



Book Managers, Can You Hear Me Now?

Hard-Hitting Lessons on How to Get Real Results

Denny Strigl and Frank Swiatek
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Recommendation

Denny F. Strigl, former CEO and president of Verizon Wireless, is a no-holds-barred type of guy. Writing with performance consultant Frank Swiatek, Strigl offers straight-shooting advice for managers and those who aspire to the role. The authors lay out exactly what’s required of you every day to become a great manager. They present no sweeping concepts or grand theories, and little here will surprise you. Nevertheless, the authors outline the proper activities, behaviors and characteristics of a quality manager. *BooksInShort* recommends this simple yet savvy book to any manager or manager-in-training.

Take-Aways

- Regardless of your specific management responsibilities, focus on four key goals:
- First, increase revenue. That is your real job, regardless of your department’s function.
- Second, think proactively of ways to improve your company’s sales.
- Third, focus relentlessly on customer service.
- Fourth, improve efficiency and cut costs at all times.
- A manager should produce results.
- Achieve results with positive, upbeat activities and behavior.
- Many managers get caught up in work that produces nothing of value, such as emails and meetings.
- To manage people effectively, gain their trust.
- To earn your employees’ trust, hold yourself accountable to them at all times.

Summary

No One Knows What You Are Supposed to Do – So Be Sure to Do It Well

As a young executive in the telecommunications industry, Denny F. Strigl was excited about his promotion to a managerial support position. He didn’t know much about his new job, so he arrived early on his first day of work. He went to meet his new boss and get his instructions. An assistant told him that the boss had not yet arrived and probably would be behind schedule most of the day. Strigl returned to his own office. Because Strigl didn’t know what his job was or what his duties were, he had nothing to do until his boss appeared two days later.

“Good managers focus constantly on getting basic, simple tasks done the right way over and over again.”

The boss said he had no idea what Strigl’s job entailed, but urged the newcomer to do his “best every day.” He suggested that Strigl meet with the department head to learn his duties. Strigl tried to connect with the department head for several days. Finally, Strigl ran into him in an elevator and asked if they could meet. The executive suggested that Strigl schedule an appointment through his assistant. Strigl explained that he had been trying to do that for days. The department head told Strigl that “he was a busy man.”

“Trust is the glue that binds managers and employees.”

After another week of passive ignorance, Strigl “camped out” next to the department head’s office until they could meet. The department head told Strigl, “Your job is to carve out a niche for yourself and perfect it.”

Strigl soon learned that no one in his department knew their jobs, either. After six months, he was grateful to transfer to another department. He took with him one lesson: Managers must provide “clear goals and direction.” Strigl swore that during his future managerial career he would never cast such a “negative shadow.”

“Accountability is the tool that enables managers to deliver results.”

Strigl rose through the ranks, spending four decades in the communications business and becoming president and CEO of the telecommunications giant Verizon Wireless. During that time, he developed the philosophy that all managers, no matter what their fields, departments or industries, have one job: to deliver the results their organizations expect and require.

The Manager’s Job

Nothing matters except performance. In any company, measure managerial performance against the “four fundamentals”:

1. **“Grow revenue”** – Increasing revenue is not only the job of sales and marketing. It is every manager’s responsibility. To illustrate, a human resources (HR) manager might devise a program to increase sales.
2. **“Get new customers”** – Every manager can build the company’s client base. For example, an information technology (IT) manager could develop a more efficient ordering system to attract customers.
3. **“Keep the customers you already have”** – Every employee in the company can optimize customers’ experiences to keep them loyal and happy.
4. **“Eliminate costs”** – Managers must figure out ways to operate more effectively and less expensively.

“Poor performers thrive in an unaccountable work climate.”

If you focus your management efforts on these four fundamental objectives, you’ll prosper. But if you get caught up in the extraneous activities that accompany management – filling out forms, emailing, attending conferences – you’ll suffer. If you are not careful, such distractions can take over your day. Great managers practice results-oriented behavior.

“It is more important to take action, even if it isn’t perfect, than do nothing.”

Avoid nine behavioral hurdles:

1. **“Managers fail to build trust and integrity”** – People will not follow you if they don’t trust you. Be honest and dependable, and speak in a straightforward way.
2. **“They have the wrong focus”** – Managers who fail to achieve results spend their time in activities that do not contribute to their primary objectives. “Stop doing things that don’t matter!”
3. **“They don’t model or build accountability”** – Managers must hold themselves responsible and insist on accountability from all their staff.
4. **“They fail to consistently reinforce what’s important”** – Managers must ensure that their employees know where to focus their efforts.
5. **“They overrely on consensus”** – Managers need to set direction and goals, not take votes.
6. **“They focus on being popular”** – Whether staffers like a manager is immaterial. What counts are the results that the manager achieves through his or her employees.
7. **“They get caught up in their self-importance”** – Great managers don’t care about showcasing themselves. They only care about attaining their targets.
8. **“They put their heads in the sand”** – Managers who insist on hearing only good news are sure to suffer rude awakenings. Quality managers want to hear bad news as soon as possible so they can do something about it.
9. **“They fix problems, not causes”** – If you respond to an issue but ignore its source, another related complication is sure to occur.

The Importance of Trust

A manager who cannot earn employees’ trust will fail. Trust depends on “integrity, openness and respect.” No manager can succeed without integrity. You must be honest in everything that you say and do. It’s the right way to act, and it guarantees effective communications. Your employees will not have to “read between the lines” when you speak. They will know that what you say is what you mean.

“The more managers focus on distractions, the less they focus on results.”

Be direct in your speech. Avoid buzzwords, corporate-speak and weasel words such as, “connect the dots, bubble up, push the envelope” or “low-hanging fruit.” Always watch the basics. For example, if salespeople are not hitting their quotas, find out if they are making the proper number of cold calls, appointments and so on.

“When you have the wrong focus, you create the wrong measurements.”

As a manager, your integrity is on the line. Compromise it in any way, and you will lose the trust of your staff. To be effective and to build trust, create “an ‘open’ work environment,” where your workers feel comfortable about speaking freely without fear of retribution. One of the best ways to create an open work environment is to leave your office and spend time in conversation with your employees. This demonstrates that you value the people who work for you and want to find out what matters to them. Always give your staff members immediate access.

“Bureaucracy is enemy number one of a healthy work culture.”

If your subordinates do not respect you, they will not trust you. The best way to gain respect is to treat others respectfully. Some 30% to 50% of managers fail to

advance (and in some cases, lose their jobs) because they treat their employees poorly. When staffers do not measure up, avoid personal attacks. Instead, discuss their performance. For example, you might say, “Robert, your sales are off by 32% for the first half of the month,” rather than disparaging his results.

“At the end of the day, you’re left with one of two pains – the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. Pick one.”

To win the respect of your employees, always hold yourself accountable. Work hard to make your workers the best professionals they can be. Strive to improve yourself as well. Being an effective manager requires having the proper mind-set. You cannot be egotistical or a complainer. Help develop and promote a strong corporate culture within your organization, one that all employees can feel proud of joining.

The Manager’s Workday

Starting fresh at work requires getting the rest you need at night. First thing in the morning, check your emails to get a quick line on what transpired the previous day and overnight. Respond appropriately to messages that require responses, but don’t let email consume your day.

“Managers are often blind to the shadow they cast due to the anxiety experienced during a critical incident.”

Get up from your desk and go see what your employees are doing. Be positive and optimistic in your interactions with them. Afterward, return to your office and deal with the most pressing professional issues. You also may have meetings to lead or attend. When you run a meeting, keep it simple. Always have a plan. Make sure each meeting has “a beginning, a middle and an end.” Start and finish on time. Reduce bureaucracy.

“Company culture...is the attitude that employees display and the actions employees take.”

Now it’s lunchtime. Don’t de-energize yourself with a heavy meal. Instead, go walk around outside. After lunch, check your email again, make any necessary calls and focus on problems you need to correct. Make the rounds of your employees again, visiting staff members who work in other locations if necessary. “The best and easiest tools to use in creating an open work environment are the manager’s own two legs.” At the day’s end, check with your staffers about the status of their activities. This also is a good time for personal coaching. Make a plan for tomorrow. Do your best to get out of the office before 6 pm. Try to avoid business dinners, which sap energy and steal time. If you must, it’s okay to work at home occasionally. Better still, get away from work to refresh yourself and recharge for tomorrow.

Accountability

Accountability is an all-important personal characteristic for any manager. Follow the rule: “If you touch it, you own it.” If something falls within your purview, assume responsibility. Don’t pass a problem on to someone else. Use these eight techniques to reinforce accountability within your organization:

1. **“The surprise visit”** – This will keep your staff members on their toes.
2. **“The unexpected follow-up phone call”** – If an employee says he or she will accomplish an objective by a specific date, phone a day or so after that date to check on the status of the task.
3. **“Coaching”** – Help your employees by counseling them in small doses. Even a quick conversation can be an effective coaching session.
4. **“The 5:15 report”** – To ensure that your staffers remain directly accountable to you, instruct them to send you routine “5:15 reports”: summaries that take staffers 15 minutes to prepare, take you five minutes to read, and that land on your desk or in your email by 5:15 pm.
5. **“The performance agreement”** – This details specifically what an employee agrees to accomplish within a set period of time.
6. **“The operations review”** – This is a comprehensive report from the members of your team about their primary operations. Strigl held such reviews four times a year in each of Verizon’s four regions.
7. **“The performance appraisal”** – Make sure that your employees understand that these evaluations are as important to you as to them. Never have workers prepare their own performance appraisals. Write them yourself.
8. **“The performance improvement plan”** – Use this tactic with staffers who need to upgrade their work. Be positive. Send the message that the whole point of the plan is to help the person perform better. Establish a set time frame for performance improvement, “usually 30, 60 or 90 days.”

“If you personally fall short of your culture, take action to correct it as soon as possible.”

Be aware of the impact your behavior has on your employees. “When managers change their message too often, people become confused about what’s important.” For example, if a “critical incident” occurs, something highly challenging for you as a manager, don’t lose your cool and become emotional. That would set the worst possible example for your team members, who almost certainly will mimic your negative behavior later. Your “symbolic acts” also influence your employees. For example, when Verizon Wireless initially developed its text messaging function, most of its executives had no interest in it. However, Strigl made sure to send text messages to his senior management team and other personnel as often as possible. He insisted that they text message him back. Once they did, they lined up enthusiastically behind the company’s new telecommunication capability.

About the Authors

Denny F. Strigl is the former president and CEO of Verizon Wireless. Performance consultant **Frank Swiatek** has worked with numerous *Fortune* 500 companies, including Verizon.
