



Being the Boss

The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader

by Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback
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Take-Aways

- The core task of managing and leading is to influence others.
- Becoming a fully effective leader – learning to exercise influence – is so difficult it requires a years-long journey of personal development.
- Most managers make progress on their journeys but then stop growing.
- They lack a clear understanding of their destination, which is to master “3 Imperatives,” the three key levers of influence that encompass all they do as leaders.
- First, “manage yourself” – Build relationships not on authority but on trust – people’s confidence in your competence and character as a boss.
- Second, “manage your network” – Influence those you don’t control by building relationships for mutual advantage with everyone you and your team need to work.
- Third, “manage your team” – Make your people a true team, a group committed to a common purpose and to each other in pursuit of that purpose.
- Then manage your team as a whole, not as a collection of individuals.
- Recognize individual needs but always in the context of the team.
- Use the “3 Imperatives” to shape all you do every day as a manager and leader.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall

9

Applicability

9

Innovation

8

Style

8

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) Why the “3 Imperatives” – “manage yourself, manage your network and manage your team” – are vital to leadership; and 2) How they can guide your development as a manager and as you pursue team goals and career growth.

Recommendation

Even great managers face unprecedented challenges in an economic climate characterized by constant innovation, chaos and general unpredictability. Harvard professor of business administration Linda A. Hill and business writer Kent Lineback offer a lucid blend of cogent theory and practical strategies. They educate and inspire novice and experienced leaders who want to practice the fundamentals of good management. *getAbstract* recommends this deftly organized, clearly presented, practical guide primarily to new and middle managers but also to anyone who aspires to be a great boss.

Summary

Introduction to the “3 Imperatives”

Stepping into management or taking on greater leadership responsibility is a life-altering event that’s as transformative as becoming a parent. Whatever your level of experience, you might wonder if you have the mettle, courage and skills for the job. Becoming a good manager forces you to confront your beliefs about your work; your interactions with people; and the loyalty you have to your subordinates, your superiors and your company. The process takes years. No shortcuts can circumvent the hard work of learning how to gain and exert the influence you need to make other people “more productive as individuals and, especially, as a group.”

As you develop managerial skills, you will face “inherent paradoxes” that confound good management, such as being accountable for other people’s work or having to manage both the immediate present and the distant future. You will also need to cope with the dynamics of generational differences, cultural diversities and “ad hoc work groups.” Successful managers sow a “seed of progress” in each small interaction within a “fluid, hectic, fragmented and discontinuous” environment. They use the 3 Imperatives – “manage yourself, manage your network and manage your team” – to achieve the critical goal of influencing others.

“Completing Your Journey”

Turning into a great manager is an ongoing and long process that requires you to learn from your mistakes. On a scale of one to five, rank your current management ability in the 3 Imperatives:

Imperative One: Manage Yourself

You must understand how to use authority, how to set boundaries with staffers while building caring but professional relationships, and how to build the trust that good management requires:

“Management is defined by responsibility, but it’s done by exerting influence.”

“Most organizations have a few great managers, some good managers, a horde of mediocre managers, some poor managers and some awful managers.”

"The work of managers seems so fragmented, improvisational and superficial because it embodies a panoply of paradoxes."

"Effective managers accomplish much of their work in hundreds of little steps that eventually accomplish the work of management."

"Given its paradoxical nature, the boss-subordinate relationship is easy to get wrong."

"For all the effort and, sometimes, discomfort involved, you'll discover how rewarding work can be when you build it around a rich web of relationships."

- **"I'm the boss!"** – Abandon the idea that your success depends on exerting "formal authority." Your staff members want an authentic relationship with you, even though you are their boss. If you form such connections, you'll enjoy higher levels of compliance, greater commitment to individual and group goals, and a sturdier willingness to participate in change. Hierarchical structures that place managers above their workers are not as effective as structures that place managers amid their staff as the "hub connecting all the pieces." Wielding formal authority benefits both parties only when you earn the right to exercise it appropriately by meeting your obligations to your workers in return for their willingness to heed your leadership.
- **"I'm your friend!"** – At the other extreme, neophyte managers mistakenly try to be friends with their direct reports to gain their trust, respect and cooperation. Be forewarned: Forming close personal ties is a recipe for disaster, especially when you must discipline or terminate workers. Being your employees' boss and being their friend should be mutually exclusive for several reasons: Friendship exists for its own sake, not as a means to an end; bosses and subordinates are not equals, while true friends are; bosses cannot befriend all their employees equally; and, of course, friends don't make each other change their work practices, report on their progress or be accountable for their goals. A healthy boss-subordinate relationship should be more amiable than antagonistic, with both parties appropriately concerned about each other's lives but at some distance. Think about your rapport with teachers, coaches, lawyers and other professionals. You want to trust their expertise and unbiased advice, but an overly friendly connection could cloud your perspective.
- **"Can people trust you?"** – Formal authority and likability cannot help you gain managerial influence over your staff. Only trust can do that. Trust is the most decisive element of good workplace relationships. Build others' trust in you by focusing on their belief in your "competence as a manager" and in your "character as a person." Competence means that you know "what to do and how to get it done" and that you understand how to be a boss. Character is rooted in your values and how you practice them daily. Your staff will parse your every word and action to determine what you're made of and whether you consistently do the right thing.

Imperative Two: Manage Your Network

To manage your networks, first determine who belongs to them and nurture them. Two realities of organizational life surprise many new and middle managers: The first is your interdependence with other people for help and cooperation. The second is the pervasiveness of "political conflict" among competing stakeholders. To resolve both issues, develop and cultivate a set of networks using the following steps:

- **"Understand...the reality of your organization"** – Some managers mistakenly think they work in a bubble, independent of what happens in the rest of the company. They feel responsible only for their group's productivity, and they interact with other managers and units only when necessary. Eschewing corporate politics is a path to managerial failure. Appreciate the value of gaining influence with other groups, their managers, your boss and others to obtain the best resources and the most support for your team's goals. You are the voice of your team, so you must smooth out relations with other groups, negotiate on behalf of your team, protect its best interests, and disseminate information about its needs and accomplishments.

"Team culture, like infrastructure, enables productive work. If you get the culture wrong, nothing else your team does is likely to work well."

"Trust is counting on someone to do the right thing. Culture defines 'the right thing' within a group."

"Through purpose, goals and clarity, groups become teams – communities that exert strong influence on members' attitudes and behaviors."

"Management makes the difference between group dysfunction and a high-commitment, high-performance team."

- **"Weave your own web of influence"** – All organizations are political environments, and your success depends on creating a sphere of influence within that environment. You already have contacts, but you must establish and nurture networks that encompass people you depend on and those who depend on you – today and in the future. Form "ongoing partnerships" before you need them. Leverage your networks in these four basic ways: Get and share information, integrate your group within the context of the larger organization, create mutually beneficial coalitions with people who share common objectives, and gain their help in discerning and assessing the ethical trade-offs that occur among stakeholders. You need three types of networks: an "operational network" pertaining to your team's actual work, a "strategic network" to hone future planning and a "developmental network" to guide your personal growth as a manager. Building networks will reveal who among your colleagues trusts you and likes working with you.
- **"Don't forget your boss"** – Learning to manage up the organization is critical. You can benefit from your direct superior's experience, insights and wisdom, and he or she can support your career growth and help you get the information, resources and support your group needs. A poor relationship with your boss can do the opposite, leaving you feeling bereft in a "stalled" or "derailed" career. Embrace the "mutual dependence" that characterizes a working partnership of two people who – though not equals – need each other to thrive. Examine and enhance your relationship with your boss by looking for areas that need improvement, including achieving higher levels of trust, fulfilling needs, meeting expectations, communicating your drive for career growth, and maximizing strengths and bolstering limitations.

Imperative Three: Manage Your Team

Lead those who work for you by making them into a real team – a group of people who do collective work and are committed to a common, compelling purpose. Most groups never achieve this state of mutual dedication. Members of a real team focus on "we," not individuals; believe the team will succeed or fail as a whole, not person by person; and are united by powerful personal bonds based on their common purpose. Effective managers build those bonds. They create a team and manage through it, rather than managing members one-on-one. This is a much more powerful source of influence that they exercise by taking these steps:

- **"Define the future"** – Instill group purpose by formulating a sense of clarity about where your team is headed. Too many managers get caught up in small day-to-day events, problems and distractions. Defining a vision of the future based on purpose establishes common goals, fosters commitment, improves focus, deepens a sense of perspective about change, and builds trust and influence. Develop and use unwritten and written plans. Your unwritten, internally imagined plan coalesces everything you believe about "what you do, where you're going, why you're going there and how you're going to get there." Your written plan is a more time-specific summary of how those elements relate to the foreseeable future – perhaps one to five years away. Promote greater team involvement by including others up and down the hierarchy in your planning activities via social networking and collaborative software tools.
- **"Be clear about how your team works"** – Culture is the intangible infrastructure that supports productive work. If you establish clearly defined expectations within the right culture, you can create an atmosphere of trust where everyone believes that each team member is doing the right thing. As manager, ensure that each person knows

"There's often a gap between what we know to do and what we actually do."

"Full mastery comes slowly, as with any serious craft, and requires steady progress in a world that keeps throwing up ever more complex challenges and opportunities."

"Management begins with you – who you are as a person."

unambiguously “who does what, how the work gets done, how members work with each other and how the team is doing.” Reinforce group goals within an atmosphere of trusting, positive expectations by saying, “Do this because the team expects it of you,” rather than, “Do this because I’m telling you to do it.” Encourage group discussion of cultural norms and expectations, provide frequent feedback to individuals and groups, and welcome “constructive disagreement and conflict.” The same guidelines apply when you supervise virtual teams and, especially, cross-cultural teams.

- **“Your team members are individuals, too”** – While people long to be part of groups, they also crave appreciation as individuals. You must set the tone and create an environment in which this can happen. Maintain high levels of interaction by being easily and frequently available to your team members, particularly when they need you. Openly recognize individual contributions and efforts to be team players. When you engage with your staffers, give them your full, undivided attention. Be “honest and forthright” so they see they can trust you to keep your word. Get to know them as individuals. Be aware of generational factors that affect group dynamics. Uncover individual strengths and shortcomings, and assign tasks that allow people to flourish and learn new skills. Improve your talent at hiring the right candidates, evaluating employees’ performance, taking corrective actions as needed and terminating unfit workers with dignity.

“Manage Through Your Daily Work”

The management landscape can be a “chaotic, unpredictable” environment. Use the 3 Imperatives to guide you through unplanned situations, challenges and responsibilities. Use planned “interruptions” to further your goals. For example, introduce yourself to a senior executive whose cooperation you’ll need later or have a new team member observe a client meeting. Or, give two team members who are tense with each other a chance to mend their differences by assigning them to solve an urgent problem together.

When interruptions don’t occur naturally, good managers create them by scheduling a series of meetings that precipitate relevant questions or by asking team members to report back after finishing a certain task. The idea is to “consciously, systematically, routinely bend or extend” everyday habits to polish your work as a manager.

Use the “prep-do-review” action model. Don’t simply react during an encounter. Instead, prepare by asking yourself what you want to do, why you want to do it, how you want to do it and who it will affect. Then carry out the actions you’ve decided to pursue. Finally, review the encounter by reflecting on what happened, whether you achieved your targeted result and what lessons the encounter holds for the future. Prep-do-review is a vehicle for asking the necessary, difficult questions all managers must ask and an excellent tool for improving how you manage yourself, your network and your team. Enhance its effectiveness by working within a “perpetual loop of prep-do-review-prep-do-review.” You’ll find yourself making progress throughout your daily work, rather than in spite of it.

About the Authors

Professor **Linda A. Hill** teaches business administration at Harvard Business School. **Kent Lineback**, a former executive and now a writer and coach, has co-authored or collaborated on more than 12 business books.