

6 management best practices you can implement now

While each manager has his or her own individual management style, certain management practices exist that great leaders tend to have in common. Attending to these areas results in a positive, productive work environment.

It is one thing, though, to know the importance of a concept to successful management and quite another to put that management skill into action. For instance, wanting a reputation as a “good communicator” is noble, but what can a leader do to actually merit that description?

To that end, we’ve identified six best practices for managers followed by suggestions as to actions and behaviors that support each one. See which might work for you to boost your management skills to a higher level.

Build trust

Good relationships start with trust. Workers who trust their leader speak up about little problems before they develop into big ones. Innovation thrives since people are confident that their ideas will get treated respectfully. Implementing change proves easier because employees don’t fear underlying motives. Morale flourishes because team members know their manager has their back.

Solid ways to strengthen bonds of trust include:

- **Conduct regular one-on-one meetings** with each member of your team where you both give feedback. Tell the person at least one thing he did well and one thing he can improve on that happened since the last meeting. Have him do the same thing for you! Employees will start seeing feedback as a two-way street built on constructively examining both positives and negatives.
- **Admit your faults.** Many employees are worried about coming to their manager with issues and shortcomings for fear that acknowledging their weaknesses could be held against them. That's an unhealthy way to work. Make such conversations normal by owning up to your flaws. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it and note what you learned from the error. You will find your employees much more willing to have an honest conversation with you.
- **Quit micromanaging.** Employees interpret such behavior as you not trusting them to do the right thing. Drive home the point that you expect team members to come forward on their own accord when they need help or encounter a problem. Set up periodic check-ins for updates on progress, but don’t bother them too much outside of that scheduled time.
- **Delegate more often.** Not only will you spare yourself the stress of trying to tackle too much on your own, you send the message that you think enough of the other person to handle the responsibility.
- **Manage expectations, not tasks** — especially with remote workers. Employees should not feel like you are trying to “catch” them not working. Provide clarity about benchmarks, and trust individuals to manage their own time effectively in order to meet them.
- **Call out bad behavior.** Business leaders who allow off-color jokes, participate in gossip sessions, or stay

silent when team members blame or bad-mouth one another, lose the trust of staff members hurt by those words.

- **Admit when you don't know something** rather than lie or avoid the issue. Especially in the midst of an ever-changing world due to the pandemic, situations will arise where you simply can't give a good answer. That's OK. Reassure others of your commitment to timely, accurate information as available with a response such as, "I understand your concern about this matter. I will continue to seek solid information and convey it as quickly and thoroughly as possible." By admitting when you don't know, employees are more likely to trust you when you do tell them something.

Communicate early and often

Operate under the assumption that people want to do good work. To do so, however, they need timely, clear, thorough information that specifies what to do and how to do it. Their questions require answers so that they can progress toward meeting defined expectations.

Managers looking to improve communication may want to try the following:

- **Proofread your emails** and other correspondence before sending. Ensure the accuracy of dates, metrics, and other critical info, as mistakes can come back to haunt you. Also, read for clarity and tone. Upon second glance, you might determine a sentence or two needs rewording for better understanding, or you might want to choose different phrases to emphasize a certain point.
- **Set specific points throughout the day to answer emails**, and let others know what those times are in the line after your signature. Staff will know that you aren't ignoring their messages and will have a better idea of when you'll get back to them.
- Deliver emotional or confusing news face to face. Use Zoom if an on-site meeting is not possible. You'll be able to better judge comprehension, and body language will clue you in on reception.
- **Listen with your full attention.** Turn off electronics during conversations, and look at the speaker. Try not to interrupt. When it's your turn to speak, summarize what the other person said in order to confirm understanding.
- **Walk the floor at least once every other day.** You'll get a better idea of what's going on around the office and people's general temperament. This stroll also provides the opportunity for team members to grab you for a quick comment.
- **Host office hours once a week.** Staff members can drop in to talk about any topic without fear of disturbing you. If remote, hold virtual office hours to serve the same purpose.
- **Keep remote staff in the loop.** Off-site workers feel like second-class citizens if they are always the last to know. Send an email blast to everyone at the same time, regardless of location. Or, schedule a video conference where all team members attend virtually whether from the office or at home.
- **Commit to holding tough conversations as the need arises.** Someone should not first hear about a major problem at an annual performance review. Rather, bring the worker in for a private conversation when something happens. State things factually rather than emotionally (as in "You've been late three times over the past two weeks" instead of "Why are you too lazy to get in here on time?"). Calmly discuss what must change, the rectification steps involved, and the repercussions for not following through. Agree to meet in two weeks to evaluate progress.

Stay organized

Disorganized managers not only make their own lives more difficult, they impede the progress of those around them. Both within their individual department and at the company as a whole, people depend on managers to keep things running like a well-oiled machine. Confused priorities, failure to make the best use of time, and inattention to detail can prevent the organization from reaching full potential.

Strategies for improving organizational skills include:

- **Set an agenda for each meeting.** This action enables others to see what will be covered and come prepared to discuss these issues. Attach relevant documents to allow time for reading them beforehand.
- **Stay on top of who, what, where, and when** through project management apps and management software. Popular choices include Asana, Hive, Basecamp, Zoho, Trello, and Monday.com. Do your research before committing: the best selection is the one that works for your needs *and* that you'll actually use consistently.
- **Make the most of your to-do list** by composing it at the end of the workday when things are fresh in your mind. You will be able to hit the ground running the next morning instead of trying to remember where things stand.
- **Set a specific time each week for housekeeping.** Go through your physical inbox. Put things at your desk where they belong. Organize emails into files. Decluttering provides a psychological boost, and you'll feel good about not wasting time down the line on trivial matters like finding the stapler when you need it.

Onboard with care

You will never have as captive of an audience as you do during an employee's first days on the job. What you do and say, and especially how you make someone feel, influences retention, loyalty, and morale.

Be ready to make a positive impression through actions such as:

- **Make sure you are around and available on a new hire's first day.** Someone excited to join your team will start to deflate if bored and made to feel like a nuisance who others got assigned to baby-sit.
- **Work with human resources to provide a structured onboarding experience.** Follow a master checklist to ensure all paperwork gets completed and policies covered. Realize, though, that a new hire wants to start making a difference, not just handle bureaucracy. Create a small project he can work on with colleagues; he'll get his feet wet and start bonding with others.
- **Assign each new hire a mentor.** This action gives the person someone else besides you to turn to with questions, and it develops the leadership skills of your seasoned employees.
- **Request that team members personally welcome new hires.** They can send emails briefly introducing themselves, their role at the company, what they like about working here, and a personal fact or two.

Create a positive environment

Company culture influences retention, loyalty, and productivity. Workers who feel connected to the organization, its people, and its purpose have a sense of satisfaction that keeps them coming back to do their best day after day.

What helps make somewhere a great place to work? Managers can try these measures:

- **Smile and greet staff members each morning.**
- **Establish rituals that promote togetherness.** Celebrate birthdays with a bagel breakfast. Go out for a drink together when KPIs (key performance indicators) for the month exceed expectations. Collect toys for disadvantaged kids each Christmas and spend a Friday afternoon in early December wrapping and delivering them.
- **Create a Slack channel** on which you and others can give a shout-out for exceptional performance or kind acts.
- **Make a point of always submitting something to the company newsletter.** Staff members will appreciate this public recognition of achievements, and your department will gain a reputation as a thriving work environment.
- **Pen hand-written thank you notes** around the holiday season or year's end. This personalization shows you truly value the individual and want to make a sincere effort to recognize what each person

brings to the team.

- **At the end of every staff meeting, take a moment to reflect on the bigger picture.** How does the team's work fit in with the overall company mission?
- **Sit down with team members individually** once or twice a year to set professional goals. People enjoy knowing you're interested in their career development and future with the company. Maximize potential for achieving business objectives by constructing SMART goals together. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. Framing goals within this set-up zeros in on what to accomplish and the necessary steps.
- **Get a sense of what motivates different members of your staff.** Talk to them one on one, or send a survey around. You may find some people like tangible rewards such as gift cards or small prizes. Others may want increased opportunities, such as the chance to head a project or represent the company at a conference. Adjust your appreciation methods accordingly.
- **Watch for burnout.** If somebody seems overly tired or stressed, evaluate what that person has on her plate and make adjustments. Tell people to unplug during non-work hours in order to fully recharge. Practice what you preach by not texting or emailing at strange times, even if you don't expect people to respond until later.
- **Remember that you set the tone, so be a good role model.** Use your accumulated PTO. Stay home when you're sick. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Roll up your sleeves and pitch in when you see someone struggling. Practice random acts of kindness.

Look ahead

Successful managers do not get so wrapped up in what's going on today that they fail to see tomorrow. They look at the big picture and what will be necessary for both themselves and the company to reach new heights.

Forward-thinking actions might include:

- **Set aside time for strategic planning** by scheduling it into your calendar at regular intervals. Forecasting workloads and resources necessary for upcoming projects provides time to evaluate critical factors such as needed material and labor.
- **Tend to your network.** These connections provide information and advice beneficial to your current job as well as to future career moves. Once a week, send an email to someone simply to see how the person is doing, or thoughtfully comment on an acquaintance's LinkedIn post.
- **Commit to professional development** and honing management skills. Use the educational benefits provided by your company to take one course or seminar a year in an area in which you feel out-of-date. The pandemic significantly increased what colleges offer online, so take advantage of that scheduling flexibility.
- **Encourage lifelong learning among your staff, too.** Identify together what soft and hard skills would prove useful to obtain. Create specific plans on how to go about gathering them. Perhaps you could set aside one Friday afternoon a month for team members to watch TED talks on relevant topics. Or, maybe money exists in the budget to bring in an instructor to teach advanced PowerPoint.
- **Brainstorm once a week.** Great managers are always looking for new ideas, effective initiatives, and solutions to problems. Dedicating time directly to letting the mind flow can end up producing amazing results.