# Management in a Nutshell

1. **Public praise, private criticism.** We’ve all been there before. Manager publicly shames us in front of our colleagues. How does this make us feel? Not good. Is this someone you are willing to go above and beyond for? Not likely. What about when we do go above and beyond with little to no acknowledgement? If the objective is to demotivate your team, failure to do the “little things” is a surefire way to do it. Provide praise in front of peers, champion your employee’s contribution to management, give them a “Bravo” award… basic stuff but not to be overlooked. And everyone makes mistakes. If you miss an opportunity for praise or lose your composure in a group setting, don’t just roll with it. Apologies and acknowledgement for the outbursts are essential to create a collaborative, open work environment.
2. **Motivation.** It’s important to understand what makes people tick. As a Manager, your job is to get the most out of your employees. But don’t think about it in a manipulative way. If you get the best and most out of a given employee, they feel good about their contribution and feel good about working for you. It really can be a win-win. But how do you accomplish this feat consistently across a myriad of personalities? This is where Management Science and Art intersect. You need to learn about an individual, experiment, and takes cues on what is working and what isn’t. A certain employee may need specific instruction, regular check-ins, constructive feedback etc. But another employee may feel smothered/micro-managed with this approach. Perhaps they are most effective w/ a clear concept of what to do and then the space and flexibility to accomplish the task.
3. **Identify Strengths and Leverage them.** Although it is important to help develop your employees, make sure there isn’t a “mis-fit” w/ a particular set of responsibilities. Your success is directly tied to your team. If you have someone who is strong in front of customers, leverage that strength. If they are exceptional at solving nebulous problems and cutting through ambiguity, leverage that strength.
4. **Spend time w/ your top performers.** The natural tendency is leave you best employees alone and spend time helping those who are underperforming. As a result, you may be unintentionally demotivating your best workers. Don’t fall into this trap! Certainly you need to invest time in employees that are struggling. But take note of your time and on the ROI of the time you are investing. Is the employee developing or is this role a bad fit? Any other fits in the organization? Know when to hold em and know when to fold em.
5. **Be a Thought Leader.** Anytime someone tells me they want to be a Manager, my first advice is to make sure you are a leader first. Don’t wait until you have been given a manager title to mentor, provide direction, and thought leadership. Your team will turn on you if they don’t value your perspective or believe you don’t have a strong point of view. However, let logic be your guide and leave you ego at the door. If someone on your team has a better idea, don’t continue to press your agenda forward due to need to appear type-A/dominant. Once again, great way to demotivate your team if you fail to enter discussions w/ an open, egoless mind.
6. **Paint the Bigger Picture.** We’re all doing something. Our little piece of the puzzle. Sometimes toiling away in our little corner of the world is tedious. What is a good way to feel more motivated? Perspective. Understanding how what we are doing fits into the bigger picture and success of the company is instant motivation. It makes us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. It’s your job to provide this to your reports. This can be shared in 1:1s, group meetings, ad hoc watercooler discussions, etc. People generally take ownership, work harder and more efficient when you can empower them w/ knowledge of the “big picture”. Make sure to solicit this information from your Manager, if they are not providing this to you.
7. **Be friendly but not friends.** As a Manager, it’s important to be approachable. It doesn’t require much time or effort to ask about someone’s children, ailment, or just general “getting to know you” chatter. This is true not just for your team but everyone across an organization. However, within your team, it’s important to keep a certain distance. If you have a direct report you consider a friend, this could backfire. Members of your team could claim favoritism and involve HR or even legal counsel (for instance, if there was a RIF (reduction in force – aka layoff) and you kept your friend who was not as high of a performer of someone who was let go.) This can be a difficult challenge especially there will be people you click with. Perhaps you can be friends w/ them after you move on but limit your interactions to be solely professional.
8. **Ask, don’t tell.** If you need someone to sacrifice their personal time or work on the weekend, it is better to ask than tell. It exemplifies respect for work/life balance and respect for your employee as a person (not just a resource). In some cases, you may need to be more demanding. But it’s better to resort to the iron fist only when necessary.
9. **Clearly Delegate Ownership.** Set your employees up for success by being clear on what you expect from them. And give them ownership. Micromanaging is generally insulting. It erodes trust and (again) is a great way to demotivate.
10. **Put yourself in their shoes.** I’ve learned more from bad managers than I learned from good ones. I’m of the belief that you treat people as you want to be treated. In the world of knowledge work, I don’t think of managers as “bosses” ordering around their team. Bosses are for construction crews. Expect a lot from yourself and a lot from your team. But always remember to be respectful.