

# Learn How to Avoid the Mistakes New Managers Make



BY **F. JOHN REH** Updated May 20, 2018

The role of the first-time [manager](#) is dangerous territory for many who are drafted or promoted into this difficult role but offered little support in the form of training or coaching. There are ample opportunities for mistakes and misfires as the rookie [manager](#) grapples with the very new challenges of being responsible for the work of others.

While prior experience in an informal leadership role such as that of product or [project manager](#) is helpful, there is much for the new manager to learn and do in the early stages of the role. In the spirit of forewarned is forearmed, here is some insight into 10 of the common mistakes that new managers make early in their tenure and tips how to avoid them.

## 01 Feel Pressured to Prove They "Know It All"



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You might have attracted the attention of senior management with your technical or functional expertise, however, now that you are in management, it is time to focus on helping create other functional experts. Yes, the skills that brought you to this role are not the skills that will help you succeed.

Your job is to support the efforts of others and support their development, and guide the overall work activities, not to serve as the de facto expert. Focus on creating experts, not asserting as the expert.

## 02 Show Everyone They Are in Charge

Those new to positions of power often feel compelled to make certain everyone knows they have power. Your instinct is to say, "I am in charge." Your instinct is wrong.

People understand you are the new boss. They are looking for guidance, direction, and help, not your assertion of authority.

In reality, a compulsion to let people know you are the boss actually weakens your authority and credibility in the eyes of your team. Resist the temptation to announce, "I am in charge," and instead, focus on earning the trust of your new team members.

### 03 Change Everything Overnight

Your assumption that everything that was done before was wrong, will shoot your credibility in the foot. Remember that your team members were part of creating the past processes and approaches, and your indictment of those methods is disrespectful and even insulting to them.

Instead of focusing on what might be wrong, engage your new team members in identifying where they want to make changes that will help them do their jobs more effectively and efficiently.

## 04 Develop a Fear of Making Any Changes

The opposite of the new manager with the mistaken drive to change everything is the new manager afraid to change anything. This manager walks on eggshells around team members and processes and is overly concerned with ruffling feathers by proposing changes.

Hold yourself accountable to making timely decisions. Engage your team members to identify areas for improvement and offer support for their ideas.

## 05 Don't Take Time to Get to Know Their New Team Members

If you are new to the team, it is essential that you [develop trust](#) with the members quickly. The best way to do this is to pay attention to them as individuals. Sit down with each team member and ask for their ideas and desired changes.

Wherever possible, support or empower them to make these changes. At the appropriate time, discuss their career aspirations and desired next steps and work together to define a development plan that moves them in the direction of their longer-range goals.

If you have been a team member and are now the manager, it is equally important to have those discovery discussions. Do not assume just because you know people as team members and peers that you understand their career aspirations and ideas for short-term improvements.

Invest the same time in these initial discussions and focus on getting to know your team members from a new perspective. Pay attention to your people and they will respond by paying attention to you.

## 06 Forget to Involve the Boss in Their Work

You might think that your boss promoted you to take care of the work and not bother him/her with the daily issues. In reality, your direct boss is an incredibly important stakeholder in your success and wants opportunities to support and coach you.

Instead of showing your ability to operate independently, make certain to keep your boss apprised at just the right level. Of course, it is up to you to assess what the right level might be.

Some bosses want daily contact. Others prefer to engage by exception when you need their help on a specific problem. Others want the opportunity to observe you in action. Make certain to assess your boss's needs for involvement in your work and deliver accordingly.

## 07 Avoid Dealing With Problem Employees

New managers almost universally run from the challenging people issues on their teams. In many instances, they have not been trained in how to deliver constructive feedback, and they are unduly concerned that any critical conversations will turn people against them.

In reality, everyone is watching the new manager closely to see if she will deal with the tough people challenges on the team. Ignoring these issues undermines the manager's credibility. In

contrast, dealing with them in a timely, professional manner serves to strengthen the credibility of the new manager.

Do not let the challenging people problems linger. Learn and practice the art and process of delivering effective, [constructive feedback](#) and feed-forward. Remember, everyone is watching.

## 08 Are Afraid to Let Everyone See They Are Human

The tendency for new managers is to falsely believe that any sign of weakness will undermine their authority. In reality, your team members are looking for signs that you are authentic as a leader.

Instead of hiding or avoiding your mistakes, admit them up front and use them as teaching moments. Your display of humility will garner support for you in your role as manager.

## 09 Forget to Protect Their People

Nothing garners support and credibility than the trust earned by ensuring team member remain safe. There are many opportunities every single day to protect your team members from unwanted distractions and some of the [political machinations](#) of other groups. Once the team understands you have their backs, they will rally around you as manager.

## 10 Fail to Adhere to the "Coach's Credo"

When things go great, it is because of the team. When they go wrong, it is because you failed. Live to this credo and your credibility with your team members will soar.

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[Updated by Art Petty](#)

## The Bottom Line

Most new managers step into one or more of the mistakes above. And while you cannot learn to manage or lead from a book or blog, you can gain critical context for what to avoid and what to do. Forewarned is forearmed!

