



Advice for the First-Time (or Experienced) Manager

By Jennifer Anderson

Congratulations – you landed your first role in leadership! Welcome to the beginning of significant personal and professional growth. To help you navigate the immense learning curve, here are the top 12 areas that all managers need to navigate to achieve success as a leader.

For those who have been in a management role for years, this article provides helpful reminders of how to be a great manager. All managers – experienced and new – should read on and apply this information in their daily roles.

1) **Keep Learning** – Even though you have moved up the ladder into management, that does not mean that you should stop learning your trade. Continue to find ways to blend learning into your work. Attend conferences (such as the upcoming NCSEA Summit in D.C. in October), read trade publications and magazines, and follow subject matter experts on social media. You will also want to include time for learning how to be a manager. There are more books on management than you can read in a lifetime; just ask your favorite manager what leadership books they enjoy and start there.

2) **Communication Skills** – If you do not know how to communicate effectively, you will never succeed as a manager. The key to communicating is first to understand the other person's perspective; you should ask questions and seek to understand their point of view. Listening skills are critical in all areas of life, and now, as a manager, it is critical that you learn how to listen well.

3) **Personal Brand** – Your personal brand is the mark you want to make or the “legacy” that you want to create. Start with answering the question: “When you get to the end of your life, what do you want to be known for?” The answer will help you to know how you want to interact with people today. As a manager, you will impact people – it is important that you are clear about how you want to influence them.

4) **Self-care** – You are busy, who isn't these days?! Find ways to incorporate exercise, hobbies, and fun time into your life. Anyone who has had health concerns will quickly tell you that if you do not have good health, you have nothing at all. New managers must find time to take care of their health – mentally, physically, and emotionally.

5) **Time Management** – Learning how to manage your calendar will be vitally important

to long-term success as a leader. The best way is to set aside time each Friday to review your week. Look for things that you could have deleted, delegated, and deferred. For example, start with an evaluation of your meetings. Were the meetings effective? Were the right people in the meetings? Did the meetings even need to happen? Maybe there are meetings that could have been canceled, freeing up an hour to work on building relationships with your new direct reports instead.

6) **Mentor** – Today you may not be able to fathom how important a mentor will be. Ask anyone who is a good manager about what has made the difference in their career, and they will all tell you how someone else helped them in their career. Having a mentor that you can go to for advice and help is invaluable. At some point, you will have the opportunity to mentor others as well.

7) **Interview Skills** – Work with your HR team to understand how they want you to interview for the company; they will help you to avoid getting sued for asking the wrong kinds of questions. But, as an individual, look for unique ways to personally connect with applicants. Recruits are not just evaluating the firm; they are evaluating you as their potential new boss. Help them get to know you, and you will get to know them better too.

8) **Hiring and Firing** – As with interview skills, work closely with your HR representatives to ensure that you are following legal guidelines for hiring and firing employees. Learning how to navigate hiring of an employee is not just an HR function. In fact, during the onboarding process, it's vitally important that you are involved in welcoming the new hire effectively. They will be working with you more than anyone else, so get involved in the process. Getting comfortable with firing people takes a long time. Hopefully, as you get better at developing relationships with your direct reports, you will find firing to be at a minimum in your tenure as a leader.

9) **Online Reputation** – Social media is here to stay, folks. If you do not embrace it, you will become antiquated as a professional. I am not suggesting that you spend hours each day on Twitter or Facebook unless that makes sense for your firm's marketing and recruiting efforts. I do recommend that you find time each week to use LinkedIn to connect with other professionals, join in group conversations, and read articles. LinkedIn is the best

place for engineers to spend their social media time, so make time for it.

10) **In-person Networking** – Attending national conferences is well worth your time for gaining CE credits, but make time for connecting with professionals in your local market too. It's remarkable how regular networking can help you meet interesting and helpful people in your immediate community. (For more helpful details on networking, refer to the June 2017 STRUCTURE magazine article, *Effective Networking: 4 Techniques to Successfully Navigate Networking*.)

11) **Relationship Building** – You will go farther and accomplish more if you go with people. Develop relationships with your boss and with direct reports. Take time for one-on-one meetings to really get to know people. Getting out of the office for lunch is a great way to build relationships, just do not go as a group. A group setting leads to playful banter, whereas one-on-one time will help you to get to know the people with whom you work. Knowing people leads to respect and trust, which in turn leads to the critical foundation of a strong team. Make sure to have regular meetings also, because one lunch will not lead to strong relationships.

12) **Service Mindset** – Approaching interactions with a service mindset with peers, your boss, direct reports – not to mention interactions with vendors, partners, and customers – will help you to have successful relationships and realize that your role as a leader is not about you; leadership is about helping others to be successful. Take the opportunity to focus on how you can help others. Do not do their work but look for ways to be supportive and encouraging.

The number one piece of advice for a new or experienced manager is to have fun being a leader! Performing as a good manager impacts both personal and professional aspects of one's life, and makes a difference in the lives of team members and other business associates. Keep these 12 suggestions in mind, and you will be well on your way to becoming (or staying) a solid manager. ■

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