

# UNLEASHING YOUR POTENTIAL AS A NEW MANAGER

## WHAT EVERY NEWBIE NEEDS TO LEARN AND DO TO ENSURE SUCCESS

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**Scenario:** What you've been longing for finally came to pass. Your boss announces your promotion. You are elated, overjoyed and feel like you're on top of the world.

All the years of hard work has finally paid off. You now carry a manager title on your new business card. You have inherited a few direct reports through your new managerial role.

You promise yourself that you will continue to work hard, build your career, be a good boss, lead a strong team and reach for the stars.

You turn up for your first day at work as a manager. You call for a team meeting to introduce yourself to your new subordinates. You communicate your excitement of being able to work with them.

You convey that you have plans to bring the team to a new level of success. You have even decided to buy lunch hoping to score some brownie points as the new boss.

*You have just begun day one as Mr or Ms New Manager.*

**F**AST forward: It's been 10 months since you got promoted. All's not well. You are not meeting your KPIs. One staff member left you claiming you both have different working styles (read as *he hates your guts*).

Another just tendered her resignation. The team is demotivated. Your boss is breathing down your neck. He alleges that you are underperforming. He is upset. You are demoralised. Yes, you are failing miserably as the new manager.

The reality is that the above scenario is not all that uncommon. Research conducted by the corporate executive board reveals that 65% of new managers fail within the first 24 months.

The work environment can be both complex and challenging. The fact is that most new managers are ill-equipped to face what lies ahead. Many fail to recognise that the competencies needed to be successful as a people manager is vastly different from that of an individual contributor.

Just because one is successful as an individual contributor is no guarantee that he or she will be successful in leading others. New managers need to be equipped with basic leadership skills.

They need to intentionally build leadership capability and credibility in order to lead successfully. Here are three key principles for novice managers.

### 1 DON'T ACT LIKE A HERO

New managers are often tempted to showcase their newfound authority. They feel a need to quickly establish their position as the new boss and begin their leadership role with all guns blazing – ready to be the hero who will turn things around and bring extraordinary success.

After all, they have to prove themselves – that they are worthy of this new mana-



**Build relational trust first, and then drive change. —Eric Lau**

gerial role entrusted to them. While the need to prove oneself could be a natural response, it also reveals the insecurity of the new leader.

This insecurity can subsequently lead to a fear of rejection causing the new leader to rely more on their title or position to gain control instead of using their influence.

Instead, new leaders need to approach their new positions with confidence and humility. Confidence does not mean that the new manager knows everything but having a positive self-image helps a new manager effectively handle his or her new environment.

Humility on the other hand shows others that you need them. It tells your subordinates that you don't know everything and you are dependent on them to achieve your team goals. This powerful combination of confidence and humility will bring you far in your new leadership journey.

### 2 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS FIRST, THEN DRIVE CHANGE

I was once asked to intervene in a dysfunctional team. The situation got so bad until the team members lodged a formal complaint to the senior management alleging that their new boss – who has just taken over the reins for three months – was driving too many unnecessary changes at a rapid pace.

I intervened by meeting up with the seven team members (without the new manager) to hear their grievances. Our meeting was hostile, not towards me but towards the new leader.

All the "usual suspects" turned up: He doesn't understand our process, what worked in his previous company doesn't work with ours, he didn't consult us, he thinks he is very smart, he's using his position to push us around, and so on.

I then met the new leader privately. He too complained: These people are slow, they are not responsive, they are in their comfort zones, they are resisting change, and so on.

Hearing the undertones of what was communicated by both sides, it was clear to me that what was missing fundamentally was relational trust.

While I understand the need to drive change and I do believe it is the prerogative of any new leader to make such decisions, no effective change can take place without a healthy buy-in from others.

New managers who are wise will take time to get to know their team members first, strengthen team bonds and actively engage them in open conversations before attempting to drive any form of change. Always build relational trust first, and then drive change.

### 3 LEARN LIKE YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT

According to the human resources

network HR.com, 47% of new managers receive no managerial training to prepare them for their new leadership role. No wonder the failure rate of new managers is shockingly high.

While some good organisations do have new managerial preparatory training potential candidates, most organisations don't. The new leaders are often left on their own to figure out how to lead.

A new manager should have a huge appetite to learn and empower himself or herself with the necessary mindset and skillsets to lead successfully. Your desire and capacity to learn will either make or break your leadership. Here are three practical ways to learn:

**Attend training programmes:** Some organisations provide training programmes for their staff. Jump into every opportunity to be in such training sessions. It's free! And even if you have to fork out your own money to attend an external leadership programme, just do it. It's an investment you will not regret.

**Read voraciously:** There are tonnes of good leadership books out there. We are shaped by what we read. Learn from the gurus. Aim to read one good book a month.

**Get a mentor:** Allow someone more experienced than you to speak into your life. Meet this person regularly. A mentor can open-up our minds, challenge us, provide good counsel and help us advance very quickly.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Leadership is not easy. It's not difficult either. If you put your heart and mind to it, your leadership route will not only enrich your life but also the lives of others.

Nothing significant ever happens without leadership. To every new manager out there: leadership is a journey, not a destination. As long as you stay steadfast to excel and be hungry to learn, you will succeed.

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