine.

Lead Confidently

Confidence is a key ingredient in leading effectively. Unfortunately, sometimes it's easier to know your weaknesses than your strengths. Ask yourself these two questions to help find your self-confidence:

- *What do you do well?* Make a list of your strengths. These items are not the same as the accomplishments on your résumé; they are what made those accomplishments possible. How will your strengths lead you to future success?

- *Why should people follow you?* Look at situations where you mobilized yourself and your team to face a particularly tough challenge. Why did people believe in your ability to get things done and trust that you were the one to follow?

Master the Fundamentals

There are countless opinions on how to be an effective leader, but it's important not to forget the basics. Here are five rules for mastering the fundamentals of leadership:

- *Shape the future.* Articulate where your company or division is going and be sure everyone around you understands the direction.
- *Make things happen.* Once you know where you're headed, focus on how. Again, be sure all of your people know what executing will take.
- *Engage today's talent.* Make the most of your people; engage and inspire them to do their best.

- *Build tomorrow's talent.* Find and build the talent you need for future success.
- *Invest in yourself.* You can never be a perfect leader; find ways to continually build your skills and become better.

05

Keep It Simple

Every generation of leaders thinks it's facing a new set of challenges that require new models of leadership. But being an effective manager is not about mastering mysterious and complicated methods. It's about keeping it simple and following old, proven, and even obvious ideas. What made a good leader in the past is still what makes one today: being competent, caring, and benevolent. Before you discard this old model in exchange for the latest reinvention of management, take a close look at the new method. Often it's the same message in a new package.

06

Avoid the Tendencies of Bad Bosses

Being the boss is hard, especially when you need to counter the natural tendencies that separate you from the people you manage. Recognizing these tendencies can help you avoid them. Here are the top three to watch out for:

- *Self-delusion.* Not only do bosses have this tendency; the majority of people estimate their skills to be higher than they are in reality. Be aware that you might be self-aggrandizing and find ways to get input and evaluations that show you your true skills.

- *Heedlessness.* Those in positions of power are watched carefully by the people below them. But that level of attention is often not reciprocated. When you become the

head honcho, don't forget to remain curious about and engaged with your direct reports.

- *Insulation.* No one wants to deliver bad news to the boss, so the boss often doesn't know the full story. Create a culture in which the messenger isn't shot, but is lauded for bringing important information forward.

07

Don't Be a Martyr

The best bosses shelter their people from disruption and stress. But you shouldn't put your employees' happiness first all the time. Sacrificing yourself will only lead to burnout and resentment. This is especially true if you have weak or destructive people on your team. Whether you hired or inherited them, your job is to help them improve and, if they don't, to help them move on.

Be a Both/And Leader

In today's tough economy, should leaders be dogged, analytic, and organized or should they be empathic, charismatic, and communicative? The answer is simple: they need all those traits. Rather than categorizing yourself as a certain type of leader, explore the nuances that a complex, fast-moving business environment requires. Leaders need to confidently deliver tough messages with analytics as evidence, but they also need to be sensitive to how people receive those messages. Most leadership traits are not an either/or choice, but rather complementary sides of effective management.

Give Your People What They Need

Traditional leaders see the employee-boss relationship as a transaction: money in exchange for labor. Transformational leaders know and recognize that employees want much more than that. Here are the four things your people need to succeed:

- *Love.* This may sound touchy-feely, but love simply means concern that is focused exclusively for that person's good. Show your employees you care about them and their future.
- *Growth.* No one wants to stay exactly where they are forever. Create a culture that allows your people to grow and expand.
- *Contribution.* To feel fulfilled, employees must know that they are contributing to

the whole. Emphasize the ways that their work matters to the organization.

- *Meaning.* People seek meaning in their work. Share a vision that demonstrates how all of your employees are engaged in a larger purpose.
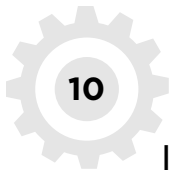
Improve Your Team's Performance

Managing your team's performance is a challenge no matter what the environment. Take the extra time and effort to help your team members succeed:

- *Offer perspective.* Relieve pressure by encouraging them to have fun and remind them work is not the only thing in their lives.
- *Make time.* Devote attention to all your team members, not just the stars. It's easy to focus on A+ performers, but success relies on everyone doing his or her job well.
- *Move on.* When something doesn't go as planned, acknowledge the setback and move on.
- *Focus on team success.* Celebrate what the team has accomplished together, rather than individual achievements.

11

Support Your People

Countless distractions, threats, and roadblocks prevent people from getting work done. Good bosses take pride in shielding their people from these annoyances. Here are three ways you can help your employees focus on what matters:

- *Show up on time.* One of the biggest detractors from work is wasted time, possibly time your people spend waiting for you to arrive for meetings or give needed direction. Being important doesn't give you permission to impede productivity.
- *Stop the intrusions.* Set aside time for your employees to think and work; don't expect them to respond immediately to voice mail and e-mails.
- *Let them have good fights.* Don't avoid conflict. Make your people feel safe enough to speak their minds, even to you, so they have productive and creative disagreements.

12

Bring Out Their Best

The brightest leaders don't rely on their own intelligence just to succeed, but use it to help their people shine as well. Here are three ways you can help your employees not only feel smarter, but act smarter:

- *Look for ideas everywhere.* Don't assume you know where all the new and creative ideas will come from. Involve people on projects not because of their titles but based on their ability to contribute.
- *Encourage openness.* Create a safe environment where your people know they can—and should—think, act, and speak with reason. Have a high tolerance for mistakes so people aren't afraid to take risks.
- *Challenge people to get better.* Offer opportunities for them to stretch their thinking and behavior. Set the expectation that everyone, including you, should improve his or her skills.

Pat Employees on the Back

An abundance of studies have demonstrated the power of touch on everything from rhesus monkeys to students in a classroom. A pat on the back or a brief touch on the shoulder can express support and reassurance, making the recipient more willing to take risks and improving his decision making. Next time you want to communicate support to a colleague, convey your intention through a small touch. Often times, contact can be more powerful than words. Use touch sparingly though, and don't linger. It only takes a brief moment of contact or a verbal "pat on the back."

14

Let Your Employees Fail

Good management is somewhere between controlling and ignoring; your job as a manager is to figure out the right balance. When you see an employee making a mistake, you may want to intervene. But people don't learn by being told how to do something right. Stop yourself from interfering. Let your employee make the mistake and then help her adjust to get it right the next time. Of course, you do need to assess the risks and the consequences of failure; if your employee is about to present a flawed report to the CEO, intervene. But when the risks are lower, be prepared to watch and endure more failure than you might be comfortable with.

Make a Mistake or Two

Very few people feel comfortable making mistakes at work. They fear that they will lose the respect of their managers and peers, and that they will tarnish their reputations. Yet mistakes are often the best teachers. Your people won't learn something new if they only do things they know well. Create a mistake-making culture. Encourage your people to take risks. Help them accept their gaffes and share what they've learned from them. Of course, there are times when blunders are too costly. But for those less mission-critical times, ask your people to approach problems not as experts but as learners.

16

Forgive but Don't Forget

Common wisdom holds that failure is inevitable, especially when innovating. If you want people to take risks and try new things, failure must be an option. But few organizations have actually created cultures that accept gaffes. To show your support for failure, encourage your people to make the most of their blunders. Try adopting a "forgive but don't forget" approach. Forgive honest mistakes, but make sure employees learn from past failures so they don't repeat them.

Have Your Employees' Backs

In tough times, people feel more vulnerable, and their senses of safety and confidence can easily evaporate. Never has it been more important to watch out for your employees. A boss who supports her people provides emotional and material relief. Don't assume that your employees know that you'd go above and beyond for them. Clearly tell them that you have their backs. And, since actions always speak louder than words, take every opportunity to demonstrate your unwavering support and avoid creating situations in which it seems everyone is for him- or herself.

18

Avoid the Unilateral-Thinking Trap

Your employees want to see you take action. But to make smart decisions, you need input. If you're like most managers, you probably seek input from people you know best. That can lead you to gather ideas only from those who share your viewpoints. Result? Unilateral thinking: everyone adopting the same point of view.

Unilateral thinking is good for cheerleading squads, but it'll get your unit into trouble. To avoid this trap, make certain your people feel free (and safe) to voice opinions and ideas contrary to the prevailing thought in your group. Go out of your way to seek alternate approaches to problems— from maverick thinkers and those you don't know as well.

Embrace Diversity Tension

Diversity is a strong asset for a company: differences of ideas, methods, and competencies are advantages for teamwork and problem solving. These differences, however, can also cause stress and strain. Don't try to minimize that tension. Instead, use it as a force for productivity and creativity. Prepare your employees to understand others without judging differences; create an inclusive environment where people feel valued for their skills; and emphasize the complementary skills that diversity brings. Finally, recognize and reward successes that result from diversity. By embracing the tension instead of trying to mitigate it, your team will be able to produce more imaginative and creative results.

20

Develop a Culture of Trust

Leadership should not be a solitary act. Leaders need to surround themselves with people who will challenge their ideas, point out their shortcomings, and tell it like it is. To be an effective manager, you need to ensure that honest opinions and information reach you. Get your people to bother you by bothering them. Open-door policies are well intentioned, but you need to go further. Develop a culture of trust and openness. Show your people that you reward candor and that the more they bother you, the better.

21

Resolve Conflicts

Working with teams can be a frustrating experience, especially when seemingly straightforward conflict devolves into personal or protracted disputes. Next time your team members start throwing proverbial punches, take these three steps to get them to stop fighting and start working:

- *Intervene early.* The sooner you step in, the better. A simple disagreement can turn into a serious conflict within seconds when emotions are running high.
- *Focus on team norms.* Refer back to something the parties can agree on or, hopefully, already have agreed on. Use team norms to guide behavior and help the parties identify common ground.
- *Create shared agreement.* To reach an accord, have the team members talk it

through. With all parties' cards on the table, facilitate an outcome that is amenable to all. Avoid a lowest-common-denominator solution. Instead, find one that integrates all parties' interests.

Motivate Employees Set in Their Ways

Employees who are slow to react can be frustrating, especially in environments where responding and adapting to change quickly is imperative. However, don't assume these slow pokes are trying to undermine progress or resist change. They may have very good reasons for their response times. Next time you're waiting for someone's input, go talk to him. Explain that you are all under pressure and that you value his response. Ask that he get back to you quickly—within a day or so. He may have a thoughtful rationale for proceeding cautiously, and when he realizes that the matter is in his hands, he may speed things up.

23

Drive Real Change

Getting people to change their behavior can feel like an impossible task. Even when the change is positive, people find it difficult to embrace something new. Here are three ways to approach change to make it more palatable:

- *Focus on joy, not fear.* Fear may seem like a powerful motivator, but it actually can make people freeze. Instead, focus on the positives of the new behavior and the joy people will derive from it.
- *Create the crowd.* Despite our professed love of individuality, people still want to fit in with the crowd. Have someone people respect model the new behavior.
- *Harness momentum.* One bank got customers to change their saving habits by rounding up their debit card purchases and putting the extra in a savings account. Make the new behavior easy to master by integrating it with something people already do.

Assess Behaviors, Not Just Results

When star employees churn out great results, you might be tempted to pat them on the back and ask them to keep doing whatever it is they're doing. However, your job as a manager is to understand the behaviors that drive those results and ensure they are in line with your company's values. Here are two ways to do that:

1. ***Give separate ratings for behavior and results.*** When you combine the two, you can easily give employees a pass for bad behavior when they're producing positive outcomes. Assessing them separately ensures that you can give fair behavior ratings without obscuring the business results.

2. ***Use 360-degree assessments.*** These are better at assessing behaviors and their impact on other employees. Use the findings to set behavioral goals that each employee can work toward, such as "treat my team with respect."

Give Better Feedback

Feedback is essential to your development as a professional. So why is it so painful to give and receive? Here are three tips to help you give constructive feedback that works:

1. *Focus on business outcomes.* Explain what the company needs—talent development, sales growth, improved service—and frame your feedback as a way to reach those outcomes.

2. *Give it often.* When feedback is reserved for semiannual reviews, people rarely receive it well. Give feedback regularly. You will be more practiced, and your people will be more accustomed to hearing it.

3. *Be specific.* Identify the specific behavior that a person needs to change. State clearly what you want her to do differently. Use illustrative examples that help the receiver understand exactly what you mean.

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Don't Just Communicate, Explain

Good communicators know they need to use energy and enthusiasm to persuade their audience. Great communicators know they also need to explain what all the excitement is about. Next time you need to share something important, be sure you convey enthusiasm, but also clearly explain what is at stake and answer the question, "What does it mean?" Lay out what the issue, initiative, or problem is—and be clear about what it isn't. Use metaphors only if they are helpful to your point and share details that support your claims. Then, define what you want people to do by establishing clear expectations. Don't lose or confuse your audience with too many details, though; save those for written communications.

Master the Art of Being Assertive

Overly assertive bosses can be seen as bullying and overbearing. But bosses who tend to hold back may be considered wimps. Good bosses find a balance between the two. This doesn't mean you should try to be assertive all the time. Instead, be prepared to use both approaches in different situations. Your team members may need you to challenge them to accomplish a particularly tough goal. Or you may need to be more passive to let them step up. Be flexible. Use your emotional intelligence to determine when being assertive will be motivating rather than stifling, and laying low will be appropriate rather than discouraging.

28

Create a
Mentoring Culture

Encouraging older and younger employees to share knowledge, ideas, and advice makes sense. But old-school, top-down programs in which mentors and protégés are assigned to each other don't work as well as relationships that come about organically.

Help mentors and protégés find each other by starting with specific work needs, when one person can contribute to another's project or goal. This establishes the initial relationship in a comfortable, useful way. Later, if the chemistry between the two proves strong, the relationship may evolve into a broader discussion of career goals and personal aspirations.

29

Empower Your Employees

Successful leaders empower their people to make decisions, share information, and take risks. Here are three ways to get out of your people's way and let them take ownership:

- *Give responsibility and autonomy.* Let those who demonstrate the capacity to handle responsibility take on new levels of accountability and have autonomy for their tasks and resources.
- *Focus on growth.* Create an environment where people have the opportunity to expand their skills and are rewarded for doing so.
- *Don't second-guess.* Unless absolutely necessary, don't doubt the decisions of others. This undermines their confidence and encourages them to hold back when they have ideas.

30

Focus Your People on What They're Best At

Most performance review systems set an ideal image of how an employee should act and then point out how each employee uniquely fails to meet that ideal. We call these failures "development areas" and encourage people to focus their energy on improving them. However, improving on weaknesses takes a tremendous amount of energy. Instead, focus your people on their strengths. Encourage them to do what they are uniquely good at. Most importantly, accept their weaknesses. If someone isn't good at spreadsheets, ask another person to do them instead. If you can't take away that part of his job, help him improve enough so it doesn't hinder his strengths.

Identify Hidden Talents

Finding external talent to fill your company's needs isn't always possible. Nor is it always necessary. By paying attention and asking the right questions, you will likely discover a myriad of hidden talents among your existing employees:

- *Turn a compliment into an interview.* When congratulating an employee on a job well done, ask exactly what helped her succeed. By better understanding her process, you may uncover an unseen strength.

- *Ask why employees prefer certain tasks or projects.* Preferences can be a view into someone's talents. An employee might enjoy a project because it involves a product she cares about or because it gave her a chance to design surveys. By learning which, you will possibly uncover talents.

- *Inquire about dreams.* Ask your employees what they would do if they had their career to do over again. Peoples' dreams often include an aspect of themselves they don't regularly share.

Use Action Learning

One of your most crucial jobs as a manager is to help develop your direct reports' leadership capabilities. Action learning can help. Through action learning, individuals work through actual business problems and apply lessons learned to new challenges. Here's how it works:

- *Assign* an employee a substantial, important project that is "in plan" and for which failure would have visible consequences.
- *Deliver* some feedback that's relevant to the employee and the context in which she will be learning.
- *Debrief* her on the experience of tackling the project, reviewing with her the results she achieved and how.
- *Articulate* the results' business implications.

- *Help* her transfer the lessons learned to future projects.

The more relevant the challenge and the higher the stakes, the more action learning stretches your employees and the more they learn.

Participate in Their Stories

Motivating employees to higher levels of performance is a challenge for most leaders. Often people are motivated to do things simply because it feeds into the story they tell themselves. For example, your star performer regularly exceeds your expectations because she tells herself that she is the kind of person who impresses others, or a team member triple-checks a document because he is the kind of person who doesn't make mistakes. You can fuel internal motivation by understanding and supporting these stories. First take notice of what kind of person your employee wants to be. Then articulate how what you need done fits into or even enhances that image.

34

Manage Your Smartest People

The people in your organization who have the largest capacity to add value are not necessarily those who have the best titles or the most impressive educations. Also, they may not be the easiest people to manage. Here are three do's and don'ts for leading the smartest people in the room:

- *Do* explain things and persuade them. ***Don't*** flex your power. Smart people don't take a leader's word at face value; they need to understand why you're asking them to do something.
- *Do* use your expertise. ***Don't*** use your hierarchy. Smart people aren't impressed with titles.
- *Do* tell them what to do. ***Don't*** tell them how to do it. Smart people enjoy figuring out how to do things and will almost always rise to the challenge.

Leverage Your Best People

Too often managers unintentionally hinder or discourage their star performers. This counterproductive behavior is not ill intended. Often the manager isn't sure how to motivate someone who is exceptionally talented. If you are lucky enough to have such high performers on your team, try these three things to make the most of them:

- *Push them to the next level.* Stretch and challenge stars. Find out what they are good at and what they need to learn, and craft assignments accordingly.
- *Let them shine.* Don't hide your stars. Give them visibility. Let others know what they are doing. When they look good, you do too.
- *Let them go.* Top performers need room to grow. If it makes sense for their development, let them move on.

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Give Feedback to High Performers

Don't assume your high performer knows how good she is. Instead, use these three tips to give her the feedback she wants and deserves:

- *Identify development areas.* There may only be a few, and you may need to work hard to identify and articulate them, but help your star understand what she can improve.
- *Show your appreciation.* Failing to say thank you is a simple and common mistake. Your stars need feedback and praise just as much as everyone else.
- *Give feedback often.* Don't wait for review time. High performers thrive off feedback, and your job is to give it frequently.

Give the Gift of Time and Space

For the past thirty years, the MacArthur Foundation has awarded "genius grants" to creative achievers to support their pursuit of new ideas. With virtually no restrictions on the money and no obligations required of the recipient, the awards are a vote of confidence in what the recipient is capable of achieving, given the luxury of time. Next time you want a talented employee to pursue a new idea, give out a genius grant of your own. It doesn't need to be money; you can give slack time so that your star has breathing room to explore her idea. Giving these awards not only will result in useful new ideas, but will signal to your people that you value creativity and are willing to invest time and resources in cultivating it.

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Don't Forget to Manage

The distinction between leading and managing is a subject of ongoing debate. Leading is often characterized as the more glamorous job: leaders guide, influence, and inspire their people, while managers implement ideas and get things done. But leaders who focus exclusively on coming up with big, vague ideas for others to implement can become disconnected from their team or organization. Avoid being a "big-picture only" leader. Make decisions and develop strategies that take into account the real-world constraints of cost and time. Stay involved with the details of implementation. Sure, it's easier to come up with ideas and tell others to make them so, but you also need to roll up your sleeves and understand what those ideas take to become reality.

Inspire Your Team

As a manager, one of your key responsibilities is to inspire your team members—to motivate them to give their best on the job, make difficult changes, and overcome major obstacles. Your communication skills can make or break your ability to provide inspiration.

To sharpen up, practice framing a call to action as a challenge; for example, "We can turn our struggling business unit around." This approach lets your people know that if they want a new and better team, they'll have to work for it. You'll lead the charge, but you need their support. As you present the challenge, communicate a sense of hope that will help your team push through the tough choices necessary to survive and succeed.

40

Engage Your Team

Team meetings are supposed to be collaborative events. If you are doing all the talking and your team members are doing all the listening, something's not right. Here are two ways to revive your team and get them to share their best thinking:

- *Share your ideas sparingly.* You may be tempted to share all of your genius ideas up front. Instead, share one or two suggestions at a time. By limiting your comments, you give others the chance to contribute.
- *Ask lots of questions.* Don't worry about having all of the answers. Ask insightful questions that spark discussion. When people speak up, ask them to clarify their ideas so others can understand.

Trust Your Team

Although skepticism has its merits, trust is crucial to team effectiveness. To cultivate trust among your team members, place your trust in them first. Show them you believe they are competent and capable. Value their contributions by trusting them with increasingly challenging tasks and give them the autonomy they need to shine. Leaders who "test" employees can do serious harm to the overall well-being of the team. Trust is a two-way street, and the sooner you start down your side, the sooner your employees will accelerate down theirs.

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Give the Right Directions

All too often people work really hard on a project without fully understanding how their efforts contribute to the organization's overall goals. Next time your team isn't sure where it's headed, take these three steps:

- *Don't assume everyone knows the strategy.* Don't make the mistake of presuming that just because executives have shared the strategy, your people understand it.
- *Confirm shared understanding.* Sketch out a "from-to" chart that shows where your organization is now and where it is headed. Share this with your boss and your team to be sure you are all on the same page.

- *Connect the dots.* With your team, create two lists: one of the major projects, and one of the organization's goals. Draw lines between the two lists. If there are projects that don't line up, consider refocusing or killing them.

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Take the Extreme Question Challenge

A leader, especially a smart one, might be tempted to provide her team with all of the answers. However, a smarter leader knows that allowing her team to contribute ideas is not only good for the team, but makes for better results. To counter your tendency to do all of the talking, pick a meeting or conversation and commit to leading it by asking questions. Start by presenting a query that will spark discussion. Ask clarifying questions to dig deeper and better understand the ideas. Then use questions to determine next steps. You might find it difficult to avoid chiming in with a statement or suggestion, but holding your tongue ensures that others will use theirs.

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Don't Cry Wolf

If you claim that every project or task is critical, your employees will soon ignore your sense of urgency and do things at their own pace (which is likely too slow for you). If everything is important or urgent, then nothing truly is. Use relativity to convey when a project is really critical to your organization or unit. Be selective about when you apply pressure or claim that something has high impact on your goals. The less often you raise alarm, the more likely your team is to respond how you want it to.

45
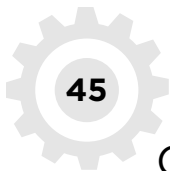
Get Rid of Negativity

Every organization, unit, or team has both good and bad. As a boss, is it your job to accentuate the positive or eliminate the negative? You should try to do both, but studies have shown that negative information, experiences, and people have a far deeper impact than positive ones. A better use of your time and energy is to focus on clearing your organization of the negatives as much as you can. This may mean tearing down frustrating obstacles or shielding people from destructive behavior. Grumpiness, laziness, and nastiness are contagious, and by reducing those types of negativity you give your people a better chance of success.

Battle Change Resistance

Any change effort is likely to face a few resisters. Unfortunately, even if these resisters are few and far between, they can quickly erode momentum and stop change in its tracks. Here are four tools to help you get people on board:

- *Cold hard facts.* Use evidence to show that change is necessary and possible. Get your facts from multiple sources and be diligent about details; even a small error can discredit your case for change.
- *Counterarguments.* Know what your opponents are saying, and be prepared to acknowledge their concerns and offer a compelling argument for your case.
- *Big picture.* In the short term, change is uncomfortable. Look at the big picture and

explain why the change is the right thing for the long term.

- *Repetition and pressure.* Stay on message, repeat your best arguments, and apply the necessary pressure to turn around the change-averse people.

Align Employee and Company Priorities

Lucky managers find that their employees' interests naturally align with company priorities. If you're not one of the lucky ones, here are three ways to line up what your employees care about with what your company needs to get done:

- *Know your employees' priorities.* Don't wait for review time. Regularly ask your employees what they personally care most about. As a manager, you need to know what drives them.
- *Communicate company priorities.* Tell employees what the company needs to achieve in the next week, month, and year. Be clear and consistent, and do this often.
- *Align interests to responsibilities.* Now that both agendas are clear, try as much as possible to channel employees' interests into relevant company priorities.

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Don't Assume People Won't Understand

Strategic decisions can be tough to make, especially in a time of limited resources, but communicating those decisions is often a tougher challenge. One of the most common communication mistakes leaders make is to assume their audience won't grasp the complex reasoning behind a decision. Instead of presuming people won't understand, find ways to explain the details, even to those who may not have the same organizational or financial sophistication as you. If your people don't understand, your job is to find a way to explain it to them. All employees deserve to know where the company is headed and the rationale behind key decisions. They will be happier and more productive when they are clued into and on board with the company strategy.

Refocus Your Team on the New Strategy

Most strategic change initiatives fail or at least hit some major bumps along the road. If your team is struggling to adapt to a new strategy, try these three steps to get them back on track:

- *Push decision making down.* If people are told to act differently, they feel like "doers" with little control or power. Let people make choices about how they will contribute to the new strategy.

- *Ask for input.* If your people are stuck, ask them to suggest ways to remove the barriers that are holding them back.

- *Share successes.* No one wants to change if he doesn't think the new strategy will succeed. Whenever you make progress, no matter how small, share it with your team as evidence that the new strategy works.

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Create a Simple Strategic Principle

Helping employees understand a strategy while simultaneously motivating them to achieve it is a dire challenge for many leaders. Creating and sticking to a pithy, memorable, action-oriented phrase can help. When designed and executed well, a strategic principle gives employees clear direction, while inspiring them to be flexible and take risks. A powerful strategic principle forces trade-offs among competing resources and provides a litmus test for decisions. When faced with a choice, an employee should be able to test her options against the strategic principle to make a decision that lines up with the company's objectives.

Managing Your Business

01

Assess Your Change Readiness

Leaders need to be on the lookout for what today's quickly changing business landscape means to them and their organizations. Here are three questions to help you face the challenge:

- *Do you see opportunities others don't?* Change breeds opportunity. Don't outcompete your rivals; reinvent the rules of the game by finding new opportunities first.
- *Can your customers live without you?* Customers' options constantly evolve. If your products and services aren't indispensable, customers are likely to move on.
- *Are you learning as fast as the world is changing?* As a leader, you can't afford to stop learning. Seek out ways to evolve and be humble enough to know you don't always have the answer.

02

Create Strategy with Stories

Too often the strategy-creation process produces options that aren't any more interesting or creative than the current strategy. If you find yourself agonizing over which of your carefully crafted strategic options is the right one, chances are you are taking the strategic planning process too seriously. Give up being right and sensible. Instead, tell a story about the future. Make it inspirational and envision your organization in a happy and successful place. Have everyone participating in the process tell his or her own story, and together you'll have created a list of options. Then start the real work of strategy creation: ask yourselves, for these stories to come true, what would have to happen?

03

Generate Your Next Breakthrough

Business leaders can learn a lot from the way that designers solve problems and create new innovations. Successful designers find new ideas in seemingly mundane places. Here are four steps to finding something original in the ordinary:

1. *Question.* Don't just ask the obvious questions. Look deeper, and don't be afraid to rethink basic fundamentals about your business and products.

2. *Care.* Caring doesn't just mean giving great customer service. Get to know your customers as intimately as possible. Immerse yourself in the lives of the people you are trying to serve.

3. *Connect.* Find ways to bring together concepts, people, and products. Many great breakthroughs are "mash-ups" of existing ideas.

4. *Commit.* Give form to your idea as quickly as possible: create a prototype and begin testing it right away. This is the only way to know if you've touched on something truly promising.

04

Kill More Good Ideas

To come up with a few good ideas, you need to generate a lot of bad ones. And to give your good ideas a chance of reaching their full potential, you need to do some serious pruning. But don't just get rid of the bad ideas; kill some good ones as well. Focusing on many ideas requires thinly spreading your resources. For your truly good ideas to make it to market, they need a concentrated focus and the resources to develop them fully. Make the tough choices and pull the plug on good ideas that aren't quite good enough.

Involve Front-Line Employees in Creating Strategy

Even brilliant strategies fail if front-line employees don't execute them well. Many leaders struggle to help their front line understand and buy into new ways of doing things. Next time you change your company's direction, don't relegate strategy creation to a handful of executives. Involve as many of your employees as possible, especially those who interact with your customers. Make them part of the process by bringing them together to think about the company's future. Ask them for input about how the company can achieve its goals. Front-line employees who help make a strategy are far more likely to do a stellar job of executing it.

Survive New Ventures

All new ventures are fragile. Even if revenues are growing (which they should be), chances are your company has't yet hit breakeven. To manage through this precarious time, be sure you know these three things:

- *How many days does your venture have to live?* Businesses fail because they run out of cash. Knowing exactly how many months or days you have to live can help you better manage costs and your funding strategy.
- *Why you are doing this?* Success requires hard work and constant attention. If you don't know exactly why you should make the effort, neither will your funders.
- *What are the top-two critical issues?* Be precise about which two issues deserve the highest priority. These may not be the most urgent, but they are the ones that your venture's success depends on.

07

Don't Get Distracted

In business, it's important to set goals—achieve a sales target, grow the company—and lay out the strategies you believe will get you there. A clear strategy that dictates the process for achieving goals can be comforting, but be careful not to let it distract you. Don't keep your head so focused on the process that you lose sight of the bigger picture. Look up every once in a while and remind yourself what you are trying to achieve. Markets change, customers change, and even your company changes; looking up ensures that you don't miss new and important opportunities.

Avoid Certain Types of Failure

Innovation experts have long argued that companies should be more tolerant of failure. But not all failure is created equally. Here are three types of failure that rarely contribute to learning and should be avoided whenever possible:

- *Knowingly doing the wrong thing.* When a project falls apart because someone hid information or misled others, any learning is moot. Failure is only acceptable when the project was done with good intentions.
- *Failing to gather the right data.* Often you can avoid failure by doing some simple research: asking target customers for input or testing an idea before launching it.

- *Prioritizing research over experience.*
  Some things are unknowable without real-life experiments. Don't waste resources on researching a theory when you can create a prototype or conduct an experiment that will give you a more realistic answer.

Don't Avoid Risk

Risk management departments are springing up in many companies. They categorize and analyze risk to the company before it happens, and in most cases, they create systems and processes to prevent risks. But the reality is that all hazards can't be predicted or avoided. Instead of simply staving off risk, focus on building resilience so that when the unthinkable happens, you're better prepared to face it. Look at all the risks you face and play out what you would do if any of them were to come to bear. Having systems in place to respond could save you valuable time, money, and resources.

10

Survive Like a
Small Business

For every small business that goes belly up, there are dozens more that are thriving. Here are three lessons for how you can operate like a small business to survive even the deepest of downturns:

- *Agility.* Small businesses have a great advantage in a fast-changing world: they adapt quickly. Without layers of bureaucracy slowing them down, they can react quickly to changing circumstances.
- *Rapid testing and refining.* Social media and online marketing tools allow even the smallest of businesses to do real-time market testing. They can also engage customers and build a community around their business.
- *Planning.* Plans are often outdated as soon as they come out of the printer. Small businesses tend to focus more on planning and less on plans. They watch their surroundings and act accordingly.

11

Prepare for a Crisis

You can't prevent all disasters. Companies often face unforeseen or unpredictable circumstances. However, leaders need to ensure their organizations are equipped to stop most crises before they happen. Prevention requires three things:

- *Pattern recognition.* Encourage your people to share information and make connections so that you can recognize when a problem is forming.
- *Broader communication.* Communication across silos is not easy, but it should be mandatory so that critical information reaches all parts of an organization.
- *Trusted leadership.* Leaders need to react quickly when a problem surfaces. Showing that you care about an issue is critical to gaining your employees' trust in your ability to handle problems.

12

Don't Shy Away from a Temporary Solution

When looking to make a change, reorganize a unit, or develop a new system, people often seek solutions that will last as long as possible. They want them to be sustainable. But nothing lasts forever. Finding a permanent solution may be infeasible and even foolhardy. Next time you need to make a big change, come up with a temporary solution—not a final one. Most approaches are useful for a certain length of time. When that time's over, you need a new way to attack the problem, which is likely to morph.

Fail Cheaply

Failures in the innovation process can be costly and time consuming. So why not reduce your failure rate to as close to zero as possible? It's a lofty goal and one that very few innovative companies have ever achieved. Plus, failure is important to innovation—how else do you learn? Rather than eliminating failure, focus on reducing the cost of failure by doing these three things:

- *Make your experiments cheaper.* Experiments need not be expensive. You don't need to recreate a concept exactly to test it. Find low-cost ways to test assumptions.
- *Change the order of experiments.* Test strategic assumptions before logistical ones. Confirm the market need before perfecting a product.

- *Make decisions faster.* Larger organizations often let bad ideas linger. Accelerate decision making when it comes to innovation and get rid of flawed projects before they cost you time and money.

Stretch Your Marketing Dollars

Companies need creativity and resourcefulness to stretch dollars when cutting budgets. Fortunately, doing more with less doesn't necessarily mean reaching fewer customers. Instead of reducing message frequency, consider shifting from TV to less expensive radio advertising. Create different versions of an ad for different markets or segments rather than separate commercials for each. Consider Internet advertising if you haven't before. Because the medium provides immediate feedback about what's working and what's not, now may be the right time to experiment with search or banner advertising.

15

Be Smarter
at Cost Cutting

Almost all companies have or will need to cut costs to survive in the current environment. Unfortunately, not all do cost cutting smartly. Consider these three pieces of advice before making cuts:

- *Put strategy first.* Cuts across the board rarely, if ever, lead to effective results. Laying out strategy first helps you decide where to cut and also helps employees accept the cuts as a step toward a goal.
- *Focus on good customers.* Rather than cutting valued services to valuable customers, "fire" high-maintenance customers who create unnecessary complexity. Focus on serving your more cost-effective customers who are happy with your products and services as they are.

- *Keep your business simple.* In a healthy economy, it's easy to overlook processes and activities that are redundant or overly involved. Simplifying them can save you money, with the added bonus of increasing both customer and employee satisfaction.

16

Put Constraints
on Innovation

Google has long been the envy of blue-sky think-ers and innovators who admire its world-class and nonbureaucratic approach to innovation. But even Google needs limits. The company has announced it would begin using formal processes to ensure that senior leaders give resources and attention to the right ideas. Don't assume that processes and constraints will inhibit innovation; they often accelerate it by focusing creativity and ensuring that funding finds projects with the highest returns. Create a process to structure and guide innovation. Just be sure that the process doesn't become a burden and squash innovative ideas with unnecessary bureaucracy.

17

Beware of "New and Improved"

Companies love to introduce "new and improved" products. Yet, often these new innovations are useful to the company but not to the customers it aims to serve. For example, a self-checkout lane may help a company reduce the number of cashiers it needs, but may be a hassle for customers who are baffled by the new machines. Before you roll out a new service, feature, or product under the new-and-improved claim, be sure to learn whether it is something customers want. Evaluate new innovations through the lens of the market, not just the lens of your organization.

18

Put the "I" Back
In Alliances

Strategic partnerships yield great benefits for those involved, but they are fragile entities. To ensure success, remember these eight I's when forging alliances with other organizations:

- *Individual excellence.* Both sides bring strengths, and neither can be expected to prop up the other.
- *Importance.* The relationship must matter strategically to both sides.
- *Interdependence.* You need to need each other.
- *Investment.* Have a stake in the partner's success.
- *Information.* Transparency strengthens the partnership; hiding information impedes trust.
- *Integration.* Create several points of contact across the organizations.

- *Institutionalization.* A formal structure can aid in objectivity and ensure the partnership works for both sides.
- *Integrity.* Trust is critical and ethics are a must.

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Build Strong Partnerships

Today's economy is forcing many organizations, both big and small, to consider acquisitions or mergers. Before fully integrating your organization with another, consider forging a strategic alliance that may give you and your partner lower costs, greater scale, or broader market scope without sacrificing independence. For smaller organizations, consider forming alliances to reduce costs of duplicative activities. Nonprofit organizations can partner to market to prospective donors. Regardless of the reasons, proceed cautiously, as alliances can be difficult to build and even more complex to maintain.

Think Like a Small Business

Big companies used to win out over small ones because of their experience, impressive client lists, and seeming permanence. We trusted big business because it was big, but the economic crisis has changed that. Small companies are now winning the confidence and the business of customers. No matter the size of your company, restore customer trust by doing what small companies do well:

- *Be available.* Customers of small companies don't need to holler "agent" into a phone to talk to a real person. Make it easy for customers to find you; react quickly to requests and demands.
- *Keep your promises.* Always follow through on what you say you're going to do.

- *Grow and sustain.* Consumer confidence is shaken, and customers want to know that businesses are going to be around no matter what the economic situation. Assure customers you are acting in a financially responsible and sustainable way.

Innovate with Less

Even large corporations need to innovate as start-ups do when resources and time become scarce. Here are four tips for innovating in a tough economy:

- *Forget the big budget.* Innovation doesn't have to cost a lot. Rely on open-source software, online market research tools, and virtual prototypes to test ideas cheaply.
- *Test in the real market.* Don't waste time endlessly perfecting ideas before you launch. Get a "good enough" design out there, then test and refine in the market.
- *Skip the business plan.* Focus on making the idea happen, not planning every detail.
- *Make decisions and move on.* Tough times require quick decision making. Don't be afraid to wind down ideas when they start to fail. You'll free up scarce resources for the next good idea.

Stop Ignoring Growth Opportunities

Chances are that someone inside your organization has a great idea for how to grow your company. Chances are that leadership is ignoring that idea. Kodak long ignored an engineer's idea for a "filmless camera" (aka a digital camera) because it was in the business of selling film. The largest growth opportunities are often the market-changing ideas that represent not only growth but a threat to your business as well. Figure out what those threats are before someone else does. Ask your people: what could put us out of business? In the answer to that question may be your biggest source of innovation.

23

Answer These Strategy Questions Simultaneously

The two essential strategic questions are: Where should a company play? How can it win there? Answering these requires analysis and logic, but most importantly, creative integration. Many good strategists focus on only one of those questions, trying diligently to figure out how to globalize or deliver a new product. A master strategist addresses both questions simultaneously and ensures the answers fit together. Don't rely on a single logic or analysis, but creatively integrate your company's choices about what market to play in and how to win there. The integration is what sets superb strategies apart from those that go nowhere.

24

Make Small Bets

How can you help your company become an innovation powerhouse? Don't put all of your resources into big bets on possible new offerings or business processes. Instead, conduct many small, inexpensive experiments in safe venues, such as quick pilot projects to test out ideas for a new product or way of serving customers. Use these small experiments to see what's working and not working. Then iterate and refine to produce a successful final innovation.

Amazon did this by conducting experiments—Kindle, Amazon stores, and elastic cloud computing—to identify and capitalize on unique growth opportunities beyond the company's core book business.

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Spur Innovation

New challenges require new ways of doing things; this means not only a new approach but a refusal to be bound by the rules that applied in the past. Here are three ways to spur innovation to address your next challenge:

- *Look outside.* When faced with the need to innovate, most companies turn to their inside talent. Instead, reach across corporate boundaries to your extended network.
- *Mobilize passionate individuals.* There are people who are likely passionate about your product, idea, or area of focus. Find those people and connect them so they can share ideas and mobilize one another to innovate.
- *Embrace new technology.* Look to younger generations of employees to see what technologies they are using. Support and embrace these technologies, as they may be the source of your next innovation.

26

Take Baby Steps

Every innovator hopes for and works toward breakthrough innovations. But in tough economic times, innovation often requires too much risk for an organization and its change-resistant customers. Instead of dreaming of "the next big thing," focus on innovating in smaller, shorter bursts. Look for improvements to current products and services. Use small and cheap experiments to test new ideas. Seek out innovations that consumers can easily adapt and don't require huge investments. These innovations are more likely to be palatable to your stakeholders and customers, and they're often the building blocks for larger, longer-term breakthroughs.

Don't Put Out the Fire

Forest fires are an essential part of a healthy eco-system. They rid the forest of old underbrush that otherwise could serve as fuel for an even larger fire. Recessions are the economy's forest fires; while painful, they seem to be necessary. Rather than compensating for dips in the economy, pre-pare for them as opportunities to rid your com-pany of excess and develop your organization's resilience. When the fire is out, discover the room you now have for new things to grow—new ideas, new strategies, and new opportunities.

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Create a Social Platform

More and more companies are introducing social networking tools to help employees connect. However, these should not be considered "work versions" of Facebook or Twitter. These platforms are intended to support your work, not give you a place to post pictures of your poodle. Here are three ways to make good use of these tools to advance your work:

- *Narrate your work.* Talk about your current projects: where you are, what you're struggling with, and what you're producing. This will help others who may be doing similar work find you.
- *Ask questions.* Often, collective wisdom is out there. If you're stuck, ask the crowd to help you out.

- *Talk about social activities.* If your company's softball team won last night's game, post it. Socializing is an important part of work, and these tools are perfect for supporting it. You may want to dedicate a specific part of the platform to socializing, however, so people can avoid it if they want to.

29

Establish Your Relevance

Many companies' forays into social media yield nothing more than wasted time and effort. Before you establish a company Twitter account or start a Facebook page, step back and think about what messages will be relevant to your customers or potential customers. If your brand and your communications aren't useful or interesting to them, you might as well be tweeting into a black hole. Start by understanding the conversations about your brand that are already happening. Then craft messages accordingly. Before sending anything out, ask yourself: What value does this message carry for our customers? What action are we hoping to inspire? If you don't have a sharp answer to these questions, it's time to return to the drawing board.

Invest Wisely in Social Media

Invest up front to grow your social ecosystem and regularly feed it new ideas, insights, and content. Whether an internal wiki, a Twitter account, or a blog, all social media initiatives require careful monitoring and management to capture value. Social media that aren't well tended risk lack of adoption and participation, and become anything but social.

31

Tell Your Story

What's your company's story? What makes it unique, and how does it positively affect people's lives? If your company is not getting its story out to customers in a consistent, thorough way, it's losing out on a chance to distinguish itself from rivals. And in today's dire economy, that can be fatal.

Use the latest technology to spread the word. If your company serves businesses, make sure your marketing message can be consumed via Black-Berry. If it serves consumers, be certain to put an application in the Apple App Store. Creating consistent and coordinated touch points will broadcast your company's story most effectively—and engage your customers.

Define Your Purpose

Great companies have a single purpose that drives them toward success. That purpose is simple, straightforward, and can be stated in one sentence. For example, Google's is, "We organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." ING Direct's is, "We lead Americans back to savings." Your stated purpose should not be a tagline but a single idea that defines your company's reason for existing. Discover what your company is best at and put it into a sentence. Don't settle for being middle of the road, but strive to be the most responsive, most colorful, or most focused. Then, make sure that everyone in your company knows that sentence and uses it to be successful.

33

Find Your Company's Inner Self

Sometimes the economy forces companies to take a hard look at what they do. Some will need to reinvent themselves to survive. Here are three tips for finding your company's inner self and developing a plan for recovery:

- *Find your company's purpose.* Don't focus too much on spreadsheets and data. Figure out what your company stands for. Most great and adaptable companies have a purpose that is larger than their products.

- *Don't (necessarily) mess with the business model.* Struggling companies often try to revamp their business models. If your customers still have a need for the business you're in, you may only have to recommit

to your business model rather than reinvent it.

- *Focus on quality growth.* Companies that grow for the sake of growth rarely survive a downturn. Growth should be driven by quality, not quantity.

Don't Control the Customer Experience

Whether or not you're aware of it, every interaction your company has with its customers contributes to their larger experience with your organization. Perhaps your company knows this and carefully and thoughtfully crafts each experience in hopes of influencing opinions. But, despite calculated efforts, customers will not always perceive your company as you wish. People don't behave or react exactly how you expect they will, but don't give up because of this unpredictability. Accept it as part of the challenge and frequently monitor what customers are experiencing. By getting their input and feedback, or better yet, observing them in real time, you can adjust efforts accordingly. Perfect control is not necessary to influence their opinions. Continue to aim for the ideal and modify as needed.

35

Externalize Your Focus

Organizations that are too inwardly focused often miss important happenings and opportunities in the market. Use these three ways to get your people to look outward for customer insights, competitor moves, and market changes:

- *Listen to customer-facing employees.* Front-line employees are your ear to the pavement. Value them, ask them what they hear from customers, and if necessary, train them to listen for the right information.
- *Get people out.* Send executives on sales calls. Ask directors to train as customer service reps. People calling the shots should meet customers face to face.

- *Share data, both good and bad.* Some executives protect their employees from troublesome market or customer data. While well intentioned, this hinders your organization's responsiveness. If there is bad news, deliver it with a well-articulated plan.

Help Boost Your Company's Online Sales

Disappointed by your company's online sales? You're not alone. The problem isn't that Web consumers are cheap or disloyal. It's that most companies aren't exploiting what online shoppers really want: engagement.

You can engage your firm's Web site visitors by giving them information on products and services related to your core offerings and brand. Porsche, for instance, uses the Web to offer adventure tours and travel information, reinforcing its image of passion and high performance.

Learn what customers are interested in by offering them a list of topics and asking them to

vote on their favorites. Use their responses to decide which attributes (wealth, attractiveness, exclusivity) you want customers to associate with your company's brand. Then provide supplementary information that helps them make those associations.

Energize Your Online Customers

Competing for your customers' attention online can be tough, especially when you're up against dancing banner ads and all of the daily e-mails customers get. Here are three tips to cut through the clutter and capture your customers' attention in this crowded space:

- *Create a sense of urgency.* Send out a coupon that needs to be used by midnight or offer a free product to the first fifty respondents.
- *Energize your customers to tell their friends.* Word of mouth is incredibly powerful and valuable, especially on the Internet. Give your customers something exciting that they'll want to share with their friends.
- *Make it fun.* Whatever the interaction is, keep it simple, fresh, and engaging.

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Look for Customer Motivation

While knowing how your customers break down into measurable categories is helpful, typical demographics don't tell you much, if anything, about how your customers behave. To truly understand their motivations and ultimately why they do or don't buy your products, ask customers about their purchase experiences. With the purchase as the "end goal," what steps do your customers take to achieve that goal? What is their thought process as they take each step? What obstacles are in their way?

Understanding their answers will help you create and market products that your customers—not their demographic category—truly want.

Use Customer Passions to Grow Sales

Have you ever loved a product or service so much that you couldn't wait to tell everyone you know about it? All over the Web, people's passion for products has led them to share their love via YouTube videos, blog posts, and Facebook groups. These "natural" spokespeople have created valuable buzz and initiated sales growth—all for free. Find your most devout customers and encourage them to talk about your products in their online forums. Ask them to rave on their blogs or create Facebook groups in support of your product. Thoroughly search the Web to see if natural spokespeople are already singing your product's praises. If so, harness that passion for free.

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Improve Customer Service

Advances in technology and pressure to cut costs have changed the customer service experience. Companies now push far more function and responsibility to the consumer. Here are three ways to support and involve your customers in this new paradigm:

- *Be transparent.* Show your customers your company's internal systems so they feel part of the experience, not separated from it. For example, consider how shipping companies now allow customers to schedule pickups, print labels, and track packages on their own.

- *Convert or capitalize on tribes.* There are groups of people who are going to blog, tweet, and find other ways to praise or complain about your products. Find your

company's tribe and make it an ally in delivering a positive message.

- *Open the door to new talent.* Some of your customers may be so enthusiastic about your product that they can sell it better than you can. Find ways to discover who these customers are and capitalize on their talents and passions.

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Create a Seamless Process

For companies that care about the customer experience (and who doesn't?), integration is a must. Choreograph all your customer touch points so customers have a seamless experience, whether they walk in your store, reach your call center, or use your Web site. Be sure the systems and processes that support this coordination are in sync. Often, companies have channel-specific silos that are culturally and logistically at odds. Create incentives that encourage your people to coordinate across those channels. Look out for those who are barriers to a harmonized customer experience. If they can't learn to coordinate, it may be time for them to make room for their integration-minded colleagues.

Move Beyond Demographics

Traditional demographic information, such as gender and age, is only so useful when getting to know your customers. Psychographic information reveals far more about customers' preferences and purchasing habits. If you understand how your customers interact with the world and what they value most, you are far more likely to be able to give them what they want. Ask them questions geared at their personalities and preferences. Use association-based questions, such as, "If you were a car, what kind of car would you be?" The answers will help you better profile your customers so you understand which products they want and how to market them.

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Appeal to Their Emotions

The recession created unprecedented consumer anxiety. Consumers don't trust companies to stay around or to do the right thing. This means you need to tap into your customers' emotional sides. First, understand what makes them anxious. That anxiety may be distrust of your product or concern over their family and community. Then, craft a simple, emotional message that directly addresses that anxiety. For example, at a time when many consumers feel financially unstable, one insurance company created a Web site explaining that because it is owned by its policyholders, it's more likely to keep its promises.

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Win Their Hearts

Customers are far more likely to purchase a product or service if they feel valued by the person selling it. Underappreciated customers will look elsewhere to make their purchase. Reach out to your customers and make sure they know how important they are to you. Give them the opportunity to meet as many of your staff as possible, all the way up to the CEO. Thank them for their business and ask them to tell you about their company. When you create an emotional connection with them, they are more open to hearing what you have to offer and much more inclined to purchase. The connection needs to be genuine, however; your overtures shouldn't be phony or insincere.

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Speak Effectively

Successfully communicating with customers is the foundation for all sales. Here are two tactics that will increase the likelihood your customers hear what you have to say:

- *Understand their language.* Too many companies use a one-size-fits-all sales pitch. The reality is that your customers speak a unique language informed by their life experiences. Tailor your approach and your language for each customer.
- *Focus on them, not you.* When trying to make a sale, you might be tempted to talk about "my company, my product's benefits, my product's features." Instead, turn the spotlight on your customers. Talk about their problems, their values, and their purchasing plans.

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Use Words, Not Numbers

When it comes to customer data, many believe that multiple-choice surveys across large samples that can be statistically analyzed yield the most rigorous research. This type of analysis, however, only gives you a shallow understanding of your customers. To get more nuanced information, use qualitative methods to discover what your customers think about your products and services. Qualitative techniques, such as focus groups or open-ended questionnaires, let you delve deeper into the relationship between your firm and those who buy or use your products. They also allow your customers to express their opinions using their own words, not yours.

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Handle Customer Complaints

All organizations depend on customer feedback to make their businesses better and increase customer satisfaction. Yet customer complaints take up an inordinate amount of time and money, and the complainer doesn't often get what he wants. Here are three tips for expediting the complaint process and keeping customers happy:

- *Understand the full context.* Try to understand as much as you can about the complaint. The more information you have, the easier it is to determine the root of the dissatisfaction.

- *Propose a resolution.* Know what would make the situation better for your customer and propose ways you can solve the problem.

- *Show respect.* Complaining customers are often upset. Train employees receiving complaints to be empathetic and to reframe the harsh criticism they may receive into constructive feedback.

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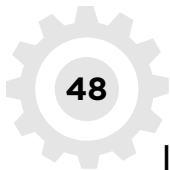
Involve Customers in Product Creation

The best way to get your customers excited by your product or service is to involve them in creating it. Instead of offering them what you think they need, ask them to help you design what they want. If you are a consultant, design the project *with* your clients, not for them. Leverage their deep knowledge about the company culture and personality. If you are in the business of selling products, hold an online contest to bring customer design ideas to the table. Customers who have a stake in the development process are far more likely to feel pride of ownership and be happy with the end product.

Develop Services Your Customers Want

Creating services that captivate consumers and generate profits is tough—thanks to the abundance of offerings, vendors, and channels. (Consider the options available for someone who wants to see a movie.)

To stand above the crowd, don't start with technology. You'll risk creating services that are too far ahead of customers' priorities, too cumbersome for people to use, or too expensive to produce profitably.

Instead, begin with customers' needs—both those they're aware of and those they don't know they have. To uncover these needs, host interactive online forums with sophisticated users who can

illuminate what other users may want to do in the coming years. Analyze leading-edge consumer activities in international markets. Take time to research product investments being made in industries related to your service offering.

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Simplify

Today's consumers reward simplicity. They want direct connection and streamlined design. Find unnecessary complexity in your organization: Is it in your product offerings, your processes, your services, or all of the above? Do you offer too many product variations? (GM has forty-seven brands of cars.) Or do you have costly functions that need to be better integrated? (Seagate Technology had the highest R&D costs in the industry after accumulating and not integrating acquisitions.) Find ways to cut the clutter in your business. Serve your customers how they want to be served—simply.

Attributions

Management Tips was adapted from the following blog posts and products. Search for them on hbr.org:

Managing Yourself

1. "3 Steps Toward Being a Better Leader in 2009" by Stew Friedman
2. "Choose the Fantasy World You Live In" by Peter Bregman
3. "Top Ten Ways to Find Joy at Work" by Rosabeth Moss Kanter
4. "A Freelancer's Recipe for Professional Development" by Steven DeMaio
5. "Never Let Your Ego Stop You from Learning" by John Baldoni
6. "The Power of Preventive Assessment" by Stew Friedman
7. "Five Questions Every Mentor Must Ask" by Anthony Tjan
8. "Do You Have an Excessive Need to Be Yourself?" by Marshall Goldsmith

24. "Why You Need to Fail" by Peter Bregman
25. *What's Next, Gen X?: Keeping Up, Moving Ahead, and Getting the Career You Want* by Tammy Erickson
26. "Are You the Bottleneck in Your Organization?" by Brett Martin and Thanos Papadimitriou
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About the Book

Management Tips 2 is a compilation of the Management Tip of the Day by *Harvard Business Review*. Adapted from digital articles and other content, these tips offer quick and practical advice on how to manage yourself and your team. Please turn to the list of attributions at the back of the book for more information on the sources from which these tips were adapted, and visit hbr.org for more tips and content.

Managing Yourself

Know and Live by Your Personal Philosophy

Worrying about what other people think of us can be paralyzing. We stop taking chances and play it safe. Our careers suffer. To fight these anxieties, develop a personal philosophy that articulates your sense of who you are. What values drive your actions? Who has qualities that align with yours, and what are they? What makes you feel that you're performing at your best? How do you want to live your life? Write down your answers and look for what they have in common. Use the words that stand out to come up with your personal philosophy. Then commit to living by it. When something at work starts to lower your confidence, let your philosophy remind you of why you do what you do. Shut out others' opinions and focus on the things that really matter.

02

Lead Confidently When You Aren't Feeling Confident

When faced with a tough challenge, you may feel uncertain and even afraid. But it's hard to inspire your team if they sense that you're intimidated. You can project confidence by doing four things. First, demonstrate empathy for your team members. They want to know that you aren't out of touch with their feelings. Second, communicate your vision for the team and that tough challenge. People need to have a clear sense of where they are headed. Third, set a direction. Show the team how you'll reach the vision together. Last, give people proof so they have a reason to buy in to what you're telling them. Offer evidence for your direction and optimism. Be specific, be personal, and reference the work that the team is already doing to build their confidence and your own.

Improve Your Critical Thinking

To make good decisions, think critically. Too many leaders accept the first solution proposed or don't evaluate a topic from all sides. To guard against these mistakes, you can hone your critical thinking skills. First, question your assumptions, especially when the stakes are high. If you're coming up with a new business strategy, for example, ask: Why is this the best way forward? What does the research say about our expectations for the future of the market? Second, poke at the logic. When evaluating arguments, consider if the evidence builds up to a sound conclusion. Is the logic supported by data at each point? Third, seek fresh perspectives. Relying on your inner circle to help you think through these questions won't be productive if they all look and think like you. Ask other people to question and challenge your logic.

Focus on "Microhabits"

High achievers often have lofty aspirations for self-improvement. But big goals such as "meditate for an hour every day" or "read more" are often more burdensome than sustainable. So, start small by focusing on "microhabits," more achievable behaviors that you build over a long time. These habits should be ridiculously small, like meditating for thirty seconds or reading a paragraph each night. Piggyback on a daily task. Perform your new action at the same time as (or right before) something you already do every day. Read that one paragraph while brushing your teeth. Meditate while waiting for your coffee to brew. Then, track your progress, but keep it simple. Try using a "yes list" where you write down the desired action, and under each date, simply note a Y or N to indicate if you completed the task. Once you've

accrued several weeks of Ys, you can increase your microhabit by a small increment, say 10 percent. Continue these incremental adjustments until the new habit is part of your muscle memory. By starting small, you can achieve big results.

05

Don't Let
Perfectionism
Get in Your Way

Perfectionism can push you to excellence, but it can also increase your anxiety and lower your productivity. Learn when to let go and move on. Create a checklist of a task's essentials. If you're working on a client pitch, for example, make sure the presentation addresses the client's major concerns and details why the client should hire your company. Your inner perfectionist might fret over the font choice and every semicolon, but once your checklist is complete, slowly back away. Or ask a trusted colleague to help you get perspective. Do you need someone to tell you when your first draft is good enough or when you should stop nitpicking? High standards are great, but they shouldn't keep you from getting your work done.

Don't Feel Guilty about Being Behind

When you have a never-ending to-do list, it's easy to feel guilty about what you haven't finished. But guilt is useful only when it motivates you to get more done—it shouldn't make you feel ashamed. To ease these kinds of emotions when they arise, exercise self-compassion. Imagine what you'd say to a friend who felt bad for being behind on a few projects. Chances are you'd tell your friend not to worry about it so much, so tell yourself the same thing. You can also make yourself feel better by focusing on what you *have* been able to accomplish. Keep a "done list" in addition to your to-do list, so you can remind yourself of past work. Remember that all that work you have to do will be there tomorrow, whether you feel guilty about it or not. So, cut yourself some slack, take a breath, and just do your best.

07

Clean Up Your Desk

If your workspace is a mess, you might be too. Research shows clutter adds to our stress and anxiety levels, detracts from our ability to focus, and makes us seem less conscientious and agreeable. Make a habit of tidying your workspace. Block off a few minutes on your calendar every week to sort through your piles of stuff. When it comes to managing digital clutter, ask IT for tools to organize online documents and advice on which items you can discard. For your home workspace, set up a designated area so that you have a boundary between work items and home items. (Research has also found that messy environments can encourage creativity; you just don't want your desk to get too chaotic.)

It's OK to Feel Uncomfortable When Learning

Being a beginner at something can feel awkward and embarrassing, especially if you're used to being an expert. But those feelings are inescapable growth pains that come from developing and improving. To get used to the discomfort, know that it's brave to be a beginner. Exposing your weaknesses and trying new things takes courage. Make the challenge a bit easier by looking for learning situations with low stakes—maybe a class where you're not expected to be an expert or you don't know anyone else. If it helps, tell fellow participants that you may mess up whatever you're about to attempt. Your willingness to take risks may inspire others to do the same. Don't stop learning. Keep pushing yourself, especially in the

areas where you are accomplished, so you can get even better. If you are willing to feel embarrassment and shame, and even to fail, there's no end to what you can do.

Weave Learning into Your Everyday Work

We all need to keep learning new things to grow in our careers. But sometimes the urgency of our schedules gets in the way. To find time for learning, make it a part of your day-to-day tasks. Pick up skills from those around you. Notice how your boss handles a negotiation; ask salespeople about industry trends; get feedback from your peers after you give a presentation. At times, something may pique your interest, but you're too busy to explore it. Try creating a "to-learn" list: write down concepts, ideas, and practices that you want to return to later. And create a learning channel for your team, whether it's through Slack, SharePoint, or somewhere else, where you add links to valuable resources.

10

Move Past Your Mistakes

When you make a mistake at work, do you replay it in your head for days or even weeks? This overthinking is called rumination and can lead to serious anxiety. To break out of the cycle, identify your rumination triggers. Do certain types of people, projects, or decisions make you second-guess yourself? Notice when (and why) a situation is causing you to start overthinking. Distance yourself from negative thoughts by labeling them as *thoughts* or *feelings*. Instead of saying "I'm inadequate," say "I'm *feeling* like I'm inadequate." These labels help you distinguish what you're experiencing from who you are as a person and an employee. Distract yourself. When your brain won't stop spinning, do any simple activity you can focus on for a few minutes, like taking a walk or meditating.

Don't Take Small Annoyances at Work Personally

Sometimes the smallest action, or inaction, can have a big effect on how we feel about our colleagues. Imagine that you emailed a coworker days ago and they haven't replied. You might think the person is being rude, but they may just be under a tight deadline and feel bad about the delay. When you encounter situations, consider their broader context before jumping to conclusions. When a colleague's behavior is affecting you negatively, ask yourself if they could be focused on an important project for the boss. Is something in their personal life distracting them? How would the situation look to an outside observer? Is anything amiss or just seem that way because you're caught up in it? Assume the best about people—and try not to take things personally.

12

How to Handle Tough Feedback

When feedback is unexpectedly harsh, your first instinct may be to run and hide. Four steps can help you react productively:

1. *Collect yourself.* Breathe deeply and notice how you're feeling. Silently labeling your emotions ("I'm feeling hurt and ashamed") can help you distance yourself.

2. *Understand.* Ask the other person for detailed examples of the behavior highlighted. Listen calmly, as if the conversation is about someone else.

3. *Recover.* Tell the person that you need to reflect and will respond when you can. Don't agree or disagree right away with what you've heard. Take some time to process and evaluate it.

4. *Engage.* Think about the validity of the feedback. Even tough criticism usually has a kernel of truth, so look for it. Then, share your thoughts with the person again.

13

Study Positive Feedback

Because critical feedback is jarring and threatening, it tends to stick in our brains. But positive feedback is invaluable for learning about your strengths and growth areas. Save the praise you get, anything from thank-you cards to written notes in your evaluations to comments in email threads. When you get mixed feedback, tease apart the positive and negative aspects, and put the positive ones in your kudos folder as well. Periodically review and reflect on what you've saved. What patterns or themes can you identify? How could you use your strengths in new situations? What else can you learn about your strengths, and who might provide that perspective? You may feel immodest or uncomfortable basking in positive feedback. But someone has gone out of their way to highlight what you're good at, so use it.

Create Space for Honesty

One way to get feedback that will help you improve is to build a culture where it's safe for employees to be honest. Show colleagues that you want to know what they think, especially when they might hesitate to tell you. Ask open-ended questions and listen carefully to the answers: "What did you hear when I shared my strategy?" or "How did it feel to you when I sent that email?" Tell your team that you want both positive and negative comments, and then resist the urge to respond to what they say; even if you disagree, simply listen and reflect. Thank your team for their honesty and use their feedback to make necessary changes.

15

Where Are You in Your Career? Where Do You Want to Go?

If you're not always clear how you should think about growing in your career, try writing a "from/to" statement that articulates where you are today and where you want to go. For example: "I want to progress *from* an individual contributor who adds value through technical expertise and closely follows others' directions, *to* a people leader who creates a clear strategy and delivers results through a small team." To write a from/to, ask trusted superiors and colleagues for their candid view of your current role and goals. Ask them to be brutally honest, because their transparency will help you figure out how you need to grow. Reflect on their answers and incorporate them into your from/to

statement and then have your advisers read it to provide a reality check. Sometimes people think they're far ahead of where they are or choose an unrealistic destination.

16

Build Your Career While You Wait for Your Dream Job

When you're starting your career, should you hold out for your dream job or take anything you can get? The answer is "a little of each." There is value to be had from almost any role, so while you search for that ideal match, pay the bills with jobs that give you one (or more) of three things: experience, credibility, or income. You'll need the right skills and background to land your dream job, so in the meantime, look for roles that will let you build relevant experience. And consider jobs at companies with great reputations, even if the job in question isn't your exact goal. Having a top company on your résumé will make you stand out both now and in the future. Of course, sometimes you just need a paycheck. When all else fails, do what it takes to duct-tape an income together.

Get Mid-Career Help from a Mentor

Why do people get trapped in a mid-career rut? In some cases, after succeeding early on, they play it safe rather than taking the risks that would help them advance. As a result, they feel stuck in the status quo. If this situation sounds familiar, don't just hope things will change—get help. Find a trustworthy mentor who has navigated the same challenges. During your meetings together, discuss the tough work situations you're facing, and ask about their experiences and how they push themselves to keep growing. You could also find an executive coach to meet with regularly. A good coach will help you understand what's holding you back and explore options for your future. And do some reflecting on your own, too. Think about whether you still get satisfaction from your job, whether you're playing it safe, and where you want your career to go next.

18

Plan Your Retirement

If you want to continue working in some capacity after you retire, you'll have to plan. Ask yourself four questions:

- *How much money do I need to earn?* If a certain income is mandatory, this criterion has to come first and will influence your other decisions.
- *How much location independence do I want?* If you have visions of balancing some work with a lot of travel, or if you'd like to spend winters in sunny climes, think carefully about how to cultivate a location-independent second act, such as a seasonal or internet-enabled job.
- *How much change am I seeking?* If you'd simply like to downshift in your current career, ask your manager about transition-

ing into a consultant role. A bolder change
will require additional groundwork.

- *How can I start test-driving my future
  career now?* Experiment with some small
  side projects while you have the security of
  your regular income.

19

Say No to Office Housework

No one likes to do "office housework"—low-importance tasks such as ordering lunch and taking notes in meetings. But research shows that certain groups of people, including women and people of color, are more likely to be assigned this kind of work, and that taking it on can hurt their careers. When faced with office housework, what should you do? First, have a prepared answer about how your time would be better spent: "I was hired to do X, and this new task would take away time from completing X well." For on-the-spot requests like ordering lunch, you might say, "I really need to be present during that meeting, as it's critical to what I'm working on." When you say no to housework, offer to do something of higher value instead. And if you can't say no, make sure that people are aware of the extra work you're doing and that you at least get credit for it.

Find Meaning in Tasks You Dislike

Think about an activity that you don't always enjoy doing—delivering performance reviews, for example. Now ask yourself why you do it but ask four times. The first time you ask "Why do I do this?" you might answer, "Because I have to" or "I want to let my people know where they stand." Then ask a second time: "Why do I want to let my people know where they stand?" The answer here might not be inspiring: "Because it's part of my job." But the answer might also start to sound more meaningful: "So that people can know how they can reach their career goals." Then ask a third time: "Why do I care if people know how to reach their career goals?" Continue for one more iteration. By the fourth round, you're likely to uncover a meaningful reason behind the activity—and a motivation for doing it well.

21

Schedule Breaks

The volume of information and stimuli coming at us every day makes it more difficult to focus than ever. To do the careful thinking that decision making and leadership require, you must step back from the noise of the world. Schedule fifteen-minute breaks at least once or twice a day to sit quietly in your office or take a walk. Commit to these breaks as you would any meeting or appointment; if you don't schedule moments of quiet, something else will fill the time. Use the time to think about your to-do list, especially the tasks you should stop doing. Solitude gives you the space to reflect on where your time is best spent. Try to get clarity on which meetings you should stop attending, which committees you should step down from, and which invitations you should politely decline.

Take Care of Your Body and Mind

Moving into a leadership position for the first time can be one of the most stressful moments in your career. To weather the transition, start by shifting your mindset. Focus on what excites you about the switch, not on what scares you. This will help you relax into your role and mitigate self-doubt. Practicing mindfulness techniques, such as meditation and controlled breathing, will develop your ability to stay calm and poised in challenging situations, such as running a contentious meeting or making a high-stakes decision. Lastly, you won't succeed unless you take time to care for your overall health. You may be strapped for time, but don't put off going to your annual medical checkup or finding a therapist if you've been struggling mentally. Sound sleep, regular exercise, good nutrition, and mental health are especially important when taking on a new role.

23

Stop Constantly Checking Your Phone

Focusing can be hard with all that beeping from your phone. There are simple ways to reduce distractions. Turn off push notifications. If that doesn't help, use airplane mode to limit interruptions when you're trying to focus. If being out of touch gives you anxiety, make exceptions for specific numbers, such as those of loved ones or important business colleagues. Check email, instant messages, social media, and text messages in batches, rather than sporadically throughout the day. Quickly checking anything, even for one-tenth of a second, can add up to major productivity losses; it can take an average of twenty-three minutes to get back in the zone after switching tasks. It's OK to not respond immediately. In

addition to giving you more uninterrupted focus time, delaying can lead to better decision making by giving you more time to think about your response.

24

Practice Your Negotiation Skills

Whether you're seeking more money, higher status, increased visibility, additional resources, or more time off, you likely won't get it if you don't ask your boss for it. Make your request a win-win by using phrases that imply joint success, such as "How can we both do well?" Then respond with "what ifs." For example, if your boss says that you need more experience before you can advance, you might reply with an exact strategy: "What if I take the lead on our communications strategy with the sales team?" Even if you get an initial no, you can still leave the negotiation with a small win that may put you on the path to an eventual yes.

Break Out of a Creative Rut

Creativity can fade when you get bored or discouraged at work. To get your creative juices flowing again, change your habits. Try something new every month. Meet new people at work. Talk to new clients. Look for intersections—places where your department's work overlaps with another. Volunteer for a cross-functional activity. And seek obstacles as opportunities for research and analysis. (Why is it there? Whom does it serve? What are its effects? What are other ways of getting the results you're looking for?) Start by selecting obstacles you can change and continue on from there. Find ways to share what you know with others—write an article, lead a training session, or mentor a young upstart.

Make a Tough Decision Easier to Accept

When you're faced with a tough call, consider two things that make these decisions so difficult: *uncertainty* about the outcome and *value complexity*, the notion that any choice you make will negatively affect someone. To reduce the uncertainty in a decision, first consider the costs of not acting, and then think carefully about your options. Have you made any assumptions that are holding you back? Are there low-risk, small-scale ways to test your options? To handle value complexity, consider how you can help people understand your decision once you make it. Especially when the decision involves trade-offs that will affect others, you'll want to be as clear as possible about your intentions.

Block Off Your Schedule

You can't do deep, creative work when meetings constantly disrupt your flow and hurt your productivity. To have time and space to focus, establish one day a week when nothing can interrupt you—no texts, no emails, no phone calls, and absolutely no meetings. Block this day off on your calendar and tell colleagues that you'll be unreachable because you're working on critical projects. Something urgent may come up anyway but try to keep the day from being compromised. Stick to a simple rule: you can move your unreachable day around—maybe it's Wednesday one week and Thursday the next—but you can't remove it from your calendar or push it to the following week. As you get into the routine of taking days for focused work, it'll be easier for you, and the people around you, to keep them sacred.

28

Feel in Control to Avoid Burnout

There are many reasons people feel burned out at work—an overstuffed to-do list, tasks that seem meaningless, a lack of connection with others. One of the largest contributors to burnout is feeling that you lack control. If you don't have autonomy in your job or a say in the decisions that affect your professional life, it can take a toll on your well-being. When you find yourself feeling not in control, step back and ask why. Does your boss contact you at all hours, so you're always on call? Are the team's priorities constantly shifting, so you can never get ahead? Once you know the reasons, figure out what you can do to address them. Maybe you could establish better boundaries with your boss or get the team to agree that certain priorities will remain constant. Having control in even a few areas can help you avoid burnout later on.

Create Project Deadlines

How do you motivate yourself when a project doesn't have a deadline? Try making one up. Pick a date that you want the work done by or set aside some time for it each day or week. Create accountability by enlisting positive peer pressure. Tell a colleague what your deadline is (even if you picked it) and send them updates regularly. For additional motivation, incentivize yourself. For example, after spending a morning on the project, you might treat yourself to lunch. Or work from your favorite coffee shop, as long as you finish the project's next step. If those incentives aren't powerful enough, try penalties. Decide that if you don't complete the task as planned, you won't be able to listen to your favorite podcast or watch your favorite TV show tonight.

30

Don't Let Your To-Do List Distract You from Leading

If you're struggling to balance your individual work and the work of leading your team, reset your priorities. Seek out leaders who find that balance and ask how they do it. You can also ask them for feedback on your efforts. Use the feedback to think about ways you can give employees what they need, whether it's holding regular career development conversations, pausing to acknowledge a colleague's efforts, or closing your laptop to focus in one-on-one meetings. Over the next few weeks, notice when you feel a task or deadline pulling your attention away from a direct report. Remind yourself to focus on the people you're leading. You'll be able to get back to your to-do list soon enough.

Be More Efficient

Small changes to your work style could end up saving you hours each week. For instance, before eagerly jumping into a new project, talk to stakeholders about their expectations so that you know what to prioritize. Maybe they want a detailed project plan, but maybe a rough outline would get the job done, too. It's also helpful to ask yourself if you could reuse any past work to complete the project at hand. Say you're preparing a presentation to senior leaders. Can you pull language from the proposal it's based on or draw on other materials to flesh it out? Last, use "timeboxing" to organize your efforts. Decide in advance how long you will spend on each task and stick to it. Even if you don't finish everything in the allotted time, timeboxing will help you focus for short bursts of productivity.

32

Use Habits to Stay Grounded

When your life is disrupted by a big life event—a job change, a baby, a relative's illness—how do you maintain your focus and well-being? Add some stability to an unstable time by making sure your habits align with your long-term goals. Think about the five to ten things you need to do every week to keep your life on track and list them. Many critical habits fall into one of four areas: personal reflection, professional reflection, relationships, and health (both physical and mental). You should also think about how you'll create accountability for yourself. Will you post the list where you'll see it often? Use an app to set reminders? Check in with a friend each week? Creating and reinforcing habits this way can assure you that you're doing what you need to— no matter how many things you're juggling.

Set Goals That You Actually Want to Accomplish

You're unlikely to make progress on your professional development goals if they feel like a chore. Instead of focusing on things you "should" do, choose one or two areas of focus that align with what really matters to you. Ask yourself:

- If I could accomplish just one major professional development goal this year, what would it be?
- When I think about this goal, do I get excited about the prospect of working on it as well as achieving it?
- Do I want to achieve this goal because it's interesting and important or because I think it would please other people?

Use the answers to come up with a short list of goals that truly match your personal ambitions.

34

Stay Focused

Constant access to data is killing our productivity. We begin the day by picking up our phones and getting lost in a stream of notifications and information. You can do three things to carve out more time and remain focused and effective at work:

- *Start your day right.* When you wake up, don't start checking email on your phone. Try a simple mindfulness practice: take a few deep breaths, make a mental list of the things you're grateful for, or meditate for twenty to thirty minutes.
- *Organize your day.* Use your body's natural rhythms. Focus on complex, creative tasks in the morning. Push meetings to the afternoon.
- *Tidy up.* A clean work environment leads to a less cluttered mind. Put everything in a drawer. Create folders on your computer

desktop to get rid of all the random files. On your phone, keep only the eight to twelve most important apps on your home screen. Turn off all unnecessary notifications.

35

Try This If You're Constantly Overwhelmed

It's no surprise that many of us feel overwhelmed a lot of the time. If your to-do list never seems to get shorter, step back and try a new approach. Consider whether certain tasks are stressing you out more than others. If so, focus on those first: finish a big project as soon as possible or break down a complicated goal into more manageable steps. You should also consider whether perfectionist tendencies are getting in your way. Think about what "good enough" looks like, and be honest about whether spending more time on something will meaningfully improve it. (If not, take a breath and move on.) Finally, ask yourself which to-dos are truly a good use of your time—and then delegate those that aren't. Thinking about how you're using your time can help you use it more wisely.

Protect Your Nonwork Time

Some jobs have very clear lines between when you're "on" and when you're "off." But when you work in a role where the lines are blurred—or potentially nonexistent—it's important to protect your nonwork time. If you feel like work is taking over most of your waking hours, start by clearly defining what "after hours" means for you. Take into account the number of hours you're expected to work each week, as well as personal commitments like attending an exercise class you really enjoy. When do you need to start and stop to put in the appropriate amount of work time? Then, develop mental clarity about what needs to get done and when you will do it. Keep track of your tasks and plan them out. Make sure you block off time for an end-of-workday wrap-up, where you review and make sure you did everything you needed to do for the day. Last, communicate with

your colleagues about how (or if) you want to be contacted during your off hours. Really guard your time. If you don't, you won't get the mental break that everyone needs.

Treat the Weekend Like a Vacation

When Monday morning arrives, do you feel relaxed? Or are you still stressed out from the previous week? Research shows that one way to make your weekends more refreshing is to think of them as a short vacation. Simply enjoy yourself: sleep in, do less housework, eat a bit more than you normally would. And find ways to make common tasks more fun, whether turning on upbeat music in the car while running errands or making yourself a margarita for folding laundry. Slow down: pay attention to your surroundings, your activity, and the people involved. Keeping your mind on whatever's happening will help you savor it, which in turn will help you feel as if you're breaking out of the day-to-day grind. But save these vacation weekends for when you really need them—research shows they lose their effects if they happen too often.

38

Make Time for
Your Hobbies

When we don't make time for our hobbies, our professional lives pay a price. Why? First, hobbies awaken our creativity. It's hard to come up with new ideas at work when our brains are filled with targets and deadlines. A creative hobby pulls you out of that by giving you a blank canvas and mental space to make connections. Second, hobbies provide a fresh perspective. Part of coming up with ideas is imagining how people (say, customers) will react to them. If you write, paint, or make music, you're probably used to thinking about how a reader or listener will experience your work. Bring that mentality to your job, too. Last, hobbies bolster confidence. When a tough project has you feeling discouraged, taking an hour for a hobby can boost your confidence and mood. Use that boost to tackle the project with fresh resolve.

Be an Attentive Mentor

How can you make sure your schedule full of meetings and obligations doesn't hinder your ability to be an attentive mentor? First, appreciate that some time is better than none. If sixty-minute meetings aren't possible, try to set aside thirty or even fifteen minutes. These smaller windows will force your mentee (and you) to get to the point. Be fully present and engaged during mentoring sessions. Whether you are meeting in person, over Skype, or by text, demonstrate to your mentee that for the next few minutes, they are all that matters. If you get distracted by other tasks or your next meeting, refocus and remind yourself to be here, now.

40

Improve Your Emotional Intelligence

It's not always obvious how to improve your emotional intelligence skills, especially because we often don't know how others perceive us. To figure out where you can improve, start with a reality check: What are the major differences between how you see yourself and how others see you? You can get this kind of feedback from a 360-degree assessment, a coach, or a skilled manager. Next, consider your goals. Do you want to eventually take on a leadership position? Be a better team member? Consider how your ambitions match up with the skills that others think you need to improve. Then identify specific actions that you'll take to improve those skills. Working on becoming a better listener? You might decide that when you're talking with someone, you won't reply

until you've taken the time to pause and check that you understand what they said. Whatever skill you decide to improve, use every opportunity to practice it, no matter how small.

41

Don't Overuse
Your Strengths

Most leaders have strengths that make them distinctive. But those same characteristics, when overused, can have a downside. For example, a well-honed sense of self-control can turn into rigidity. Courage, taken to the extreme, might become recklessness. Honesty, if not tempered, can turn into cruelty. Take some time to think about which of your skills you might be relying on too much. For example, consider one of your strengths that has served you well at work and that others have admired. Then try to recall a situation in which you relied on that quality more than you should have. Are there occasions when your strength became a liability, causing more harm than good and perhaps even leading to an unintended outcome? Keep in mind that we

tend to overuse our strengths under stress. When we're not getting what we want, our instinct is to double down on whatever has worked best in the past.

42

Know Which Skills Can Take You to a New Career

One of the hardest parts of switching careers is knowing which of your skills you can apply in a new way. Many industries may value your talents as much as your current one does. Here's how to identify your transplantable core skills:

- *Tap other reinventors.* Consult with people who have already transitioned from your industry to a different career. Discuss what core skills you might be overlooking and how they could apply elsewhere.

- *Confer with outsiders.* Talk with a wide range of folks outside your industry. Ask them about your core skills. How you should market them? What less-obvious functions or organizations are looking

for such skills? What are the obstacles to landing such work?

- *Create a strategic message.* Distill your goals and skills into a simple statement to guide you. For example: "Communicate clearly, execute fast, think creatively, and act with courage."

43

Build Your Personal Brand

Developing a reputation as an expert can lead to promotions and new assignments and also open up other professional opportunities. You don't have to be a worldwide expert right away. You can coach others on writing better business memos even if you aren't Shakespeare. Be clear about what you do—and don't—know. Being honest that you have some knowledge and are acquiring more will lead others to respect you. And make sure your company understands the value of your public brand. Particularly if your expertise isn't part of your core responsibilities, show your manager how your more visible profile can help the company. Strategically expand what you're known for. Emphasize your full range of talents so that your new expertise doesn't pigeonhole you.

Stop Underpricing Your Freelance Work

Overpricing your work can scare clients away. But charging low prices can signal low quality, making clients hesitate to work with you. To ensure you aren't underselling yourself, ask trusted peers to provide honest information about going rates. Once you know what your price should be, practice saying it out loud. Quoting a fee to a client can be nerve-racking, especially a rate increase but rehearsing it will make you more confident. Then test the market demand for your new rate and adjust accordingly. Increase your price steadily and incrementally until you feel you're earning what you deserve. If you ask for a rate that clients resist, consider freezing or reducing your rate until you've built up other income streams or increased your reputation. Asking for what you deserve gets you not only more money but also more respect.

45

On Social Media, Be Polite and Get to the Point

Social media is an effective tool for expanding your network but reaching out to people you don't know can be awkward. You'll have a better chance of success if you prioritize people who are close to your level in their careers. This network will grow in seniority with you and can connect you with opportunities down the line—and peers are more likely to respond than someone in the C-suite anyway. Make sure your initial message is brief and personal; approach it as you would a handwritten note. Think of the three points you want to convey, and let your natural voice come through. If you and the person have something in common, like a shared interest or mutual friend, mention it. It's also a good idea to be direct (and

polite) about what you're looking for. If you're seeking advice, for example, you can say, "I'm struggling with a business problem and would love to find out what you think."

46

Don't Let a
Long Job Search
Get You Down

Start by acknowledging that there will be ups and downs. Remind yourself that long waits, and the emotions they cause, are normal. Activities like mindful meditation and journaling can help you experience and sort through your feelings in a positive way. You may also want to enlist the help of a coach, therapist, or work group for support. If you're unemployed, be sure to do activities that energize you, such as exercising or having lunch with a friend. And don't take delays personally. If a contact hasn't made the introduction that they promised, send a friendly reminder, but also think about their other priorities. Chances are, the person wants to help you—they're just busy.

If You Mess Up a Job Interview, Fix Your Mistake

Job interviews are stressful. Even when you've done a ton of preparation and practiced your answers, the pressure might cause you to say the wrong thing, respond to a question incompletely, or leave out a critical piece of information. You can't ask for a do-over, but you can try to correct your mistake. If you're still in the interview, you might politely say: "I just realized that I haven't mentioned . . ." or "I don't think I fully answered your question. I'd like to add . . ." If you realize your mistake or omission after the interview, you can send a thank-you email that says, "I want to add to [or clarify, or revise] what I said about X . . ." Then you don't have to worry about your flub. You can know that you did your best—and that it's now up to the hiring manager.

48

Stay Focused in a New Job

Your first few months in a job have a major impact on whether you succeed. Many people have trouble deciding where to focus their energy early on, so use three questions to guide you.

- *How will I create value?* Know what is expected of you, by when, and how your progress is assessed. Consider the interests of all stakeholders (not just your boss), and keep in mind that the answer may shift over time.

- *Whose support is critical?* The company has a political landscape—learn to navigate it. Learn who has power and influence, and then build alliances with them. If you can help them accomplish their goals, they may return the favor.

- *What skills do I need?* The abilities that got you the job may not be the same ones you need now. The sooner you understand what you should acquire and develop, the better.

49

Show How a New Job Title Will Benefit the Company

If you've been in your job for a few years, you've probably seen your responsibilities expand. But if your job title hasn't changed, talk to your boss. Before you ask for a title change, ask yourself, "What would help my manager say yes?" Think carefully about why you deserve a new title—maybe you just sealed a big new deal for the company, or you executed an important project—and how it will help you be more effective in your job. Will it give you more credibility with your colleagues? Help you build rapport with clients? Grant you more authority to make decisions? Consider what your supervisor cares and worries about most and use that to build your case. Your boss is more likely to agree when the change benefits you *and* the company.

Take Charge of Your New Role after a Promotion

Moving up in an organization usually means greater rewards, more responsibilities, and higher stakes. But transitioning into a bigger role can be challenging. Typically, the more senior the role, the less structured the onboarding process, which can feel disorienting. The key is to take responsibility for it yourself. You can ask for help or accept support, but you should get up to speed as independently as possible. Start by answering these questions:

- What do I need to do in the first week? The first thirty days? The first quarter?
- Who do I need to meet, and what's the best way to connect with them?

- What don't I know—and what will I be expected to know?
- If I find myself struggling, how will I ask for help or guidance?

Be Your Own Advocate

A good boss can guide your career, but they can also leave you floundering if they won't support you. If you're struggling to get the help you need to move up, take your career into your own hands. Developing a group of mentors is a good way to start. Put together a team of people to support you, both inside and outside your organization. Think broadly across levels and functions. Look for people whose careers are further along than yours and whose style or achievements you admire. You should also find ways to make yourself visible to important stakeholders in the company—your boss's boss, for example. Volunteer to work on cross-functional projects that senior leaders will have their eye on. And keep in mind that building your status outside the organization often gains

you visibility inside it. You might decide to join an industry association and work toward a leadership position there, for example, or use social media to engage with top thinkers in your field.

Ask for a Raise at the Right Time

Most people make their pitch for a raise at review time, when their bosses are often overwhelmed with the pressure of completing evaluations. Instead, time your request to coincide with changes in your own tasks. You should ask for a raise just before you take on new responsibilities or right after you successfully complete a project. If you've just created more value for your company, it's a great time to say, "Can we share that value?" If you've collected evidence about your contributions and have a reasonable target figure in mind, you're more likely to get what you want. Just make sure to look forward, not backward. You want to highlight your contributions, but then you should pivot to what you hope to tackle next. If your boss doesn't seem receptive, suggest revisiting the issue in a few months and then get that on their calendar.

53

Prepare for Tough Conversations

Difficult conversations are never fun, but preparing for them can help you ensure they're productive. Start by identifying your motives. What do you want out of the conversation—for you, the other person, and any stakeholders involved? Knowing your goals is a good way to keep the meeting on track if emotions rise. Next, gather facts to support your position. If you're about to ask for a raise, for example, write down notes on how you've grown in your role. If you're going to give someone tough feedback, bring examples of their work and behavior. Be ready to defend your point of view and explain how you came to it. And think through any stories you're telling yourself about the other person. Do you see your boss as "the enemy"

because she can grant or deny your raise request? Consider what your manager will care about in the conversation and use that to plan how you'll address their concerns.

54

Stay Calm during a Tough Conversation

Having a tense conversation brings up a lot of negative emotions, leaving you feeling like an active volcano. To prevent an outburst and stay in control of your emotions, physically ground yourself in your environment. One of the best ways to do this is to stand up and walk around, which activates the thinking part of your brain. If you and your counterpart are seated at a table, and suddenly standing up seems awkward, you might say, "I feel like I need to stretch. Mind if I walk around a bit?" If that doesn't feel comfortable, you can do small physical things like crossing two fingers or placing your feet firmly on the floor and noticing what it feels like. Mindfulness experts call these actions "anchoring." Whatever you can do to focus on your physical presence and your senses will help you stay grounded and get through that tough conversation.

Rehearse Your Presentations

Before a critical presentation, the best thing you can do is rehearse—a lot. You don't need to memorize every line (which will make you sound *too* rehearsed). Your goal should be to speak confidently while leaving room for spontaneity. Spend extra time on the beginning and end of your talk, including your first and last slides. The introduction sets the stage for your message and gives your audience a reason to care. Your conclusion determines which ideas people will walk away with. If you nail these two sections of the talk, you'll probably do well. You should also repeatedly practice any sections that have complex or technical content. While you rehearse, record yourself on your phone; play it back to watch for distracting habits (fidgeting, avoiding eye contact) and areas where you seem unsure. Rehearse those sections a few more times.

56

Give a Persuasive Presentation

When you need to sell an idea at work or in a presentation, how do you do it? Five rhetorical devices can help. Aristotle identified them two thousand years ago, and masters of persuasion still use them:

- *Ethos.* Start your talk by establishing your credibility and character. Show your audience that you are committed to the welfare of others, and you will gain their trust.
- *Logos.* Use data, evidence, and facts to support your pitch.
- *Pathos.* People are moved to action by how a speaker makes them feel. Wrap your big idea in a story that will elicit an emotional reaction.
- *Metaphor.* Comparing your idea to something familiar to your audience clarifies

your argument by making the abstract concrete.

- *Brevity.* Explain your idea in as few words as possible. People have a limited attention span, so talk about your strongest points first.

57

Connect with Your Audience Remotely

Good presenters know how to connect with their audience, which is really challenging in a virtual setting. To start, you have to adopt an engaged, active persona. Make eye contact with your participants by looking directly into the camera as often as possible. This can be hard to remember, especially if you have to look elsewhere on your screen to see the participants. To make it easier, set up your screen so that the window with your audience is close to the camera. This way you can simultaneously make eye contact with them and see their response. Pay attention to the angle of the camera so your face is at a comfortable level for others to see you. Remember to show a warm, engaging smile; laugh occasionally; and maintain a friendly, engaging tone. In informal meetings, you might create a connection by turning the

camera on your dog laying by your feet. In more formal settings, you can start the meeting with a personal story or ask people to talk about where they're calling from to create a sense of warmth and connection.

58
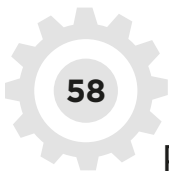
Run a Good Meeting by Getting the Basics Right

Plenty of meetings are a waste of time. They're unfocused, badly run, and way too long. But improving your meetings isn't rocket science—work on getting the basics right. When planning a meeting, know why you are scheduling it in the first place. Having a specific goal in mind will help you create a useful agenda. Next, decide who truly needs to be there, considering the key decision makers, influencers, and stakeholders. If certain people should be in the loop but don't need to attend, you can ask for their input beforehand and update them afterward. Open the meeting by clearly laying out its purpose and focusing people on the task at hand. As the facilitator, your role is to get attendees to feel committed to the outcome.

When the meeting is over, take a few minutes to reflect. Did everyone participate? Were people distracted? What worked well, and what didn't? Use your reflections (ask others for their thoughts, too) to keep improving for next time.

59

Speak Up in Meetings

Speaking up in a meeting can increase your visibility at work, but isn't natural for everyone. If you struggle to offer your thoughts on the spot, you can prepare a few comments or questions so that you know you'll have something to say. Also think about your reasons for wanting to speak up in the first place. Ask yourself why you care about the meeting's topic and use the answer as inspiration when crafting your comments and questions. During the meeting, when your turn comes, pause and breathe. This can strengthen your voice, helping you to speak with clarity and authority. But, saying something just to talk isn't always a great idea. If you're speaking up to show off or to offer a comment that would be better expressed one-on-one with someone, it may be better to say nothing.

60

Surround Yourself with People Who Push You to Grow

When planning our careers, we carefully choose our companies and jobs. But rarely are we deliberate about selecting advisers and confidantes to help us succeed. Cultivate a support group for your career by considering who inspires you, whether colleagues, senior leaders, or peers in your field. Seek out these individuals and be candid about why you admire them and want to connect. Focus on building a relationship that will benefit both of you. As you get to know each other, don't be afraid to explore big life questions: What do you want to do with your life? What motivates you? What are you doing that you really don't like to do? Work together to become better versions of yourselves.

Managing Your Team

Adapt Your Leadership Style to the Situation

Different work situations call for different leadership styles, and most managers use one of two approaches: dominance or prestige. When you lead through dominance, you influence others by being assertive and leveraging your power and formal authority. This approach works best when your job is to get everyone aligned and moving in the same direction. When there is a clear strategy for a new product launch, for example, and the challenge is in getting your team to enact that vision, dominance is an effective way to create a unified front. Prestige, in contrast, means influencing others by displaying signs of wisdom and expertise and being a role model. This approach works best when you're trying to empower the people who report to you. If a marketing team

is charged with creating an innovative advertising campaign, for example, a prestigious leader can release the constraints on team members and encourage them to think outside the box.

02

Build Your Emotional Courage

Start by thinking of a leadership skill you want to get better at: giving feedback, listening, being direct—whatever you want to grow in. Then practice that skill in a low-risk situation. For example, let's say you want to get better at being direct. The next time there's a mistake on your phone bill, call customer service and practice being succinct and clear. Notice how you *want* to react— Get angry? Backpedal?—and focus on resisting those impulses. These are the same feelings you'll encounter in higher-risk situations at work, so learn to push through them. Continue to practice until you feel comfortable and can respond the way you'd like to.

03

You Don't Have to Be Isolated

If you're a senior executive, there's a good chance you're out of touch. Having a layer of handlers who decide what you should or shouldn't see may save you time, but it also keeps you isolated and disconnected. This is a serious problem. If you don't have firsthand information about your employees and customers, you're unlikely to make the best decisions. So get out of your bubble. Do a stint on the front line—answering customer service calls or handling a key client—so you get direct exposure to lower-level employees and the people who buy your products. Consider instituting skip-level meetings, where you can talk with lower-level teams (without their bosses present) about business conditions and customer reactions, and how to implement strategies. In all settings, encourage people to challenge your thinking instead of just saying what you want to hear.

Don't Let Your Ideas Overpower Your Team's

Your job as a leader is to create a safe space where your team can share ideas without fear of judgment. But knowing how to give input without squashing others' suggestions can be tough. Should you jump in with your own ideas during brainstorming sessions, or step back and be a coach? The key is to find the right balance. Deadlines and performance targets can increase the pressure to impose your own opinions, but doing so will increase your team's self-doubt and perpetuate the perception of the all-knowing leader. So take off your leader hat and convincingly tell your team not to treat your ideas any differently than

their own. If you notice that your contributions mute their participation, return to coaching. Your team won't be creative if they are waiting for you to tell them what to do.

05
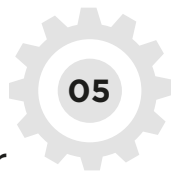
Prime Your Team for Creative Thinking

Innovative thinking is fueled when a wide range of talents, skills, and traits come together. If you want to enhance the creative potential of your team, develop the diversity of their skills. Here are a few ways to get started:

- *Build expertise.* Send your team to professional conferences, or arrange training sessions to help them gain new skills.
- *Take field trips.* Arrange a site visit to a customer or even to a competitor. Or observe best practices in an unfamiliar industry. For example, an airline hoping to improve customer service might visit a clothing retailer known for its excellence in that area.
- *Host creative events.* Bring in outside speakers to give talks or workshops.

- *Seek additional resources.* Gather your team to watch and discuss a TED talk, or form an ad hoc reading club to discuss books and articles of interest.

How to Manage Your Most Creative Employees

Some bosses wonder how to manage creative people. Research suggests that they may in fact have a different type of personality. But that doesn't mean you need to manage them in a completely different way; a lot of the same rules apply. Focus on making sure there's a good fit between their creative tendencies and their role, so you can tap into the full range of their talents. Surround them with detail-oriented project managers who will handle the implementation of their ideas. Don't worry if their approach to work is nothing like yours, as long as they're meeting deadlines. Prove that your company truly values creativity by rewarding people who come up with innovations. And apply the right amount of pressure to projects; too little will lead to a lack of motivation, and

too much will create stress that inhibits creativity. Organizations that provide their most talented people with personalized development plans and mentoring opportunities, and that promote a culture of support and inclusion, will benefit from increased creative performance.

Don't Hide Your Weaknesses

You might be tempted to want colleagues to see you only at your best, but that's a bad way to lead. For one thing, it's unsustainable. We're all human, and we all make mistakes. Sooner or later, you will, too. For another, leading is about connecting. People will follow you, work hard for you, and sacrifice for you if they feel connected to you. And they won't feel that way if you only let them see what you think will impress them. So don't be afraid to own up to the areas where you aren't perfect. If it helps, think of it this way: you aren't weak; you have weaknesses. There is a difference.

08

Follow These Rules from the Best Bosses

Amazing bosses try to make work meaningful and enjoyable for employees. They're most successful when they adhere to a few best practices:

- *Manage individuals, not just teams.* When you're under pressure, you can forget that employees have varying interests, abilities, goals, and styles of learning. But it's important to understand what makes each person tick so that you can customize your interactions with them.
- *Go big on meaning.* Inspire people with a vision, set challenging goals, and articulate a clear purpose. Don't rely on incentives like bonuses, stock options, or raises.
- *Focus on feedback.* Use regular (at least weekly) one-on-one conversations for coaching. Make the feedback clear, honest, and constructive.

- *Don't just talk—listen.* Pose problems and challenges, and then ask questions to enlist the entire team in generating solutions.
- *Be consistent.* Be open to new ideas in your management style, vision, expectations, and feedback. If change becomes necessary, acknowledge it quickly.

Get More Out of One-on-One Meetings

One-on-one meetings often feel hurried and disorganized. To improve them, be deliberate about how you structure them. First, schedule them, so they are repeating events on your calendar. And honor these time slots. Don't cancel, which signals to your employee that you don't value their time. Make sure there's an agenda. Before the meeting, ask your direct report for a synopsis of what they'd like to talk about. You should do the same for them. During the meeting, be present. Turn off your phone; mute notifications. Start by complimenting your colleague on something they do well. Then, listen to your colleague's concerns and provide feedback and ideas on how they might solve problems. Always close with a note of appreciation.

Micromanagement Limits a Team's Growth

You may want to be kept in the loop, but micromanaging hurts morale, establishes mistrust, and limits your team's growth. Here's how to break the habit:

- *Understand why you do it.* Micromanaging often comes from insecurity. Think about the reasons you shouldn't micromanage.
- *Prioritize what actually matters.* Determine which tasks you truly need to do. The real work of leaders is to think strategically, not do their team's jobs for them.
- *Talk to your team.* Be clear about when you want updates on their work, so they can ease your anxiety. Ask them how you can better support them.

- *Step back slowly.* Tell your employees you trust them to make decisions. Try not to overreact when things don't go exactly as you'd like.

Admit Failure

As a leader, admitting failure is critical. Many people try to shrug off missteps as things that happen to everyone. Although doing so might seem harmless, there are many good reasons why you should admit you've messed up. Here are three:

- *To connect with your employees.* While most employees won't want to discuss their own failures, they are more likely to connect with leaders who admit to theirs. Even if the specific failure isn't applicable to staff, simply talking about it helps you connect.
- *To learn.* Failure is only positive when you learn something important from it and make the necessary adjustments. If you don't do this, you cannot learn from outside perspectives and you're more likely to stay in denial.

- ***To tolerate mistakes in others.*** As much as leaders openly say that failure must happen for innovation to be present, many get upset at staff who fail or struggle. That attitude shuts up staff, closes down experimentation, and obliterates creativity. Set an example that failure is OK.

12

Encourage Healthy Habits

Your job is to support your team through intense work periods. The first step is to take care of yourself: eat nutritious food, exercise, get plenty of sleep, and find a friend to vent to when you need it. These things aren't luxuries—a healthy mind and body will help you lead well. When you turn your attention to your team, think about how you can be compassionate, be a source of optimism, and set a good example. Show your employees that, whatever the stressful situation, you're all in it together. Talk about how you cope with stress, and encourage people to take breaks, improve their work-life balance, and maintain a healthy attitude toward daily work and deadlines. Remind people why their work is important to the company and to customers. Renewing your sense of purpose is a good way to fight the drain of burnout.

13

Use Celebrations to Mark Important Moments

People have long used ceremonies—bar mitzvahs, baptisms, weddings, quinceañeras—to mark changes and turning points. Companies have ceremonies too, but they often focus on celebrating the positive: work anniversaries, promotions, and project victories. These types of recognition are important and shouldn't stop, but companies should consider using celebrations to help people through hard times. This can be a powerful way to mark difficulties, acknowledge and honor those who have sacrificed or experienced hardship, and help people move on. You may not celebrate after a difficult reorg, but you might gather as a group and read your mission statement aloud. Communal experiences can help strengthen your group's bonds, values, and vision.

Help Your Employees Feel Purpose

Instilling purpose in your employees takes more than motivational talks, lofty speeches, or mission statements. In fact, if overblown or insincere, those methods can backfire, triggering cynicism rather than commitment. To inspire and engage your employees, keep two things in mind. First, purpose is a feeling. You could tell your team that their work is important, but how can you help individuals feel it firsthand? Think about ways to show people the impact of their jobs. Perhaps you could bring a customer in to share a testimonial, or send a small team into the field to experience the client's needs for themselves. Second, authenticity matters—a lot. If your attempts at creating purpose do not align with how you've acted in the past, employees will likely be skeptical, and

they might be left feeling more manipulated than inspired. Making the pursuit of purpose a routine, rather than a one-off initiative, will show employees that you're serious about it.

Coach an Employee to Solve Problems in New Ways

Start off by asking a few questions: What problem are you solving? What concerns you about it? What frustrates other people about it? Your goal is to get the person thinking about why their efforts aren't working. Repeat their answers back to them. Once they understand why their plan of action is flawed, ask what else they might try, based on what they know about the problem. Encourage them to think about what type of solution would make sense for this type of problem. Remember, your role here is not to provide answers. It is to clarify the questions the employee is trying to answer, push them to consider new perspectives, and help them reflect on what they've learned.

16

Delegate as a Chance to Teach

For many managers, the hardest part of delegating is trusting that a task will be done well. But it becomes easier when you think of it as a chance to train your staff—not just get rid of some work. The next time you need to delegate something, start by determining who on your team is ready to handle more responsibility. Then create simple tasks to help them learn the skills they'll need. If you'd like someone to take over running a weekly meeting, for instance, have them practice each part of the process: one week, they can create an agenda, which you'll review. The next, they can watch you run the meeting, with plenty of chances to ask questions. Eventually they'll be ready to try running the meeting themselves, after which you can offer feedback. This kind of teaching can be time consuming, but it will go a long way toward preparing your team for more-complex work.

17

Make Team Learning Easier

Leaders want employees to continue to learn and develop new skills, but this wish will fail if you don't give people extra support. You might encourage employees to sign up for extra training and courses, but not many people will have time to engage properly, or at all, if their workloads remain the same and they have to study after hours. To promote more team learning, give them opportunities to develop. Give them stretch assignments and more autonomy. Make sure your team has access to resources to learn and grow, including people. Use mentoring to connect younger stars with seasoned executives; they can learn from each other. Establish regular check-ins for feedback, and measure progress through 360s. You can also fuel development by giving rewards such as promotions and stock ownership.

18

Shake Up an Employee's Routine

Every job contains some grunt work. If you manage someone who thinks they have more than their fair share, consider ways to change their responsibilities. You might, for example, impose a time constraint on an unglamorous task: Tell them the previous week's data needs to be compiled and reported by Monday at 4 p.m. Expect some pushback, since the employee is likely to say they can't complete the work in half the time. But ask them to at least try; a time constraint can turn an unexciting task into an engaging challenge. You should also consider assigning them some new work. Giving them more-exciting projects will compel them to get through their lower-value work more quickly. And share the burden: if employees see you doing grunt work, they'll be less likely to complain about it.

Recognize Your Employees' Achievements

Leaders have to actively build a sense of connectedness with their employees, and this starts with expressing appreciation.

- *Notice employees' unique contributions.* Say something that highlights something specific: "I appreciate the way you pull in people from other departments to reach your team goals. You're a connector."
- *Thank people personally and publicly.* Daily interactions—from the elevator to the parking lot—are opportunities to show appreciation for your employees' efforts. Public recognition at a staff meeting or a thoughtful "thank you" in a newsletter or email are also meaningful.

- *Ask "What do you think?"* Give people the opportunity to express themselves and be recognized for their ideas. Proactively ask employees, "How do you think we could improve?" and "What is keeping us stuck?"

What Not to Say When an Employee Makes a Mistake

Past-focused questions, like "What were you thinking?" only reinforce the mistake and make the person feel defensive. Instead, ask a question that looks forward: "How will you do it differently next time?" Focusing on the future this way allows the person to acknowledge their mistake and demonstrate what they've learned. It shows that you're confident in the person's abilities and gives you the chance to point out any problems in their thinking. Future-focused questions aren't easy to ask when your emotions are hot. Take a deep breath before speaking and remember that your goal in this situation is to help the employee grow, not to make them feel worse than they already do.

21

Take Responsibility for Your Team's Burnout

No manager wants a stressed-out team. And while employees have some responsibility to monitor their stress levels, leaders need to play a critical role in preventing and remedying burnout. Start with curiosity. Ask yourself: What is making my staff so unhealthy? How can I help them flourish? Then, gather data by asking your team what causes them to feel motivated or frustrated. Employees may not have a silver-bullet solution, but they can most certainly tell you what isn't working, and that is often very helpful data. Then, ask your team what they need. Think about small changes, for example, asking: If we had this much budget and could spend it on X many items in our department, what would be the first priority? Have the team vote anonymously, and then share

the data with everyone. Discuss what was prioritized and why, and then start working down the list, performing small pilots and assessing what works. The good news is that burnout is preventable, and these low-risk and inexpensive experiments will give you useful information about what you need to change in your work environment.

22

Help Employees Return Smoothly from Medical Leave

When an employee returns from a medical leave, it's your job to help them ease back into work. The process starts during the leave: check in with the employee a few times so that they don't feel cut off from the team. When they're ready to return, come up with a transition plan and think through the precise details. For example, ask the employee how they want their return announced and talk about any schedule changes needed. Make sure to phase the transition plan, since the person may not be ready to return to 100 percent capacity right away. And consider how you can create a welcoming experience for their first day back. Once they're back, check in more frequently than you normally would to make sure they feel supported.

Help Your Team Be Themselves at Work

Many employees downplay their differences from each other at work to avoid drawing unwanted attention or making others uncomfortable. If you help your team members feel comfortable being themselves, they can focus on work rather than on hiding parts of their identities.

- *Shift the language.* When organizations talk about diversity, people tune out. Introduce the concept of "covering," or hiding certain aspects of yourself, to not appear different. Most people have done it at some point in their careers. This opens up a new way to talk about differences.
- *Share your story.* Most of us have had experiences related to covering, whether we faced it ourselves or witnessed it in someone close to us. Start the dialogue and let others know it's OK to do the same.

- *Force the conversation.* Build genuine connections with your employees, and speak up if they believe the corporate culture encourages covering.

Decrease the Bias in Your Hiring Decisions

Human beings are hardwired to prefer people who are like us, which is one reason bias creeps into hiring decisions. Diversity initiatives and process audits can help, but for hiring to improve meaningfully, individual managers have to recognize and address their personal biases. The first step is to accept that you have biases. Think about why you might feel drawn to some job candidates more than others, and what biases or preferences might be involved. Consider how factors such as race, gender, education, socioeconomic background, and even height might influence you. Aim to go into hiring decisions with an awareness of how they might go astray. Then, when you're actually evaluating a candidate, keep asking your-

self: "Where could bias show up in this decision?" You should also form your own opinion of the candidate before comparing notes with your colleagues, so you aren't influenced by others' views.

Ease the Transition to Managing Former Peers

Being promoted into a manager position is exciting, but it can be awkward if your new team is made up of your former peers. When you're promoted over people who have always been friends (or rivals), the power relationship is inevitably altered. Here's how to ease the transition:

- *Meet with each team member one-on-one.* Individual meetings let you personalize your message and be more candid than a group setting allows. Talk to each person about what they do and how you can help them.

- *Hold a team meeting.* Using some ideas from the one-on-ones, discuss the purpose of the team, what should change, and what should stay the same. Explain how you like

to operate and how you want your team to work together.

- *__Deal swiftly with challenges to your authority.__* If someone resists your leadership or goes behind your back, state your displeasure firmly and ask what's causing their dissent.

Lighten Your Team's Load

Project overload is real. But as a leader, you can find it hard to tell whether your team needs more resources or just could be working more efficiently. Ask people to identify their key activities and how much time they spend on them in a typical week. Use that data to assess workloads and priorities. Consider which tasks the team could stop doing and which might benefit from rethinking their process. Pay special attention to low-value projects that have to get done but that take an inordinate amount of time. Are there ways to simplify the workflows to reduce the amount of time your team spends in these areas? And look for tasks that simply can be done more quickly. If your team is still struggling after these steps, it might be time to hire more people.

Be a Mediator, Not a Boss, to Resolve Employee Conflicts

Two of your team members have had a disagreement that has escalated from a squabble to a full-blown argument, and now they want you to resolve it. What's the best way for you to step in? Your instinct might be to immediately fix the problem by making an executive decision, but your team will benefit more if you intervene as a mediator. Ask your colleagues to engage in a mediation process with you. Explain your hope that everyone will work together to find a resolution. And set a ground rule that they should focus on reaching agreement, not on persuading you that one of them is right. Taking this mediator approach will enable your colleagues to resolve the conflict themselves, making them less dependent on you to sort out future problems, and

making it more likely that they'll follow through on the solution. In most workplace arguments, dictating a solution is less effective in the long run than showing your employees how to talk through their concerns together.

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Help a Direct Report Clarify Their Career Goals

As a manager, helping your direct reports achieve their career goals is part of your job. But what do you do if they aren't sure what those goals are? First, tell the person that it's OK—and sometimes even preferable—not to have a concrete career path in mind. Being overly attached to a specific plan can cause people to miss opportunities that aren't on the prescribed route. Next, ask questions to understand what drives the employee, such as, "What problems excite you?" and "What types of work do you want to do less of and more of?" From there, encourage them to think about the skills they'll need in the future, focusing on those

that will be transferable to other jobs or roles. Then suggest they try small experiments to learn more about what they like to do and where they need to develop.

29

Offer a Change of Scenery to a Mid-Career Employee

The mid-career crisis is a real phenomenon. People's satisfaction bottoms out when they're in the middle of their careers. As a manager, you don't want to lose these valuable employees just because they fall into a slump. To keep them engaged, consider offering a change of scenery through remote work or even a relocation. Remote work can let them change their personal lives without hurting their professional progress. A relocation to a different office could make sense for both the company and the employee if that office needs the employee's skills. Of course, a relocation is a big life change, so the company should be ready to assist with the move. In offering these options, you can help an experienced employee who still has years left in their career rekindle their enthusiasm for work.

Support Your Team's Mental Health

Mental health issues affect one in four adults. But when a colleague or direct report confides in you about an issue, you might find it hard to know the right way to respond. You can help in a few ways. Offer training to employees in how to support their colleagues. Training can teach people to recognize the signs of anxiety, depression, and other common mental health issues. They can also provide a safe space for role-playing so that employees can practice different scenarios. You can also create and share a list of trusted, publicly available resources for information and 24/7 advice. People often worry about the stigma that accompanies mental health issues, so tools they can use anonymously are valuable. By taking these steps, you can offer another essential kind of support: signaling that mental health issues, and the employees who struggle with them, matter.

Get Your Team to Be More Experimental

The most innovative companies encourage their employees to experiment. If you'd like to push your team to be more entrepreneurial, start by encouraging people to bring their outside interests to work. Ask your employees about their hobbies. What do they enjoy doing on weekends? What are they proud of outside of work? Employees who feel comfortable expressing their full, authentic selves are often better at coming up with new ideas. Creating a culture of experimentation also requires a fairly hands-off approach to leadership. Don't be a micromanager. Instead, show employees that you trust them to get work done, even in ways that haven't been tried before. When people have a sense of ownership, they feel more freedom to try something new. And finally, get

comfortable with failure. People won't take risks if they're afraid of what will happen if a project doesn't work out. Measure someone's performance by their level of ingenuity, not their ability to play it safe.

32

Ask Your Employees More Questions

As you move up in an organization, people increasingly look to you for answers. But the best leaders don't provide all of the solutions; they inspire curiosity, creativity, and deeper thinking in their employees. And that starts with asking the right questions. Encourage your employees to slow down and explain what they're proposing in more detail by saying something simple and to the point, like "Wait, what?" You could also use phrases like "I wonder why . . . " to encourage curiosity. And then follow up with "I wonder if things could be done differently." Another question to try: "How can I help?" This question forces your colleague to define the problem, which is the first step toward owning and solving it.

Give Feedback Based on Facts, Not Opinions

When you give feedback on a fellow employee, it should be useful. But unless you connect it to what matters to them—and separate it from your personal beliefs and preferences—they won't be able to act on it. Emphasize facts, not interpretations. Stay away from subjective comments: "She's self-centered." "He lacks confidence." Even if you believe an employee's behavior stems from lack of confidence, for example, that's just your opinion; it may be inaccurate. Point to specific behaviors instead: "He doesn't contribute during meetings." "She interrupts me when I'm speaking." And ensure your feedback is both negative

and positive, which helps to counteract your personal biases and preferences. For a colleague to improve, they need to know what they are doing well and where they have room to grow.

Don't Give Feedback When You Don't Need To

Feedback should be a regular part of work, but not every behavior warrants input. For example, you shouldn't offer corrective feedback just because someone has a different work process, even if it stresses you out. Before you deliver feedback, think about what you want to achieve. Avoid giving it when:

- You do not have all the information.
- It's something the recipient can't control.
- The person appears to be highly emotional or especially vulnerable.
- You don't have time to explain it thoroughly.

- It's based on a personal preference, not a need for more effective behavior.
- You don't have a solution for how the person can move forward.

Encourage Your Employees to Share What They Know

Many of us hide what we know at work because we don't want to lose the power or status that we think the knowledge gives us. But recent research shows that hoarding information often backfires and can negatively impact the withholder's growth and development. Your job is to create a culture in which your employees feel comfortable sharing information and speaking openly about their concerns. One way to figure out why your staff is holding back information is to use third-party, anonymous surveys. Then act on this feedback to gain back their trust. And make sure the people you manage understand the consequences of hiding knowledge. Those who are keeping information in order to protect themselves may not understand that they are actually doing the

opposite. Use trainings, newsletters, bulletin boards, and other communication channels to help employees understand why sharing knowledge with your teammates is important.

Set Boundaries to Manage the Endless Stream of Emails

One of the reasons email is so hard to manage is that sending it is easy. We can fill up each other's inboxes by just clicking a button, which is why it's important to set boundaries around email. Try these three things:

- *Use autoreplies.* When you need time to focus on work, your email autoreply can tell people that you're unavailable and when you'll get back to them. Whether you'll reply in a day or a week, let people know what to expect. (And in the meantime, give yourself permission to ignore messages that can wait.)
- *Set guidelines for your team.* Tell people how and when you prefer to communicate,

and ask colleagues and clients about their preferences as well. Don't forget to revisit this discussion when people join the team or new projects begin.

- *Lead by example.* If you answer emails late at night or on weekends, you're telling your team to do the same. Use services that allow you to schedule emails to send later. Better yet, step away from your inbox entirely.

For Better Virtual Meetings, Focus on Relationships

As more employees work offsite, virtual meetings are a necessity. "Reading the room" can be hard when you're not in the same room as your team, making these meetings tricky to navigate. Focus on building relationships. Allow ten minutes at the start for people to connect and catch up. This is your virtual watercooler time when you can have informal conversations. Ask questions about personal lives and families to get to know each other outside of work. Once you officially start the meeting, refer to each contributor by name so that everyone feels recognized and part of the community. When you can, meet face-to-face with the team. These techniques are the foundation for authentic conversation and connection, leading to more-effective virtual meetings.

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Let Your Team Speak Their Minds in Meetings

When people feel safe enough to speak their minds in meetings, everyone benefits: employees get to be honest, and managers get to hear what their team members really think. Leaders can invite candid conversation by doing two things. First, focus on permission. Give people permission to say or ask anything they want. Sometimes in meetings it's unclear who is allowed to say what, or which topics people can and can't ask about. Discuss these things with your team up front. Ask your team for permission to lead the meeting—whether that means calling on people who haven't spoken, keeping the conversation on track, or holding people back if they're talking too much. Second, create psychological safety.

Everyone has had the experience of not feeling heard or respected; show your team that won't happen in your meetings. Ask the group to devote their full attention to whoever is talking, to not interrupt each other, and to highlight the value in other people's contributions.

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Think about
the Weight Your
Words Carry

You have a lot of influence on how employees spend their time. Consider the ripple effects your input can have. Think of your comments, suggestions, and questions as pebbles you're throwing into a stream: Each one can have an impact far larger than you may intend. Always recognize the weight your words carry and speak with intention. During meetings with your team, don't think out loud, and lob ideas at everyone. Be sure you're giving the team a clear, unified picture of projects and strategies; if you aren't ready to do that, hold off on saying anything until you are. And don't ask for updates unless you really need them. Always specify what information you need, why, and when, so you don't create an unnecessary fire drill.

Make Kindness a Norm on Your Team

We all want to work in a place where people treat each other with kindness and respect. But you can't expect your team to behave that way without making it clear that you want them to. This process starts when you interview potential team members: tell candidates that your team values civility, so they can opt in to working for an organization where those values are prized. Have discussions with team members about what civility means and define the norms that you expect everyone to uphold daily. Compile those norms into a "civility code," which your employees can use as a guide. Once the norms are established, reinforce them however you can—in team meetings, at important events, and through rewards. These conversations and efforts garner buy-in and empower employees to hold one another accountable for civil behavior.

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Don't Solve Your Team's Problems for Them

If your team is constantly bringing issues to you rather than addressing them on their own, you aren't doing your job as a manager. Only let problems get escalated to you thoughtfully and occasionally. Make sure you're not stepping in when you shouldn't. Don't ask yourself, "How do we solve the problem?" until you've paused and considered, "Who should own this problem?" Balance the need to resolve the issue with consideration for how your actions will influence future behavior. In your desire to help your team, you might be tempted to do more than you should. If others are struggling to solve problems they should

rightfully own, always ask, "What is the least I can do?" Find the lowest level of initiative for yourself, while requiring your team members to act in ways they are capable of.

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Give Your Employees Time and Space to Focus

Between scanning our inboxes, checking our phones, and feeling overwhelmed by our workloads, it's a wonder anyone can get work done. To help your employees focus and stay productive, you need to counterbalance these distractions. First, make sure the office has designated spaces where employees can disconnect. You don't have to install nap pods like Google—you can set aside a corner with comfy chairs or rooms where people can close the door and work. Second, encourage employees to block out chunks of focus time on their calendars. Tell them it's OK to ignore email or Slack for a few hours; have them use an auto-reply to let people know they're unavailable. ("I'm stepping away from my email to finish this project.

I'll be back in one hour.") And set policies for how quickly employees have to respond to messages. The more time they're spending on urgent emails, the less time they're spending on deep work.

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Balance Your Team's Work Styles

As a leader, it's important to understand your work style and the styles of your employees. Prioritizers focus on goals, deadlines, and facts. Planners ask how the project will be delivered and completed. Arrangers want to know who the stakeholders are and who else should be involved. Visualizers consider why the project matters and what the end of the project will look like. All four types of people bring a valuable perspective to the table, and companies need all four types to remain competitive. Realistically, your team probably won't have a balance of all four styles, but you can bring on new members or call in outside experts to bridge the gaps. And if your team is heavily weighted toward one or two styles, recognize the value in balancing it. Work-style diversity ensures you'll have people focusing on both the big picture and the details.

Help Your Team Make Better Decisions

Judgment is a muscle that you can help your team build. Talk through how you make important decisions. Explain the criteria and stakeholders you consider, as well as any risks and trade-offs you assess to teach people how you think, help them understand company priorities, and demonstrate the factors to consider when making future judgment calls. Acknowledge that mistakes will happen, and that it's OK. Let your team members occasionally make big or hard decisions on their own. Remind yourself of your mistakes that helped you grow. Be curious, not dismissive, when a team member makes a poor judgment call. Ask questions to understand their thought process and push their thinking for next time.

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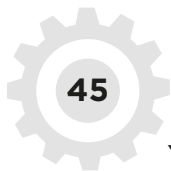
Your B-Level Players Deserve Your Attention, Too

Every manager would love to have a team of A players, but that's probably not realistic. You're almost always going to have a mix of performers on your team, so make sure you're not ignoring your B players. These employees can be selfless, dedicated employees who fill important roles, but often they don't get the attention they deserve. Make sure you're giving them enough support and guidance by learning about their concerns, preferences, and work styles. Occasionally reassess their job fit to make sure they're in roles that draw on their strengths. And don't overlook someone's talents just because the person is quiet or reserved, or because they don't fit your idea of what a leader should act like. Some B players aren't com-

fortable in the spotlight but thrive when they're encouraged to complete a project or to contribute for the good of the company. When they have the motivation and the encouragement they need, B players can turn in an A+ performance.

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Lead Your B-Level Players to A-Level Success

Can a team of B players achieve A+ success? Research says yes, but only with an A-level leader. As an effective leader, you can have a variety of styles, with certain characteristics: superior judgment, which helps you make good decisions and learn from mistakes; high emotional intelligence, which helps you stay calm under pressure and build relationships with your teams; and high ambition, which pushes you to high performance. In addition, you can use four tactics to make your teams more effective: Have a strong vision that motivates your team with a plan of attack and milestones. Use analytics to help your team make smarter, better decisions with data. Give honest feedback about team members' limits and help them improve.

And foster morale by encouraging team bonding. When people care about each other, they raise their performance for each other, too.

Staff Your Big New Project with Three Kinds of People

When you're staffing a high-profile project, you want an all-star team. But it's not enough to put your high performers on the task. There are three types of people who should be on the team of any breakthrough initiative. First, look for employees who are comfortable with uncertainty. You need individuals who will remain curious and focused even when the project is far from the end goal. Second, be sure you have people who create structure within chaos and take action. These workers can drive a team forward even when circumstances change. Finally, find employees who have a combination of these critical traits: divergent thinking (the ability to connect seemingly unrelated information and ideas); convergent action (the ability to execute on ideas and create

something tangible); and influential communication (the ability to share knowledge in a coherent, compelling way). Many people have one of these critical traits, but your project team needs employees who have all of them.

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Protect Your High Performers from Burnout

When a high performer on your team burns out, you might think it's their problem to solve. But your job is to help employees control their stress. You can protect your stars by giving them some autonomy in choosing their projects. Don't just put them on the toughest tasks; letting them choose ensures they're working on assignments that excite them. Pair the person with another high performer on a hard project, which will help them challenge and push each other. The pairs should be employees at similar levels.

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Give Opportunities to Your Top Employees

Every manager wants to keep their stars. One of the best ways to win loyalty from your top talent is to give them as many opportunities as you can. Let them take on big challenges like a highly visible project or a new leadership role. You may have to battle HR to make this happen. After all, HR leaders tend to want to treat people homogeneously and limit opportunities to rigid time frames. They may insist that your star isn't ready, or that giving the role to the star isn't fair to others who are more senior. You can promise to look for opportunities for those you've bypassed and take full responsibility for what your top talent is—and

isn't—able to do. Don't let red tape stand in your way. If your top talent is blocked and made to wait for opportunity to be available, they will simply go somewhere else.

What to Do Before Telling Someone They're Fired

Telling someone they're fired is never easy, but you can take steps to make it less painful. Before starting the conversation, make sure you've prepared responsibly. Does the person know there's been an issue? Have they been given an opportunity to act on your feedback? Identify the right environment for the meeting—a private place where you won't be interrupted. Think about what you want to say. Instead of preparing a script, focus on setting your intentions. Really think about the person: who they are, why you hired them, what this will be like for them. Try to see the best in the other person. Imagine them contributing more

powerfully in another organization or role. And approach the conversation with the assumption that they have value—it may just be in a different job.

Don't Be Afraid to Show Some Emotion

Keeping a cool head at work is important for decision making and team cohesion, but it can have an unintended drawback: your calm professional persona may be so rigid that you forget to be yourself or show your emotions. As a leader, it's hard to generate enthusiasm among your direct reports if you always wear a serious face. Next time you prepare for an important speech or meeting, think about the emotional takeaway you want to impart to your employees. Then choose words that match your emotional tone. If you want your team to feel confident, for example, say you are "proud" and their ideas are "powerful." Or if your team is facing a tight deadline, tell them the task is "critical" and you're "eager" to meet the opportunity so that your organization won't "miss out." Without emotional language, your message may

fall flat, so be forthcoming about how you feel; a leader's emotions are contagious. If you project excitement or encouragement, your team will pick up on your energy.

Challenge Your Employees to Keep Them Engaged

Leaders play a significant role in helping employees understand why their jobs matter, but it's not just about connecting their work to a larger purpose. You can also do it by demonstrating curiosity: explore, ask questions, and engage people on their ideas about the future. Make clear that there is a wide range of possibilities for how work gets done and that you want your employees to try new things. At the same time, keep them focused on meeting goals and making progress. Remain ambitious in the face of both failure and success, and push your people to continually accomplish more. You want employees to feel a sense of progress, reinvention, and growth, which results in a more meaningful and positive work experience.

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Build Your
Team's Trust

To be effective, leaders need their team's trust. But how do you get that trust—and how do you get it back if you've lost it? Three behaviors are essential. First, create positive relationships on your team. Help employees cooperate, resolve conflicts between others, give honest feedback, and check in with people about their concerns. Second, demonstrate expertise and judgment. People are more likely to trust you if they believe you have technical know-how and the experience to make good decisions about the team's work. Last, be consistent. You must do what you say you will do. Follow through on your commitments and keep any promises you make. You don't need to be perfect at these three behaviors to be a trusted leader, but you do need to be good at them.

Explain How You Make Decisions

Most managers dedicate significant amounts of time and energy to ensuring they're being fair. But it's inevitable that some will perceive outcomes as fair, and others, as unfair. Be transparent about how and why you made a decision. For example, if you want an equitable promotions process, with certain competencies or styles counting more than others, tell your team your intentions. If you want equal sharing of bonuses, to reinforce the importance of every employee, be up front about it. As the manager, you have the discretion to make those decisions. As long as you have thought carefully about what the business needs, and made your decision as objectively as possible, you have done your job. You'll always have an opportunity to restore balance with the next decision.

55

Help Your Team Avoid Unhealthy Competition

Collaborating is hard if you view your colleague as the competition. Even when leaders don't explicitly paint a win-lose game for their teams, the competitive mindset is the default for most high-achieving professionals. So you have to communicate the message that success in the team can be greater and more exciting when people work together. Emphasize the opportunity for all team members to value and learn from each other. And follow these tactics to help employees adopt a teaming mindset:

- Model the behavior you're hoping to inspire. Demonstrate curiosity and interest in the people you work with, ask them genuine questions, and respond thoughtfully to what you hear.

- Place a high value on and reward successful teaming more than individual performance.
- Frame the challenge ahead (the work, the initiative, the project) as something in need of diverse perspectives and skills.

56

Don't Let Envy Be Part of Your Team's Culture

Nothing good comes of envy. If employees are resentful about what they feel they deserve or what others have, morale and well-being will suffer. You can combat envy by building a culture of goodwill ("I'm grateful for what I have, and happy about your success") rather than one of comparison ("I deserve what you have"). Start by setting an example. Let your team see you supporting your peers and cheering their accomplishments. Show employees that you value genuine camaraderie, and encourage them to measure themselves by their own achievements rather than by others'. Discuss how people can combat feelings of envy (and even how you've managed envy in the past). For example, employees may benefit from talking with a friend or mentor to dissect what they're

feeling and regain perspective. They should also try to avoid unhealthy comparisons and the distorted perspectives that come with them. A culture in which people want each other to succeed is one that can bring out the best in everyone.

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Don't Let a Toxic Culture Drag Down Your Team

Company culture exerts a powerful influence on employees' behavior. In some cases, that power can turn toxic, driving us to compromise our values and do things we normally wouldn't. You probably can't change a toxic culture on your own, but there are steps you can take to insulate yourself from its effects. First, figure out the kind of environment you need to be effective—and happy—at work. Which of your values have fallen by the wayside? Do you feel healthy and content? Are you proud of how you behave toward colleagues? Next, talk to your teammates about the culture you all wish you had. Ask what's important to them at work and how company norms have affected their behavior. Then talk about estab-

lishing and committing to a team "microculture" based on everyone's shared values. The microculture may not fix the company's broader issues, but it can encourage your team members to resist the negative pressures they face in their jobs.

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When to Change Your Employee's Goals

As a manager, what do you do if, after working hard with your employee to set goals at the beginning of the year, it's no longer clear that those targets are still worth pursuing? Perhaps your employee has achieved a goal and needs a new challenge, or the organization's objectives have changed. Meet with the employee to review the existing goals and plans. These questions can help guide your discussion and reassess the targets:

- Are the goals still realistic, given any changes in resources or constraints?
- Are they still timely? Is now the best time to achieve them?
- Are they still relevant? Do they still align with the company's strategy?

Depending on the answers, you may need to change only a single goal, replacing it with a new one—but in some cases, the entire plan might need to shift. Work collaboratively with your direct report to come up with new goals that are achievable and important to the organization.

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During Change, Ask Employees What Worries Them

If you want to lead a successful organizational change, you have to communicate about the change empathetically. And that means finding out how your team feels and tailoring your emails and meetings to their concerns. Leaders who don't take this step risk alienating their employees, who may already be feeling nervous or skeptical. So talk to your team members about what's happening and why. Ask what they're worried about and what kind of improvements they'd like to see. Listen closely and then use your communications to address what you heard. Repeat these steps during each phase of the change, so you can gauge how people's feelings are shifting over time. The goal is to make sure everyone feels included and

heard. You should also be as transparent about the change as possible. It's likely that you'll need to keep some details about the how and why private, but being open will build trust and credibility.

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Ask Your Team the Right Questions

Being a strategic leader starts with asking your team the right questions about their work, your company, and the big picture. Here are five questions to pose to team members on a regular basis:

- *What are you doing today?* This will bring to light any significant work that you aren't aware is being done or that's taking much more time than it should.
- *Why are you doing the work you're doing?* This allows you to gain clarity on what's important and why it's important from your team's perspective.
- *How does what we're doing today align with the bigger picture?* This is a discussion about gaps and outliers. If your team is working on something that doesn't align with the broader goals of the organization, challenge the value of doing that work.

- *What does success look like for our team?*
  This allows you to home in on what's really
  driving your team's success, in terms of
  activities, behaviors, relationships, and
  strategic outcomes.
- *What else could we do to achieve more,
  better, faster?* This is where you push your
  team to be innovative. If you've done the
  work to answer the preceding questions,
  you are well positioned to be strategic in
  answering this one.

Attributions

Managing Yourself

1. "How to Stop Worrying about What Other People Think of You," by Michael Gervais
2. "How to Lead When You're Feeling Afraid," by Peter Bregman
3. "3 Simple Habits to Improve Your Critical Thinking," by Helen Lee Bouygues
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