You're the Boss—Now What? 7 To-Dos as a First-Time Manager

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If you've been promoted to management for the first time, you're probably stoked about your new gig, ready to take charge, and, let's be honest, contemplating how to spend your first new paycheck.

But, if you're like most, you're also feeling pretty terrified. While graduating to management is a huge accomplishment, it's also the beginning of a pretty huge challenge. Not quite sure where to start? Get off on the right foot with these steps for a smooth transition.

1. Get Smart

First off, make it your personal mission to learn everything you can—believe me, this is the big key to success as a new manager. Seek out the management tools, resources, and classes that your company offers. Some organizations have formal supervisor training, and nearly all have manuals and HR policies. Read them, digest them, and keep them on your bookshelf.

You should also do some digging and learn more about each of the people you'll be managing. Review their personnel files, their resumes, and their past performance reviews and goals.

2. Find a Mentor

Of course, many of the situations you'll face as a manager aren't outlined in any manual. How do you deal with a team member who's underperforming? Or an overachiever who you'd love to promote but can't because of budget cuts?

The good news is, someone else has probably dealt before with any situation you'll face. So one of the most important things you can do is find a mentor, someone with whom you can confidentially discuss issues as they arise. If this is your boss, great. If not, find someone else in your company who can serve in this capacity.

3. Change Your Focus

You've likely been promoted because you're awesome at your job. But the crazy thing about your new position? It's not about you anymore. "Before you were a manager, your number one job was to accomplish tasks," says Penelope Trunk in 4 Worst Mistakes of a First Time Manager. "Now, your number one job is to help other people accomplish the tasks in an outstanding way."

This shift is often difficult for first-time managers, but it's crucial—your performance will be tied to the performance of your team. This means, if your team fails, you fail. And if they succeed? You can take credit, but you have to share it with the rest of the group, or they won't be willing to do a great job for you in the future.

4. Listen and Learn

Many new managers want to make bold changes quickly to show that they're in charge—and it's a bad idea. Resist this temptation, and instead, take plenty of time to fully understand your organization and team. Set up individual meetings with each of your new staff members to understanding their roles. Ask questions about what they like about their job, the biggest challenges they face, and ideas they have for improving the organization.

Obviously, you can't please everyone, but saying "I would love to get your input as I make plans for the future" goes a long way in building positive relationships and open communication. And understanding what people's goals, hang-ups, and challenges are can help them perform at a higher level, which will only serve to help you.

Also let them know that you're open to listening on an ongoing basis. Whether it's having an open-door policy or scheduling "office hours" each day, make sure your employees know when and how they can reach out to you.

5. Address Relationship Shifts

The biggest mistake that new managers make? When asked this question, "90% of the women whom we interviewed replied that they tried to be liked," say authors Caitlin Friedman and Kimberly Yorio in The Girl's Guide to Being a Boss (Without Being a Bitch). This can be especially true if you've been promoted from within and find yourself now supervising someone who used to be at the same level as you.

If you do find yourself now managing a former peer, you must address the shift—immediately. You can't keep up your twice-weekly happy hours and closed-door lunch dates with your work BFF without feelings of distrust and resentment from the rest of your team. Also keep in mind that, while your former colleague may be happy for you, she may also feel awkward or resentful.

Try starting the conversation with "You know that I value our friendship, but as a manager, I need to make sure that everyone on the team views me as being fair and consistent, so our work relationship is going to change." Easy? No. Important? More than you know.

6. Be on Model Behavior

Complaining about the boss over cocktails? Showing up 15 minutes late to meetings? Sorry—those days are long gone. As a manager, you'll be looked to as a role model by not only your employees, but also by others in the organization. You can't expect people to give their best at work if they don't see you doing it, so be sure you're always on your A game. This means meeting deadlines, sticking to your word, keeping your personal opinions under wraps, and doing your best to represent your department and organization.

7. Manage Up

Being the boss doesn't mean you can ignore your own supervisor. In fact, it's more important than ever to keep her in the loop, since you'll be reporting the progress of an entire group of people. It's also important to make sure that the goals you outline for your team are intimately tied to your boss' priorities. Ask to set up regular meetings to discuss your goals, your progress, and any issues, and how they relate to the organization as a whole. You can only impress your boss with your team's progress if you're moving in the right direction.

Being a manager is an ongoing learning experience, and it's probably never going to be "easy." But, do your research, set expectations, and shift your focus from the get-go, and you'll be off to a great start.