

Course Transcript

Facing Challenges as a First-time Manager

Course Overview

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Challenges of a First-Time Manager

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Course Overview

[Course title: Facing Challenges as a First-time Manager.] High expectations are often placed on first-time managers. Along with these comes the pressure to succeed and the need to prove yourself in a management position. Establishing credibility early and building new working relationships go a long way in helping first time managers succeed in adjusting to their new responsibilities. In this course, you will learn ways to establish credibility and manage former colleagues effectively. You'll also learn how to balance conflicting expectations as a manager.

Building Your Credibility as a New Manager

Learning Objective

After completing this topic, you should be able to

- *specify ways of establishing your credibility as a new manager*

1.

[Topic title: Building Your Credibility as a New Manager.] [Jason and Sue Lynn are talking to each other.] "That's the new manager." [Jason addresses Sue Lynn while pointing at Sophia.]

"I met her when she was in another division, here's her first management position."

"Oh great, so we get to be her experiment."

"Maybe it'll be okay. Maybe she won't last long, I don't even remember the last guy's name."

[Sophia joins Jason and Sue Lynn.] "Hi, I'm Sophia, I'm your new manager."

Like Sophia, you may be new, starting your first managerial position. Like Sophia, you may have almost nothing on which to base your initial actions or decisions. You certainly don't know how people will react to you, your plans, or your way of doing things. Like Sophia, you may be more than a little nervous, but you know you're capable. That's why you were hired. The question is, how do you communicate this to your new employees?

To gain respect and trust, you must establish and build your credibility as a manager. Credibility is the ability to inspire others' belief in you. And your trustworthiness, reliability, integrity, and ability as a manager. To understand why credibility matters, just consider what happens when it's missing. When managers can't inspire loyalty and commitment, employees perform poorly. They require more supervision because they lose respect for you and often, by extension, to the job. Establish yourself from the very start and you'll have the credibility you need to continue to get things done.

However you can, secure some early wins. Consider setting a short term goal that your team is likely to achieve. Looking for and achieving early wins demonstrates your managerial competence in your new role. Early wins, even relatively small ones, create a positive impression for both your employees and your boss. These successes will jumpstart your relationships with your employees and let you feel more in control. Although it's okay for early wins to be relatively small, they should have substance. Focus on the specific rather than trying to address broad issues. Then, celebrate your team's success. Show them you understand and appreciate their hard work. Beyond that, simply do what you say you're going to do. If you make a commitment, honor it, and don't make promises you can't keep. Be honest. Dishonesty destroys credibility. If you can't do something, don't say you can. If you don't know the answer, say so. Then, make sure you find out the answer and get back to whoever asked the question as soon as possible. *[Jason and Sue Lynn are talking to each other.]*

"The new boss seems to know what she's doing."

"Sophia, her name is Sophia."

Communicating Effectively as a New Manager

Learning Objective

After completing this topic, you should be able to

- *recognize how to communicate with your team as a first-time manager*

1.

[Topic title: Communicating Effectively as a New Manager.] [Sophia, Sue Lynn, and Ryan are in a meeting.] "And the figures under your old manager just won't cut it. They need to come up to the new margins." [Sophia addresses Sue Lynn.]

"But they're being adjusted again. And what numbers do we need to meet?"

"The new ones, we've got to get them up."

"I think you're confusing her."

"You have high standards. I'm trying to meet them now that you've promoted me."

"You don't know the new margins, do you?" *[Sophia is perplexed.]*

Sophia is a first-time manager. She wants to show that she means business. She knows first impressions matter. Her team needs insight, good judgment, and competent leadership. Sophia wants to provide that but she's not done that here. To build and maintain your credibility as a manager, you have to set clear and appropriate expectations. Clarity is important to get results that ensure your team's work aligns with your organization's goals. But clarity isn't enough. Sophia was clear that she expects Sue Lynn's numbers to improve, but it was not clear about what they need to improve to. It's important that your expectations are also appropriate if you want your people to actually meet them. Talk with your employees, establish and define your relationship with them. This doesn't require acting tough and making demands, but rather discussing what you mean by successful working relationships. Focus on the standards you expect. Set high, but reachable goals. You can be demanding, but also fair and capable of being satisfied. Setting reasonable goals allows you to gain an understanding of what each of your employees is capable of. But there's more. You must also work to communicate openly and honestly. By encouraging open communication, your employees will know that they can come to you with news, good or bad, without fear of reprisal or blame. Share knowledge and information with your team. Pass on information from upper management about what's happening in the company. Remember, it's a lot easier to be honest from the start than it is to correct misconceptions later on. *[Sophia and Sue Lynn are in a meeting.]*

"I'll be honest with you, Sue Lynn, your work is pretty bad."

"Okay." *[Sue Lynn is taken aback and is disappointed.]*

While it's important to be direct, you can do so in a caring way. Your employees expect you to be honest about their performance and hold them accountable. But there's such a thing as being too direct in delivering the truth. Before communicating, ask yourself whether you're giving useful information that will benefit your team and whether it's the right time and place to give it. Delivering information tactlessly isn't ideal, but keep in mind that being too careful, hesitant or vague also sends the wrong message. It can be a delicate balance, but it's part of the manager's job to achieve it. *[Sophia and Sue Lynn are in a meeting.]*

"I'll be honest with you, Sue Lynn, I'm concerned about your work lately."

"I know, I'm struggling with this project. How can I fix this?"

Managing Former Coworkers: Acknowledging the Change

Learning Objective

After completing this topic, you should be able to

- *recognize techniques for acknowledging the relationship change between you and your former coworkers*

1.

[Topic title: Managing Former Coworkers: Acknowledging the Change.] [Sophia, Sue Lynn, and Jason are in a meeting. Sophia addresses Sue Lynn and Jason.] "First off, I'd just like to say that even though I'm manager now, I still consider myself just one of the team."

"I can't believe they promoted her." [Jason addresses Sue Lynn.]

"I like Sophia, she's nice."

"Sure, you guys are tight." [Jason smiles sarcastically.]

If you're new to the department or the company, you start with a mostly blank slate. But if you've been promoted from within, your new employees are your former coworkers. They were once your peers, perhaps even your friends, or maybe not, but now they all report to you. Some will be happy for you. Some, well, may not be. Either way, things are going to be different. As a first time manager, these differences may be especially jarring. Fortunately, you can make things smoother when you've acknowledged the relationship change between you and your former coworkers. Perhaps the hardest of the changes is to maintain personal boundaries. Sophia and Sue Lynn are friendly. They've been to lunch together two or three times. They've shared company gossip. Like it or not, this has to change. When managing former coworkers, you have to set clear boundaries in your new relationships. If you leave the boundaries unstated, you risk misunderstanding and resentment. *[Sophia, Sue Lynn, and Jason are in a meeting. Sue Lynn addresses Sophia and Jason is being a listener.]*

"And so, it was a really bad night. I'll try to get those figures to you by the end of the day."

"All I can ask is that you try. And Jason, you'll have the figures by noon?"

"I have them now. Two-faced." [Jason is upset by Sophia's blunt reaction towards him.]

Along those lines, if you demonstrate from the start that you'll treat everyone fairly, you'll avoid a lot of headaches. Don't play favorites. If someone tries to take advantage of your friendship, explain that giving preferential treatment will inevitably have a negative impact on morale and breed resentments. And when resentments arise, meet with that person privately, letting them do the talking. Don't try to persuade the person to accept you, just work on clearing the air. Don't apologize for your promotion. And don't be dismissive just because you're the boss now. This leads to more resentment, instead collaborate. Ask for their thoughts on how to deal with the issue. It won't be easy, but it is necessary. You need to encourage openness and address concerns about your promotion head on. Ignoring it won't work. Facing it is part of acknowledging that your relationships have changed. And when your people talk, listen carefully. Try to understand their viewpoints. Assure them your focus is now on what's right for the business, and that favoritism is not something that will help.

Ultimately, you will prove their worries unfounded but initially pitfalls await. Your team knows it. You need to know it, too, and deal with it.

Managing Former Coworkers: Showing Support

Learning Objective

After completing this topic, you should be able to

- *describe ways in which you can use your new managerial position to support your former coworkers*

1.

[Topic title: Managing Former Coworkers: Showing Support.] [Sue Lynn, Jason, and Sophia are in a meeting.] "I was excited about Sophia's promotion, but now I'm starting to have my doubts." [Sue Lynn addresses Jason disappointingly.]

"That meeting was a disaster. I mean, how does she expect us to finish all this on time and budget?"

"I thought I understood the project, but now I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure Sophia understands it either."

"Hey team, great meeting, are you as fired up as I am?" *[Sophia addresses Sue Lynn and Jason.]*

"Yay."

Being a first time manager is tough. If you've been promoted from within the company, it can be even tougher. Your new employees are your old coworkers. This can be awkward for everyone. Some may be happy and supportive, some not so much. They all, however, deserve your support. Think about how recently you were in their position, with the same hopes and frustrations. If you can demonstrate that as manager, you want to improve their situations and that you care about their development and success, you'll be doing everyone, especially yourself, a favor. One way to support your former peers is by encouraging their involvement. You know these people. Make use of their skills, show them you value their expertise. Involve them in the operation of the department. While it's important to acknowledge that you're no longer just one of the gang, you need to reassure them that working together is a priority for you. Then recognize and praise your team's accomplishments. This helps overcome possible jealousy and resentment. By committing to working as a team, you'll let your former coworkers know that while some things have changed, the best aspects of your relationships are still there. *[Sophia, Sue Lynn, and Ryan are in a meeting. Sophia addresses Sue Lynn.]*

"How's it coming?"

"Honestly, not so great. We're working really hard and we're going to need at least one more person on this if we're going to meet the start date."

"I don't want to micro manage your first project, but it sounds like you might need to request another person." *[Sophia listens carefully.]*

"Can you do that?"

"Can I do that?" *[Sophia looks skeptical.]*

"Yeah, we can make that happen." *[Sophia smiles after Ryan's positive reply.]*

At the very least, Sophia can ask. Supporting your team can take many forms. But one of the most basic is pitching in and providing resources they need to do their jobs. Those may be budgetary, facilities,

supplies, and equipment, or additional personnel. Whatever they are, it's now part of your job to provide them as best you can. Show your team you support them by working to supply what they need. If you cannot supply it on your own, then take it to the next level up and make a request. Repeat as necessary. Even if the answer is ultimately no, at the least, your people know that you understand their needs and are fighting for them. When you directly involve them, praise their achievements, and show them you will do everything you can to help them succeed, you'll go a long way toward securing your own success and being a good first time manager.

Responding as a Manager to Conflicting Expectations

Learning Objective

After completing this topic, you should be able to

- *identify management guidelines that will help you respond to conflicting expectations in the workplace*

1.

[Topic title: Responding as a Manager to Conflicting Expectations.] [Sophia, Sue Lynn, Jason, and Ryan are in a meeting. All three address Sophia simultaneously.] "I still need to know if you'll approve travel for that training course in Memphis."

"The management group sent another request for the updated schedule. They say ASAP."

"IT says they won't support us. We've got to have that new software like yesterday."

"I don't have your updated figures for last quarter." [Sophia looks perplexed. She tries to understand everyone's concern.]

As a first-time manager, you'll deal with three significant sets of relationships. And three sets of expectations. Sometimes they'll conflict. You'll need to handle the expectations of your direct reports, your boss, and the members of your management team. Each has the potential to conflict with the others. Frankly, each has the potential to conflict within itself. And each will affect how you approach your work. And how smooth your transition to manager will be. You must balance these conflicting expectations through communication, leadership, and conflict resolution. Luckily, there are some guidelines to help you do that. Three of them. First, don't disregard expectations. Even when you can't resolve an issue to everyone's satisfaction, it's vital to communicate that you take their issues seriously. It may not make them any happier, but they will know you take their needs seriously. Let's suppose Sophia's boss needs her to trim her budget. But her direct report, Jason, needs to attend an out of state training session to stay up on his job. Sophia was able to find an online training solution that didn't require travel. And her budget stayed on track. *[Ryan and Sophia are talking to each other.]*

"Ryan, my team has to have new software. IT won't support their format any longer."

"I haven't got the budget for it. Have you talked to IT?"

Sophia needs to talk to IT. And she needs to talk more with Ryan. The second guideline to help with conflicting expectations is to be an advocate for your people. When expectations of bosses or peers threaten productivity, you must advocate for what your people require in order to do their jobs. Sophia's team either needs new software, which Ryan says they cannot afford, or the IT teams needs to continue to support their current format. Sophia has no authority over either of them. So she must rely on good communication and collaboration. Is there another team or department in the same situation? Working together might convince the company to provide either the funds or the IT support to allow them all to stay productive. Remember that management is an ongoing process. Therefore, the third guideline is to always work to maintain good relations with each group. The keys to positive relations are communication, collaboration, and compromise.

Expectations will conflict. It's a given. And as in any other conflict, sometimes people can't get exactly what they want. Conflict resolution doesn't, however, require expressing anger, frustration, or stubbornness. They are enemies of good relations. Best to keep them far away from your discussion and collaboration.

Let's review what you learned in this course. To successfully overcome the challenges of being a first-time manager, establish and build your credibility so that you inspire others' belief in you; communicate effectively; acknowledge the relationship change between you and your former colleagues, and show them your support; and manage the conflicting expectations of your direct reports, boss, and members of your management team.

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