8 tips for new managers to start on the right foot

Advancing into a management role is an exciting but nerve-wracking experience. Managers have a huge responsibility when it comes to motivating and supporting their teams to reach their full potential. Many people get their first managerial job in a small business or start-up with a limited (or nonexistent) new manager training program. That can make it difficult to build the new skills necessary to become a great leader.

Fortunately, there is also a lot you can practice on your own to develop your leadership skills. Where there are countless things to learn as you ascend into management, these 8 tips can help guide you through the early stages of management.

Get Comfortable Delegating

One thing that can be challenging when moving from an individual contributor role to a managerial position is learning how to delegate. As a new manager, you may feel as though you need to be involved in everything that your team is doing.

However, if you have a strong team with diverse skills, delegating allows you to make the best use of your time and get the work done as efficiently and effectively as possible. As a new manager, it's best to familiarize yourself with your team. Learn their individual skill sets and strengths to understand how to delegate and assign tasks.

Learning how to let go of tasks and delegate them also shows that you trust your team. As a new manager, there will likely be some trial and error when it comes to learning how to strike the proper balance between supporting your team and not micromanaging them. In your first couple of weeks, pay attention to each team member's work style. Some people like to be left alone to complete their work while others need more frequent check-ins.

Practice Giving Meaningful Feedback

Being able to deliver constructive and meaningful feedback to employees is an essential management skill. Offering feedback to employees can feel odd at first, but it's good to get into the habit of delivering frequent and specific feedback. Don't let your comments pile up until it's time for performance reviews. Delivering feedback on an ongoing basis helps your employees grow and improve in their roles more effectively. It also ensures that the work they produce meets your expectations.

Delivering positive feedback often feels less intimidating to new managers, so feel free to start there. Try to find one piece of positive, yet meaningful, feedback to deliver to each employee each work day.

Positive feedback is most meaningful when it highlights what you like about their work. Instead of saying something generic like "good job", try to compliment a specific thing that they did well. This is more memorable and it also demonstrates what you'd like to see from them in the future. This is important when you're a new manager, as it helps set expectations for employees in a positive manner.

Once you get comfortable with positive feedback, start incorporating more constructive criticism. This should highlight areas where there is an opportunity for improvement. Keep your tone upbeat. This feedback is meant

to help them do better, not to simply be critical. Let them know that you're on their side.

There are situations where a more stern approach is warranted. However, it is important to realize that the employees are still adjusting to you as their new manager and may not even fully understand how you want things down. Be empathetic to that and make feedback a two-way process.

Build Trust With Your New Team

One of the most important things that a new manager can do is start building trust with their team immediately. Getting off on the right foot with communication and trust-building will make your transition into management much easier.

So how do you build trust? One of the most important things that you as a manager can do to build trust and develop positive working relationships with your new team is to initiate transparent communication. The transition phase is actually a great time to start doing this. Provide updates to your team on what's going on, any changes being made to the department, and how your new role as their manager will impact them. Be open to answering questions and be honest when you don't have all of the answers. Employees like to see that you're being open with them.

You can also make it clear that you're there to help. Create an open door policy and be supportive when employees do come to you for assistance.

Learn How to Listen

Most people believe that they know how to listen well. However, most people can also name a long list of managers, coworkers, or loved ones that don't seem to really listen. Don't become that manager that makes their employees feel ignored. Learn how to practice active listening with your team.

Active listening involves demonstrating to the other party that you are listening. Some ways to show that you are listening include nodding, smiling, and using reflective statements to summarize or clarify what the other party has said. (i.e Use open body language to convey that you are listening and not closed off to what they are saying.

Try to let your employees speak without interrupting or redirecting the conversation. Managers sometimes communicate in a rushed or pressured manner because they are busy and have a lot of items to prioritize. However, cutting off employees or rushing the conversation is off-putting and can make employees feel undervalued.

Find a Mentor

New managers will want to consider finding a mentor to help them navigate the challenges that come with being a first-time manager. Mentors will often be more senior leaders within the organization. However, new managers can also seek mentors outside of the organization as well.

Mentors are a great resource for learning how to handle employee issues and build your leadership skill set.

Mentors can also give you an outlet when you need to talk through an issue or vent. One challenge with moving into a management role is losing your peer support network. Non-managerial employees have a large number of peers whom they can ask for help or vent about workplace frustrations to. However, managers tend to have fewer peers and may not spend much time actually interacting with other similar-level managers. Having someone to talk through issues with can improve your problem-solving and relieve stress.

Learn to Say No

Effective leaders need to know when and how to say no, and they need to be able to stick with their decisions amidst pressure from others. New managers often find themselves being pushed around by others because they are not yet confident in saying no.

New managers often have trouble saying no to their employees. This is especially true when new managers have advanced within the organization. When a manager is promoted from within, they may have direct reports that are former peers. This can make it harder for the new manager to stand their ground and say no when necessary. If you are in this situation, use that prior experience as an advantage.

You understand your employees' experiences since you've previously been in their shoes. You can use this to look for compromises and alternative solutions where possible. However, there will still be occasions when you need to firmly decline a request. The best way to approach this is to say no in a confident manner. You can provide an explanation, but make it clear that your decision has been made.

One other important aspect of leadership that new managers also need to get comfortable with is saying no to other managers or higher level leaders. As a manager, it is your job to protect your team and their time. If a higher-up or another department requests something of your team that they don't have the bandwidth for, you will need to be the one to step up and say no. This doesn't always have to be a firm no. In many cases, you may just need to reject the requested time frame or deadline. In other cases, you may need to reject the task altogether if it is outside the scope of your employees' duties. Learning to say no in this capacity prevents your team from experiencing burnout or unrealistic expectations.

Refine Your Leadership Style

One of the most challenging aspects of being a first-time manager is refining your own leadership style. Developing your leadership approach and figuring out how to make it fit into your company's culture takes time and practice.

One great thing to keep in mind is that it is okay for your management style to differ from other leaders in the company. Many new managers try to emulate the manager whose role they are filling in order to provide consistency for the team. This does make sense, but don't be afraid to make your leadership style your own.

After all, innovation and growth is sparked by people that are willing to try new approaches.

As you adapt to your new role, take some time to think about how you are approaching leadership and how you would like to lead. The first several weeks in a new job are often focused on learning and getting up to speed, but as you progress as a manager it's important to start refining your approach to leadership. Do some honest self assessments and consider what you may want to do differently or improve upon in order to become a better manager.

Expand Your DEI Knowledge

Everyone in the workplace should do their best to be respectful of people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and ability statuses. However, managers have an even bigger responsibility when it comes to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace.

Managers need to gain a basic understanding of the legal aspects of DEI. This can include major laws such as the Americans With Disabilities Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the basic principles of harassment and discrimination prevention. There is manager training available on sexual harassment that includes additional knowledge beyond the standard employee version that most workplaces will provide. Reviewing your company policies and handbook can also help with the compliance aspect of DEI.

However, good managers go beyond the legal basics and educate themselves on real-world DEI issues. A practical way to do this is to set aside a reasonable amount of time each week, maybe even 15 minutes to start if your schedule is packed to read about current DEI issues. You may also want to consider taking an online course through LinkedIn or another platform to learn more about inclusion and issues like implicit bias in order to ensure that you are approaching leadership in an equitable manner.