

More Than a Minute

How to Be an Effective
Leader and Manager
in Today's Changing World

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Former President, The Ken Blanchard Companies

Book More Than a Minute

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Recommendation

Holly G. Green capably covers basic leadership and management, and stresses the importance of communication, honesty, feedback and goal setting. Her book, while not particularly innovative, will help novice managers set objectives and meet them by working with the people they lead. Green's goal, as former president of The Ken Blanchard Companies, is to expand on the advice Blanchard gave in his classic, *One Minute Manager*, decades ago – hence, her book's title. Green's counsel on dealing with problematic employees will be particularly useful to beginners. Experienced managers and leaders are undoubtedly familiar with this material, even if they aren't updating it or putting it into practice, and that is where *BooksInShort* thinks this back-to-basics, contemporary manual might spur them to action.

Take-Aways

- Less than 5% of organizations have written goals and objectives.
- Studies show that effective communication within a company improves business.
- Employees cannot excel without the proper tools, equipment and information.
- Employees without goals have no sense of direction.
- Strategic planning requires a formal approach.
- Successful goal setting demands diligent follow-up from managers.
- Constructive criticism is designed to help employees – not punish them.
- Good, mutual feedback between managers and employees happens constantly, not just once a year during performance evaluations.
- You can take corrective action with an employee without confrontation.
- Good leaders solve problems instead of assigning blame.

Summary

Start with Strategic Planning

Good managers and leaders have always shared the same admirable qualities. They set reasonable goals for their employees, communicate openly and honestly, offer encouragement and guidance, and welcome feedback – both negative and positive. However, the workplace environment has changed significantly during the past 25 years. Managers now must contend with employees from three or four generations who have different attitudes, principles and ethics. Turnover rates have increased dramatically. People rarely stay with the same company for their entire careers. The Internet has removed geographical obstacles, enabling companies to employ people all over the world. Managers accustomed to dealing with workers face-to-face are now communicating with long-distance employees via e-mail and teleconferencing.

“Almost all employees want to be part of a compelling future, want to know what is most important at work and what excellence looks like.”

With so many changes in the business environment, managers can lose sight of their fundamental responsibilities. Many managers neglect goal setting, yet insist that their employees know what is expected of them. In fact, employees are often unaware of the company’s strategic planning initiatives. They don’t know their priorities or objectives, and they can’t explain how to measure their personal success, or their companies’. Managers must spend serious time and energy on goal setting and strategic planning. They can hold their employees accountable only when they’ve made them aware of their responsibilities. This process of “organizational strategic planning” covers:

- **“Mission”** – Why does your organization exist? Are you trying to make the best products in your industry or are you focused on customer satisfaction? Are you interested in energizing and inspiring people, or do you aspire to solve problems?
- **“Guiding principles and organizational attributes”** – These values and principles govern how your company deals with employees and conducts business. These qualities must be realistic, attainable and unshakeable.
- **“Value proposition”** – If integrity, loyalty, innovation and honesty are among your stated priorities, you must be able to deliver.
- **“Destination”** – Where is your organization headed? When and how do you plan to get there? Long-range planning only works if it’s clearly spelled out and achievable. The commitment to reach a set destination must exist at all levels of your organization.
- **“Strategies or areas of focus”** – Organizational or departmental goal setting requires a coordinated effort. Employees must understand their tasks and duties, and have the necessary tools and resources to accomplish their personal and organizational objectives.

Identifying the Target

Most leaders don’t commit their corporate goals to paper, even though studies show that employees who write their goals are higher achievers. Many business leaders don’t know how to set goals or just believe that the whole process is a waste of time, but written goals are pivotal to your success. Employees want to know what you expect of them and of the organization.

“If you do not remain vigilant in aligning core initiatives with your strategies, you will find that time, money and other resources are spent working on the wrong things.”

As a manager, you should meet personally with your employees, if possible, since face-to-face meetings convey urgency. Explain the organization’s objectives, codes of behavior and ethical standards. Discuss how the company plans to reach its targets. Share as many details as possible. Employees should understand how goal setting affects their teams and departments. Reaching goals requires follow-up. Without reinforcement, employees will forget about 75% of what they’ve learned. Send e-mail updates and reminders to your staffers. Meet briefly once a month to keep everyone in the loop. To keep your goal-setting initiatives on track, take these steps:

- **Be enthusiastic** – Employees will feed off your energy.
- **Publicly recognize employees’ accomplishments** – Creating excitement and building morale is a vital part of your job.
- **Share information** – Quickly tell staff members about changes in personnel, policy or operations. People perceive a lapse in sharing information as dishonesty, so failure to be forthcoming can damage your relationships with your workers.
- **Improve communication** – Build your conversational skills. Look people in the eye. Listen instead of thinking about what you want to say next.

Brew a Culture of Excellence

High-performing organizations typically generate a culture of excellence. Employees are aware of their contributions to the company’s success and take pride in being part of a successful team. Motivated employees “go the extra mile” even when it’s not required. Companies with high-performing cultures “nurture an atmosphere of trust.” Employees know they have their managers’ support and they act in the company’s best interests. If first-class customer service is a stated organizational priority, empower employees to step outside traditional procedural boundaries. Happy employees always look for ways to make things better. The factors that contribute to a culture of excellence include:

- **Sufficient resources** – Employees have the right tools, equipment and information. Adequate staffing ensures that each person can focus on the tasks at hand.
- **“Inspiring” communication** – Individuals understand what managers expect of them in the context of corporate goals. Employees can discuss issues openly with their superiors.
- **Smart assignments** – Leaders give people jobs that fit their knowledge, skills and motivation. Workers should not be overwhelmed or underchallenged.
- **Systematic feedback** – The lines of communication are open between managers and employees who provide mutual reinforcement.

Hear Ye, Hear Ye

High-quality employee management relationships depend on continual feedback. Too many organizations rely solely on yearly evaluations. Managers should monitor employee performance constantly, offering rewards for exceptional efforts and consequences for subpar performance. Unfortunately, feedback is not part of the culture in many companies. Employees may have had bad experiences with feedback from insensitive supervisors or may view any change in the internal system with apprehension. At its core, effective feedback is based on facts, not opinion, and is designed to improve performance, not to tear people down.

“Goal setting is a subset of strategic planning.”

The whole concept of feedback intimidates many people, mainly because they associate it with negativity. In fact, good feedback must link directly to attaining “agreed-upon goals.” An employee’s personality or behavior is irrelevant unless it affects job performance. Be careful when offering constructive criticism. Managers, as well as workers, must welcome feedback about their performance and commit to correcting negative behaviors. In some companies, people who are not involved with the interested parties facilitate feedback sessions.

“Presenting data-based information is a powerful way to begin strategic planning or goal setting.”

Some managers claim that they value open communication, but send negative messages by glancing at their computers or papers while speaking with employees, postponing meetings or ignoring staffers' e-mails. Managers may be reluctant to commit to a formal feedback system because it's time-consuming and requires effort. Daily demands and responsibilities can divert managers' attention from their employees' need for "clarity, direction, information, inspiration and engagement." Managers often make these mistakes during performance evaluations:

- Comparing employees instead of using objective standards.
- Holding onto old notions and opinions about employees rather than keeping an open mind and evaluating data fairly.
- Judging employees favorably simply because they have agreeable personalities or treating them unfairly in reaction to some unpleasant personality quirk.

"Don't praise someone because you are feeling guilty after providing constructive feedback and you think you need to cushion it."

Employees see compliments from a manager who offers positive feedback randomly and without purpose as insincere. Since you expect your staff to report to work on time and perform basic job duties, save your praise for people who exceed quotas, solve difficult problems, give sparkling presentations, spearhead charity drives or inspire their colleagues. Recognition takes many forms, from a handshake to a gift certificate or a special parking space. Workers who consistently exceed expectations frequently should earn promotions.

Now for the Bad News

Many managers are uncomfortable dealing with underperforming employees, especially those who have quick tempers or abrasive personalities. But ignoring problems and allowing them to fester will eventually affect your entire department by damaging morale and hurting performance. To make a plan for corrective action without a confrontation, follow these guidelines:

- Constructive criticism is meant to improve future performance. Be clear that you are not scolding or punishing the employee.
- Don't waste time chatting about the weather. Without being accusatory, explain in direct language the problems you observed and the conclusions you reached.
- Encourage the employee to respond, and offer his or her side. Listen carefully and be receptive to taking in information that could change your thinking.
- Reach agreement on a plan to correct the problems.

"Figure out what is getting in your way and work to remove the beliefs, the thoughts, the rationalizations that stop you from spending time and energy on strategic planning and goal setting."

You may not see a change right off the bat. Give employees sufficient time to make adjustments. Coach them through the process. Help them succeed. Provide encouragement when you see progress, and gentle reminders when old behaviors surface. Chronic underachievers must understand that consequences will become more severe and possibly lead to termination.

Follow the Game Plan

For goal setting, build in monitoring, motivation, tracking and flexibility. Since business is always evolving, priorities may shift and goals can change quickly. Align your core initiatives and your strategic actions. If you want to increase sales, for instance, make sure your salespeople are learning innovative techniques for working with customers. Providing a new fleet of vehicles for your salespeople would be an example of misalignment.

"Goal setting today must be more strongly linked to the big picture to be effective. Today's employees crave an understanding of the why coupled with the what."

Leaders and managers in today's environment have a greater responsibility for personal improvement. They need to expand their knowledge and make themselves increasingly valuable to thrive in an uncertain job market. They must understand that almost every situation and exchange is a valuable educational experience. Outstanding leaders share these traits:

- They have a natural curiosity and never pass up learning opportunities.
- They are interested in the way other employees and departments operate.
- They never consider themselves to be above anyone else.
- They are open-minded and nonjudgmental.
- They are willing to listen to other perspectives and opinions.
- They are more concerned with solving problems than with assigning blame.
- They are aware of how their behavior affects others.
- They understand the consequences of their actions.
- They approach others honestly and directly.
- They try to spend more time listening than talking.
- They make important decisions without hesitation, but only after gathering the necessary information.

"Think of your employees as water. Provide a container and direct the flow, and you will create extraordinary power."

Good managers are in a constant state of self-evaluation. Many record their thoughts and reflections for future reference. They understand the value of analyzing both triumphs and disappointments. Being a leader means taking risks and not being afraid to stumble occasionally, but effective leaders admit their mistakes and rebound quickly. The biggest mistake leaders can make is failing to appreciate the enormous role they play in goal setting and creating a culture of excellence in their organizations.

About the Author

Holly G. Green is CEO of The Human Factor, Inc., and has been an employee and consultant for several multinational corporations, including AT&T, Sony Electronics, Microsoft and Google.
