A Practical Guide for the New Manager

Have you just been promoted to a management position and don't know how to take on this new challenge? Don't worry: Managers aren't born, they're made.

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Management can be learned. Quality business schools and universities have been demonstrating this for years. Becoming a manager worthy of the position entails a process of learning and development, one that lasts a lifetime.

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Effective leaders are perennial apprentices, according to renowned management professor Peter Drucker. It is no simple process; it is a personal and professional transformation, one that is easier to recognize than it is to define. This is how IESE Professor Guido Stein describes it in the technical note "Challenges for New Managers" in which he reviews some of the most important aspects involved in becoming a manager.

What is managing?

Managing means managing people. Without a group to lead, no matter how small, there can be no management. In such case one could talk about controlling, coordinating, supervising or administrating resources, but not managing.

The objective of any managerial function is to get results. Becoming a manager means taking on a job and social position that comes along with rights and privileges, but that, first and foremost, entails obligations and responsibilities. Managing is more about helping others perform than doing things oneself. The new manager must learn to live with imperfection, to make decisions and to accept that he or she cannot control everything. Beyond that, managers must also be aware of the responsibility that comes along with the power of influence over others' lives; they must realize that their decisions impact the rest of the people on the team.

Learning to manage

In order to learn, one must know how to listen. One's subordinates, colleagues, superiors and even former bosses represent a powerful source of information and advice. In reality, no one can teach someone else how manage and lead. A person must learn this on his or her own. And like all learning processes, it is an exercise in humility and audacity. IESE Professor and former dean Juan Antonio Pérez López pointed out that managing is providing an example and creating business. This kind of leader stands out because he or she knows the limits of power, is capable of asking for advice, and knows how to make corrections.

But in order to optimize this learning process, people need to have a certain psychological assurance, and in today's highly competitive professional environment, managers feel unmotivated. For this reason, it is essential to have a change of culture. Managers should be evaluated based on the talent they are able to foster within their team, and not just for immediate, tangible results.

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Managing teams

Is it managing people or teams of people? According to Professor Stein, the ideal way is to consider people as members of a team, which is the environment in which the work will be done. Focusing one's management on the individual relationship with each member is not effective since people, when they become part of a group, shift from individual to group behavior. That is why it is vital to understand how a group works.

Drucker makes a distinction between three types of teams. The first is the baseball team, where the players have established roles that don't usually change, similar to an assembly line. The second is the rugby team, on which each member has a set position but works as part of a team and, like in an orchestra, cooperates to make the music sound nice. And, lastly, is the doubles tandem in tennis; each person has a primary position but must adapt to the circumstances, such as when a jazz band improvises.

The leadership style and strategy to be used will vary according to the type of team involved. When managing a team, there are a few recommended points to consider:

- Adopt a common identity and common goals, while not forsaking individual differences.
- Capitalize on the divergent points of view existing within the group through the leadership of conflict between members, which should be seen as managing support and critical dialogue, and not as a clash of emotions.
- Focus on contribution, learning and development. The team is a perfect place for fostering and evaluating the leadership abilities of its individuals.
- Rely on the independence of the team's members. For this to be possible, the first thing necessary is for all of its members to be committed to a common goal. There is no valid substitute for unity.

Only that way will an atmosphere of credibility be created. The more confidence that exists among the team's members, the freer they will be to act and make decisions, the fewer explanations they will have to give, and the more comfortable they will feel.

Advice for starting

Before accepting a promotion, the candidate should understand what he or she is expected to do. But that person should also be concerned with the way in which those things must be done, as well as the job's objectives. All of this information will help that person understand

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his or her new role and make the right decision, from which there is no going back.

After accepting the position, there are a number of key aspects to be aware of which could prevent more than one unpleasant experience for the new manager:

- The first impression does count. Thinking about initial moves and behaviors is a good idea, since they will have a lasting impact on subordinates.
- Convincing people generates more management capital than resorting to the "my word is law" approach, which also works.
- Managing involves a position of authority, but also one of dependence. It is not about giving orders, but rather getting workers to realize their full potential in order to achieve results.
- Self-knowledge is essential for identifying one's own abilities and limitations. Only that way can one find a well-suited, effective management style. Being a manager means accepting the diversity of those being managed and acting accordingly.
- It is not the time to show fear, anxiety or insecurity. The others expect an example of maturity, professionalism and serenity. An experienced manager, after getting past the initial phase, does not displace stress or anxiety onto his or her workers, but in fact reduces those symptoms.

More info:

And Now What?: A Guide to Leadership and Taking Charge in Your New Role (2017) by Guido Stein.

The technical note "**Challenges for New Managers**," also by Guido Stein, is available via **IESE Publishing**.

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