10 steps to start a management position on the right foot

Taking on a new management position can create certain doubts and insecurities. A clash between expectations and reality is almost inevitable — but it can be minimized.

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"How do I handle a new management role?" That's the question on many executives' minds when they get promoted. **Guido Stein** offers 10 keys to successfully navigate a new management role.

1. Lay the groundwork

Develop "a plan for learning the key things we did not know before and discarding the beliefs we held that proved to be false," Stein writes. Whether you are new to the company or just got promoted, stepping into a new management position usually comes with some fixed habits and preconceived ideas. These should be compared and contrasted with the realities of the new role to evaluate what needs to change.

2. Prioritize

Identify the truly vital issues and address them decisively. Landing in a new position creates plenty of uncertainty in the work environment, so there is no need for hasty actions or confusing statements that might disorientate the team. Moreover, focusing on a limited number of goals can lead to tangible victories early in the game.

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3. Identify talent

The sooner you can pinpoint relevant challenges and determine which current team members are up to the task, the sooner you can make decisions about the team, advises Stein. Making swift decisions will benefit everyone, as it will temper the "crippling anxiety" and the "poisonous rumor mill" sure to spring up during a transition. Stein also warns that there are no shortcuts to establishing quality relationships with new colleagues.

4. Be realistic

Today's limitations are often perceived as obstacles. It's important to flip that argument around and recognize that limitations also allow us to focus our efforts and energy where we can achieve the best results. Too many options can make it difficult to evaluate each one, diffusing efforts and reducing efficacy. This leads to greater uncertainty — and, if left unchecked, even paralysis. Conversely, being realistic about today's options leads us to be more focused and more creative.

5. Act prudently, but decisively

People expect their leaders to face challenges in a timely manner. However, in a 2015 survey of 22,000 managers from around the world, two-thirds of respondents said their bosses were "reactive" when it came to undertaking changes. They blamed their leaders' complacency, lack of perspective, fear of failure, and the rigidity of their approaches. According to Stein, the message is crystal clear: "It is important to prudently and wisely get out in front of events in order to manage them, not be managed by them."

6. Stop and think

From time to time, stop and evaluate whether you are on the right track. Your colleagues views of you change with a new promotion, so your words and actions may run the risk of being misinterpreted, says Stein. This affects communication, as everything a boss says is interpreted as a "statement of authority." Furthermore, others may hesitate to offer you detailed information until they are sure you will respond with "respect and integrity." New executives must strive to see themselves differently, from the outside, and regularly check in with others to properly gauge the effects of what they communicate.

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7. Don't lose sight of the big picture

A broad understanding of the market and the forces that shape it will help you anticipate trends and challenges. In order to implement appropriate strategies and tactics, you must also develop a wide-ranging awareness of how your business works, where value is created, and the company's internal checks and balances. But Stein warns that the higher a leader is on the corporate totem pole, the greater the temptation to focus only on internal issues. "Unless they make extraordinary efforts," he notes, "they will not perceive what happens outside [the company], which is where the results are achieved."

8. Cultivate personal alliances

If there is one trait that distinguishes a leader, it is the ability to exert influence both laterally and vertically. "While the effectiveness of a leader is directly proportional to the time invested in working with the members of their team, success depends more on relationships with peers in other units and superiors throughout the organization," Stein explains. Hence it is vital to build a network of contacts to bring new perspectives, compare ideas and open one's eyes to trends and new opportunities.

9. Practice empathy and political intelligence

In a new position it is essential to skillfully deal with issues that are emotionally and politically risky. To do this, a leader must exploit many personal and social skills — including adaptability, active listening, the ability to read between the lines (or hear what *isn't* being said, as Peter Drucker famously noted), self-control, empathy and persuasion.

10. Lead by example

Professor Stein is convinced that people change their minds more by virtue of observation than by reasoning. This is a case of "do as I do, not as I say." As a leader, you must inspire confidence by acting decisively, but also with self-awareness and transparency. People give their trust to those who, in turn, respect them personally and professionally.

In short, to start out on the right foot, you should evaluate key issues and address them without losing sight of the bigger picture nor the value of interpersonal relationships. Following these steps, and taking the time to periodically evaluate progress with colleagues (up and down the totem pole) will help you become an effective and inspiring leader.

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