

# Management Training

**A View from Impact Factory**

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## The Leader

By Roger McGough

I wanna be the leader

I wanna be the leader

Can I be the leader?

Can I?

I can?

Promise? Promise?

Yippee, I'm the leader

I'm the leader

OK what shall we do?

## Management Training

Primarily this document is aimed at newly promoted managers, but some of our words of wisdom (!) and advice will do quite nicely for those who have been in managerial positions for a while.

As a matter of fact, we'd be surprised if a lot of this isn't familiar. Managers, whether newly appointed or long-term in harness, often have the same expectations and hopes projected on them by others (let alone by themselves). Staff want to be able to look to their managers for guidance, strength, insight, acceptance, empathy, care-taking, clarity, fairness.

Oh, by the way, we forgot to tell you that you have to be Superman as well.

Here's something that we had to deal with in the very early days of Impact Factory, and it was our first encounter with a well-known syndrome that happens in many companies: good people who get promoted to a line manager's role who don't even last a year in the new job.

We were brought in to create a training programme for newly promoted managers; the managers had been engineers who were exceptional at their jobs. They were efficient, got on with customers very well, managed their work-loads, had good relationships with their colleagues. Then they got promoted to managing others and it all fell apart.

That was our first encounter, but it certainly wasn't our last, and since then we have done extensive training for all levels of management, from first-line managers to Boards of Directors. But we often return to the sticky problem of what happens to people who are highly skilled in one area and seem to lose it all soon after they are promoted.

## Key Career Moments

"Organisations promote people with the expectation that they have the knowledge and skills to handle the job rather than the knowledge and skills to handle a particular level of leadership. They assume that if they have performed well at one job, they'll likely perform well at the next one."

***The Leadership Pipeline*** by Charam, Drotter & Noel

That pretty much sums up the problem, doesn't it?

We know this can be particularly true for first line managers who have come from a technical background. Up until now their focus and the company's focus have been on their technical competence; they have been valued, appreciated and rewarded for these skills and their esteem and confidence stems from this focus.

It can be equally true when someone is given a new team to manage or transferred to another department: this unacknowledged assumption that the promotion itself develops the newly needed skills.

Logically, people know it doesn't, but too often, everyone kind of pretends otherwise: somehow it will all fix itself 'on the job'.

But when moving into a new arena there has to be a recognition that these managers require new skills that they either:

already have and need to use more

already have but haven't used before

need to acquire (this one being key of course)

The authors of ***The Leadership Pipeline*** go on to talk about key career moments and where and how people get derailed. One key career moment is the transitional shift from managing the self to managing others. And a defining factor in this derailment is an inability to manage effectively by using the resources available to them on their teams.

### Yes, But Why?

It is important to look at what can lie behind the possible 'derailment' of many first-time managers.

People are promoted who appear to have all the qualities and skills of a good manager. And so often things don't seem to go according to plan.

In our experience this can be caused by a combination of some or all of these factors:

- A belief that they need to already 'know it all'

- A reluctance to ask for support

- A fear of looking weak

- An inability to actually know *how* to manage others adequately

- An undefined leadership model

- A lack of self-awareness and self-knowledge

- A reluctance to try doing things differently, or try new ways of working

- A fear of being 'found out'

- Wanting to be liked; wanting to impress

The outcome of all of that can affect a manager's behaviour, which can include:

Running around and doing everything instead of managing others to do the 'running around'

Accepting tasks and problems from the people they manage instead of giving their team member's adequate support and encouragement to do the tasks themselves

Avoiding conflict

Ignoring the development needs of their staff

Unconsciously undermining their team's confidence

Badly managing their time

Hoarding information to make themselves feel important

Avoiding giving feedback or giving it inadequately

Believing that they need to look busy all the time

Making up what they think the company expects instead of getting clarification

Covering up/bluffing

Sound familiar?

### And Then What Happens?

There's more unfortunately. And that's the knock-on effect of all this on the people these managers are managing. Team members who are inadequately managed could begin to display some or all of the following behaviours:

Frustration

Demotivation

Chaos

Actively undermining the manager

Lack of commitment

Poor timekeeping

An attempt to fill the leadership gap (but without the skills or certainly the authority to do so)

Complaining and gossiping to others

Avoiding the manager whenever possible

The confluence of these displays of inconsistent behaviour - from the manager and from team members - tends to lead to mediocrity and an implicit acceptance of lower standards. Productivity suffers, and people tend to do just the right amount of work to 'get by' rather than being motivated to go the extra distance.

However, in our now considerable experience of working with managers, if a line manager has a difficult and disappointing time, the end result may well be that they do one of the following:

Put a lot of energy into surviving, not thriving

Overwork and underachieve

Never achieve the promise they earlier displayed

Leave

Remember that Superman list we included at the beginning? All those expectations (burdens?) that managers have thrust upon them before they practically begin. The team have expectations, the company has expectations and of course the manager has expectations.

In the excitement, ego (and monetary) gratification and anticipation of moving into a new role, all the potential problems or difficulties are forgotten or not even thought about. Most everyone has a vested interest in the manager succeeding, but not necessarily a lot of interest in facilitating that success.

### There is Good News!

It's not all dire! It is important to note most emphatically that not all managers flounder. Many, if not most seem to have a high degree of self-awareness, a willingness to develop (themselves and others), good transferable skills and an ability to adapt to the pressures of their position and it is these managers who thrive.

In a 2004 article in *The New Yorker*, Charles Michener wrote about the Cleveland Orchestra and why they are and always have been so successful since their founding in 1918. He quotes a number of music directors and critics who highlight the reasons for this, that could just as easily apply to the successful corporate manager.

"Herbert von Karajan once said something absolutely brilliant, 'I give them all the freedom they need to make them do what I want.'"

"The Clevelanders had a music director who seemed to enjoy hearing what they had to say even more than he enjoyed telling them how to say it."

"The Cleveland Orchestra's first music director, Nikolai Sokoloff, laid down three commandments for the players."

'Be on Time'  
'Love your work'  
'Look at me'

For us one of the key messages from those snippets is that good management is a two-way relationship full of trust and mutual respect. The difficulty is when the manager feels unprepared, in over his/her head, unsure of where to turn and simply doesn't seem to be able to ask for the kind of support that would knock a lot of these difficulties on the head.

So right off the bat we know that some of the things needed for success are a shift in mind set, beliefs and feelings, a development of essential skills and competencies and a change in behaviour.

The shift in mind set, beliefs and feelings are all about being able to hold up your hand and say, "I need help." Most people will assume that all is well if nothing contrary to that assumption is said. Even if they know it probably isn't true, that's what happens. So it may be up to the manager (even one who has been in the job a while) to let others know that they need training or mentoring or some form of hands-on guidance.

Sounds simple, but it does require a change in outlook: "It's all right to ask for support; I don't have to do all myself; I don't have to know it all already."

### Essential Management Skills

You've done it; you've asked for support. Now, what are some of the essential skills that make up the managerial 'tool kit'?

No matter what the level of management we are talking about we are clear that each person needs to have or to be developing the following:

- Self-awareness
- Excellent listening skills
- Clarity of communication
- Empathy and understanding
- Decisiveness
- Clear goal setting
- Ability to create trust
- Manage conflict well
- Ability to delegate
- Encourage and develop direct reports
- Take responsibility and accountability (no blaming or buck passing)
- Have clear boundaries

Challenging, but not necessarily overwhelmingly Superman-like.

Of course, we know that all of that doesn't happen at the snap of a finger. Change beliefs, get new skills, present new behaviour and ta da, you're a manager!

If you already are a manager you must be doing something right, so let's start there with the skills and qualities you already have. Take a few minutes to think about your most effective skills: maybe you are already a good listener and are empathetic; perhaps people automatically give you the benefit of the doubt because you know how to engender trust; possibly you know how to encourage and explain things to others.

Identifying some of your special qualities (which, by the way, often get forgotten or overlooked when things aren't going so well) is a way of acknowledging that you possess abilities, talents and expertise that serve you, your team and your company well. This is a quiet way of helping you gain confidence ("I *am* good at some things!"), albeit, often an uncomfortable way (won't it seem like bragging?).

Next, see if you can identify some of the areas that you know need developing: perhaps it's better communication skills so that your team feels included and consulted; or maybe it's honing your ability to delegate so that others develop their skills while you free yourself up more; perhaps you need to get better at managing conflict so you stop avoiding it or at least become better able to intervene when others are in conflict.

This is to help you put things in perspective: there are some things you already do well and there are some areas that need development.

Finally, you need to go talk with someone: your own line manager, your HR advisor if there is one in your company, a trusted colleague, a friend. Anyone who might help you take the next steps to becoming a far better manager. And not Superman.

If you are interested in talking to us further about our work on management training, please phone

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