



# Book Skills for New Managers

Morey Stettner  
McGraw-Hill, 2000

## Recommendation

Most of us developed our management skills, or lack thereof, in the same way: through trial and error. But Morey Stettner’s new book will give anyone freshly promoted to the ranks of management a valuable head start by spelling out practical steps that new managers can take to be effective. For all of you old-timers, reading this book will induce a near constant mental stream of "I wish someone had told me that when I was starting out." For example, Stettner’s first step, writing out a basic plan of how you want to manage your subordinates, might at first seem a bit naive to veterans. But consider this point: How much time did you spend thinking about the techniques you would use in managing people before taking over your first managerial assignment? The probable answer is not much. In a clear voice laced with illustrative examples, Stettner covers the critical skills managers rely on every day: speaking, listening, criticizing and disciplining. For his insightful treatment of these topics, *BooksInShort* recommends this book to managers new and old, employees and students of management - But then again, aren’t we all?

## Take-Aways

- Having a managerial role model helps you create your own managerial template.
- Developing a management credo gives you a touchstone for charting your path as a new manager.
- Your ethics play a significant role in how effective a manager you are.
- Having total control, if you mean calling all the shots in the workplace, is a management myth.
- New managers need to keep their words and actions overwhelmingly consistent.
- You need to develop a voice that roars in the office.
- Listening is the management skill that new managers develop least.
- Motivating an employee involves a lot more than doling out money.
- When criticizing an employee’s work, use facts not opinions.
- When disciplining an employee, think about the lesson you want the employee to learn.

## Summary

# The Successful New Manager

New managers are like children leaving the nest, you wish the best for them, but you know they think they know it all. To avoid this pitfall, consider a template for being a manager and a management credo to guide your success. To develop a template, think about your role models. Who were the best bosses you ever had? Think about a strong leader, such as a coach or a volunteer coordinator. The person you select will be your role model. Use your knowledge of this person to complete the following five sentences and you will be on your way to being a successful new manager.

1. When faced with adversity, this manager will ....
2. To improve teamwork, this manager will ....
3. When explaining a concept, this manager will ....
4. To keep control of an unruly group, this manager will ....
5. Employees respect this manager because ....

“Exploit pride, not labor.”

Successful managers are leaders. Leadership is comprised of three basic and vital elements: patience, communication skills and ethics. To be able to write your own management credo, define how you will act in regard to these three factors. Take the following diagnostic tests on patience, communication skills and ethics to understand your potential managerial strengths and weaknesses. On all three, rate yourself from 1 to 5 on this scale:

- 1 = never.
- 2 = occasionally.
- 3 = sometimes.
- 4 = usually.
- 5 = always.
- When I tell someone to do something and they don't do it, I say it in a firmer tone.
- When someone talks slowly, I interrupt.
- When I see someone do something wrong, I instantly point it out.
- When someone keeps me waiting more than a minute or two, I resent it.
- When someone doesn't answer my question right away, I cut in and repeat it.

“By turning key employees into experts, you can create a teaching corps so that the members of your team essentially educate each other.”

[If you score 17 or more you have an overly controlling mindset and may lack patience.]

- When I ask a question, I'm very curious to hear the answer.
- I like to speak in front of groups.
- If I disagree, I confirm I've understood the other person before I give my view.
- If I need to cover many points, I outline what I want to say ahead of time.
- When I give instructions or explain complex ideas, I number each item.

“Bosses love information.”

[If you score 15 or less, you are losing opportunities to bond with others.]

- I set an example of the high ethical standard I want my staff to follow.
- If I'm in an ethical bind, I'll talk about the situation with a wise mentor.
- I'd rather admit doing something wrong than cover it up and hope I don't get caught.
- I apply "the sniff test" when facing an ethical dilemma: If it smells bad I don't do it.
- I'm at peace with my ethical behavior.

“The real test of your management skills rests on your ability to grow into the job.”

[If you score 18 or below, you have questionable ethics.]

## Developing Your Management Credo

Your management credo is a set of written beliefs that summarizes your goals and commitments as a manager. The document you create should be short, between 500 and 1,000 words. Choose a format that works for you, since, after all, you will have to use it. The format can be as simple as a list of "my goals" and "things I commit to." Use the information in the above tests to guide you in writing your credo. After you have written your credo, set it aside for several days. Then go back to it to make sure you agree with it.

“You need to develop a strong spine to manage.”

Do this as many times as necessary. When you are fully comfortable with the document, re-write it one final time so that you can keep it with you. Remember that it will be the touchstone for the attitude you want to project and how you want to lead to get results.

## Six Management Myths

New managers bring excitement and expectations to their jobs. Unfortunately, they also bring myths about successful management.

“The best way to build momentum as a new manager is to make it clear to everyone what you stand for.”

Steer clear of these six management myths from the beginning:

- Myth 1: You must call all the shots - No you can't. Collaboration is the key to success. Besides, why would you want to call the shots? Who has the energy to do that?
- Myth 2: You can't trust anyone - The command-and-control model is ridiculous in this era. Absolute control is as stupid as absolute trust. Both positions are naive and alienating.
- Myth 3: You must remain objective at all times - Being strong doesn't mean being objective and removed. As long as you base your decisions on facts and not emotions, your employees will respect a show of passion.
- Myth 4: You must defend your staff - This is true, but not when they have done something stupid. Again, base your action to defend on facts and not on a knee-jerk emotional response. When you choose the latter, you really are defending your own ego, not your employees.
- Myth 5: You cannot back down - Backing down in the workplace is not the same as backing down in the schoolyard. In the workplace, it is often strategically better to stay out of dogfights. In the schoolyard, you have to fight to survive. Under these six specific circumstances, backing down may be the best and only option: 1) You state the wrong facts; 2) You are fighting for peanuts; 3) Circumstances have changed; 4) Precedent saves you; 5) Your boss disapproves, and 6) Great results hang in the balance.
- Myth 6: You are the best teacher - Sometimes you are, other times you are not. Develop experts on your staff into teachers and trainers instead of trying to be an expert on everything. Remember that your employees have talent - which is why you hired them.

## Building Momentum in a New Job

To build your momentum, be clear about what you stand for and keep your words and actions consistent. To avoid sending mixed messages, follow these three rules: 1) Do not improvise when you could repeat yourself instead; 2) Do not fake it, and 3) Do not oversell or over-promise.

“The whole point of trying to help your employees feel motivated is to help them become more productive as well as happy about their work and thus not want to move on to another job.”

To build momentum, you can also:

- Prepare a written plan for your first group employee meeting. Preparing a written plan will help you will avoid the temptation to "wing it." Remember that first impressions tend to stick long after the meeting is over.
- Look for ways to score quick wins and unclog "input channels." When you score quick wins, your employees will understand

that you are responsive to your team's efforts. By unclogging input channels, you will get enough to evaluate your own job performance.

## **Listening**

New managers tend to speak more than they listen. Do the opposite; listen more than you speak. Successful listening requires interpreting, assessing and responding. Interpreting is the process of restating what you have heard to make sure that there is mutual understanding of the topic being discussed. Assessing is the process of judging what you have heard from an open-minded perspective. Responding is the process of letting the other person know what you feel about the topic being discussed.

“The right way to criticize is to focus on observable actions, not attitudes.”

Use effective eye contact and body language and fight off the defensive reflex, which comes quite naturally. Eye contact shows your interest in the speaker. When you break eye contact, do so for a second, but avoid sharp darting movements. A "wandering" eye can be a sign of nerves and, to some people, indicates a lack of confidence. Try to maintain a strong, yet calm posture. Avoid yawning at all costs.

## **Speaking**

Effective speaking is critical to a new manager's success. Pay attention to how you communicate and to your voice. You need a voice that roars. To make sure that your voice works for you, start with your inflection. Practice placing emphasis on the words you want to highlight. Then pay attention to your projection. Do you project far enough to speak to a group effectively? If not, practice speaking to the person farthest away from you.

“Treat delegating as a chance to build rapport with your employees.”

Get rid of language fluff. Be very conscious of using too many qualifiers, repeating your thoughts or rambling before or after you have made your point. "Package your points" when addressing employees so you can present your point in an easy-to-understand manner. Remember the power of three. People grasp ideas that come grouped in three more readily than other rhetorical forms. Try using "there are three steps to this process" or "I have three reasons for asking you to do this" when speaking to employees.

“Radiate enthusiasm with your body language when you first meet someone.”

Asking the right questions is another aspect of successful speaking. Questioning lets you get the information you need and lets you show your employees that you respect their ideas and opinions. Form questions that are simple, direct and based on facts. The best questions are simple prods such as, "What is the significance of that?" or "Do you want to ask something else?"

## **Motivating and Criticizing**

Motivating employees is more difficult than it sounds because people are complicated. Using money as a motivator only takes a manager so far. Pay close attention to what your employees need and you will learn how to motivate them effectively. Beyond money, all employees need attainment, power, belonging, independence, respect and equity.

“The only way to help people feel motivated is eyeball-to-eyeball.”

Criticizing employees is more difficult than it appears. For effective criticism, focus on performance, not personality. If you cover readily observable events, you can disarm the natural defensive reflex. Be very conscious of the terms you use when criticizing. Use descriptions rather than inferences. Inferences are more easily misinterpreted.

## **Discipline**

Deciding when and how to discipline an employee can be a new manager's most challenging task. First, to avoid reacting emotionally, understand what is at stake before you discipline an employee. Ask yourself; 1) What are the short- and long-term repercussions of the employee's behavior?, 2) What is the rationale for the employee's behavior?, 3) What lessons do you want your choice of

discipline to send? Six types of behavior that occur on a regular basis may require discipline. They are absenteeism and tardiness, disrespect and lack of cooperation, substance (including alcohol) abuse, use of unsafe practices, theft or a personal problem that disrupts the work of the office. Be sure that you understand office policy on these issues before you discipline.

## Organization

A new manager can use many techniques to maintain order and efficiency. Common suggestions include: creating an optimal hour for peak performance tasks, establishing a call-back procedure, investing in the future and banishing time wasters. Manage your down time by using slow periods to do tasks you never seem able to accomplish otherwise.

Demonstrate your organizational skills at every opportunity and use these five strategies to get noticed by others in the company: 1) Give updates on your promises; 2) Put everything down on paper; 3) Confirm key facts; 4) Post your whereabouts, and 5) Keep your office tidy.

## About the Author

**Morey Stettner** is a writer and communication-skills consultant in Portsmouth, NH. He is the author of *The Art of Winning Conversation* and editor of *Working Smart* and *Executive Strategies*, two monthly newsletters published by the National Institute of Business Management in McLean, VA. He also writes weekly front-page articles on effective management for *Investor's Business Daily*.

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