



The Successful New Manager

Randy's dream has come true. An insurance underwriter for the last four years, he can finally call himself a manager. His boss recently told him, "You've worked hard, the agents like you, and your results have been outstanding. So we're going to put you in charge of one of our underwriting units. Our hope is you'll teach your employees how you do it, and your success will rub off on them."

Just like that, 10 employees now report to Randy. He walks into his new office (a real office, not a cubicle!) and looks around in a daze. He has wanted to manage a staff ever since he visited his division head's huge home many years ago and noticed how well a "boss" could live. And he figures that once he proves that he can handle a group of crusty, cynical underwriters and help them boost their results, the sky's the limit for him.

Who's Your Model?

Like so many new managers, Randy assumes that he can do the job better than others who've come before him because he realizes what mistakes not to make. He's had seven bosses in his career, and he knows exactly what they did right and wrong. The same thing happens when proud parents hold their newborn and

2 Skills for New Managers

declare confidently to each other, “Let’s raise this adorable baby the right way, not like our parents did it!”

You may think you know what it takes to manage well. After all, you’re an earnest straight-shooter who gets along well with a wide range of people. You like challenges and you dread boring routines. Experienced managers have told you that “every day is different” when you’re in charge of a staff, and that sounds just fine with you.

But the real test of your management skills rests on your ability to grow into the job. No newly minted manager can possibly anticipate what it’s like to direct people. Each day brings weird scenarios you could never predict, from the clerk who bursts into tears for no apparent reason (what do you do?) to the disgruntled veteran who issues a veiled threat against you and your company (now what?). As perhaps you can tell, managing is more than setting goals and organizing people to accomplish them. Lots of things need to be taken care of between setting goals and accomplishing them.

There’s no way this or any book can show you how to respond to every type of human problem you may encounter. But a book can help you sharpen your natural leadership skills and learn how to model yourself after effective managers so that you analyze how they would handle a similar situation.

By imagining how a top-notch manager would manage various scenarios, you give yourself a road map to follow.



Smart
Managing

My Favorite Manager

Think of the best boss you ever had. If no one pops to mind, consider a strong leader you know, such as a sports coach or a volunteer coordinator at your community center. Complete these sentences:

1. When faced with adversity, this manager will _____.
2. To improve teamwork, this manager will _____.
3. When explaining a concept, this manager will _____.
4. To keep control of an unruly group, this manager will _____.
5. Employees respect this manager because _____.

This little exercise will help you focus on appropriate and effective behaviors and tactics for dealing with people.

The individual you admire most serves as your template. Even if you're not sure how this person would deal with specific issues or perform certain tasks, trying to picture such behaviors can help.

In deciding whom to model, consider your corporate culture. Say you work in a laid-back environment filled with brainy graduate students engaged in medical testing or software programming. In such a setting, you want to promote a calm, cerebral, and creative atmosphere where your employees can operate at their best. Trying to model yourself after a loud, hard-charging executive whom you admire will backfire, because those kinds of rah-rah theatrics will fall flat in such an intellectually driven office.

Also think about how you might choose the person whom you seek to emulate. You don't want to select a role model just because she's your best friend or you share certain interests. It's best to model yourself after a manager whom you respect more than like (though the two are certainly not mutually exclusive). You want to learn from someone who takes action decisively and exemplifies the kind of behaviors that you think would make you an effective manager.

Rating Your Leadership

The more you know yourself, the better you'll manage. If you lack a strong sense of who you are and what you believe, you'll get manipulated by more forceful personalities who can tell you're a pushover. They'll feed you what you like to hear. And they'll press your hot buttons when they want to rile you.

You need to develop a strong spine to manage. If it hasn't happened yet, the day will come when you'll need to state an unpopular position and stick to it, despite disappointment from employees and even derision from bosses. You'll need to believe in yourself when doubts swirl around you, especially as the stakes mount and the pressure builds. That's when your reserves of poise and confidence will sustain you.

To gain self-awareness, take the following diagnostic tests. Your ratings will help you uncover the strengths and weaknesses that influence how you manage.

Test 1: Patience

Rate yourself using this 1-to-5 scale:

1. Never
2. Occasionally
3. Sometimes
4. Usually
5. Always

When I tell someone to do something and they don't do it, I say it again in a firmer tone. ____

When someone talks too slowly, I interrupt. ____

When I see someone do something wrong, I instantly point it out. ____

When someone keeps me waiting more than a minute or two, I resent it. ____

When someone doesn't answer my question right away, I cut in and repeat it. ____

Add up your score. If it's 17 or more, you could stand to lighten up and calm down. You need to relax a little. Your impatience might reflect an overly controlling mind-set. If you scored 16 or less, note any 4s or 5s. These indicate areas you can work on that will lower your blood pressure and raise your ability to build trust and gain compliance.

Test 2: Communication Skills

Rate yourself using the 1-to-5 scale above:

When I ask a question, I'm very curious to hear the answer. ____

I like to speak in front of groups. ____

If I disagree, I confirm I've understood the other person before I give my view. ____

If I need to cover many points, I outline what I want to say ahead of time. ____

When I give instructions or explain complex ideas, I number each item. ____

If you scored 15 or less, you're probably losing opportunities to bond with others. Your employees can tell if you're distracted or uninterested in what they have to say, and they won't like it. And if you ramble or hop from topic to topic aimlessly, they're liable to tune out or lose track of your point. Disliking public speaking won't necessarily kill your chances of managing well, but by developing at least some skills you can add a valuable weapon to your management arsenal.

Test 3: Ethics

Rate yourself on using the 1-to-5 scale on the preceding page:

I set an example of the high ethical standard I want my staff to follow. _____

If I'm in an ethical bind, I'll talk about the situation with a wise mentor. _____

I prefer to admit doing something wrong than to cover it up and hope I don't get caught. _____

I apply "the sniff test" when confronting an ethical dilemma: if it smells bad, I don't do it. _____

I'm at peace with my ethical behavior. _____

A score of 18 or below should alert you to some questionable attitudes about right and wrong. If your total falls under 15, then you might as well kiss your management career goodbye now rather than wait for the inevitable downfall later.

There are other aspects that are important to a strong sense of yourself and your leadership ability in addition to patience, communication skills, and ethics. But those three are basic and vital. Now, you may be thinking, 'Patience and communication skills, of course, because a manager must work well with people in order to get the job done. But ethics? In business?'

Yes, ethics! We all make moral decisions everyday, whether we realize it or not. If we break rules routinely or grab whatever we can take without a moment's hesitation, then we doom ourselves to alienating the very employees we need to win over—and we set a very poor example. Expedience has its place, but crossing ethical boundaries whenever the situation warrants it undermines your credibility as a leader. Sure, you can probably get away with managing by deception, double-crossing, and denial, but only if you're willing to lose everything in a flash—or to gradually corrupt your employees and lose it all slowly and painfully. As in all of life's activities, integrity is an important characteristic of any manager.

Drafting Your Own “Management Credo”

Earlier in this chapter, you thought about the best boss you ever had. Now it’s time to consider the kind of boss you want to be.

Developing a credo—or set of beliefs—can serve as a constant reminder of what you want to achieve in your new job and how. This process means more than hashing out detailed, work-related objectives such as setting projected annual revenues for your unit or maintaining low turnover. It’s loftier than that. You should prepare for the challenges of management by identifying the traits you want to embody and the commitments you’re willing to make to yourself to succeed.

To begin, set aside 30 minutes during a calm, unhurried part of the day, perhaps Sunday morning when you’re not distracted by workaday pressures. Plant yourself in front of your computer—or settle down with pen and paper—and pretend it’s a year from now.

Ask yourself, “How do I want to be perceived as a boss by an employee who has been reporting to me for the past year?”

Answer this question *from the employee’s perspective*. Play the role of one of your direct reports and imagine giving yourself a performance review. Address key areas such as communica-

tion skills, leadership, reliability, motivational style, and fostering teamwork.

If you’ve treated this exercise seriously, you should come away with a revealing self-assessment of your managerial strengths and shortcomings. Armed with this information, you’re now ready to compose a management credo.

Here are two examples of real management credos from my clients:



What’s Your Grade?

Think back to when you were an employee, probably not so long ago. Now imagine that you have the opportunity as employee to do a performance review of yourself as a boss. What categories would you use? How would you rate yourself from 1 to 10 or grade yourself from A to F? Be realistic, fair, and objective!

A 25-year-old salesperson who's about to start as sales manager:

I want to lead by example. If my sales team sees that I'm honest, forthright and dedicated, then they'll strive to act the same. I believe in listening more than talking, and not trying to have all the answers. I will praise well-earned success and support employees who need guidance. I will not accept anything less than full effort from myself or anyone else.

Management credo

A written set of beliefs that summarizes your goals as a manager and the commitments you're willing to make to get there.



A 31-year-old counselor at a nonprofit agency who's about to start as executive director:

I believe in taking responsibility for what I can control and not wasting time with events I cannot control. I will manage others the way I want to be managed: with openness and fairness.

MY GOALS:

1. *To earn everyone's respect.*
2. *To develop each of my employees to reach a higher potential.*
3. *To push everyone (including me) so that we don't get complacent.*

I COMMIT TO:

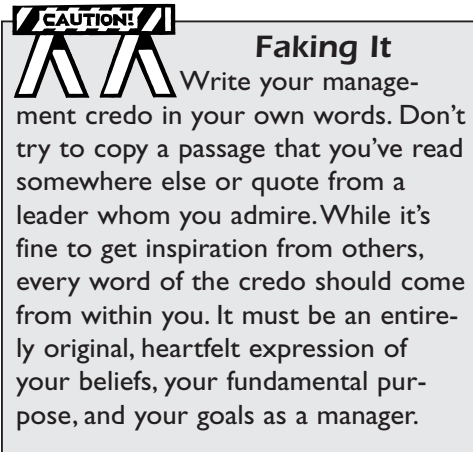
1. *Taking bad news well without losing my temper.*
2. *Setting the highest standard of behavior so that there's no confusion over what's the right thing to do.*
3. *Remembering to recognize employees' acts of kindness and selflessness.*
4. *Asking for employees' feedback on my performance regularly rather than losing touch.*

When you draft your management credo, remember that you're not trying to please or impress anyone. It's designed as a

private rallying cry, a mission statement that directs your efforts. Write in your own voice and stick to what you believe in most deeply. Probe to uncover why you want to manage people. Your answer should help you compose a credo that you will be more likely to follow.

Your credo should be relatively short, from 50 to 1,000 words. Don't pad it to lend a false sense of depth. It's better not to waste words or repeat yourself.

Choose a format that works for you. As you see from the above examples, one manager broke it down into "My Goals" and "I Commit to" while the other simply wrote out a few sentences and left it at that. Make a numbered list or use bullet



CAUTION!

Faking It Write your management credo in your own words. Don't try to copy a passage that you've read somewhere else or quote from a leader whom you admire. While it's fine to get inspiration from others, every word of the credo should come from within you. It must be an entirely original, heartfelt expression of your beliefs, your fundamental purpose, and your goals as a manager.

points if that will help you express your thoughts.

When you've completed this task, put the draft of your credo aside. Don't even think about it. Then after a few days, take a fresh look at it. Read it all the way through without judging it or making any changes. Let it sink in for another day. Then and only then should you

tweak what you've written—and only if you feel it needs revision so it really expresses what you believe, the attitude you want to project, and how you want to lead to get results.

Effective Managing Isn't Easy

As a new manager, you should know that being an effective manager requires a lot of effort. Learning to lead a diverse group of employees can be a harrowing, confounding, and downright painful process.

You should realize what you're getting into by accepting a people management role, and that, at least in the first few months:

- You may not sleep nearly as well at night.
- You'll bring the job home and possibly take out your frustrations on family and friends.
- You'll find yourself putting out fires, despite your best attempts to prevent personnel crises.
- You'll question your judgment when you delegate a task and then find it isn't done well.
- You may lose trust in coworkers when you confide in someone and word leaks out.

In short, expect to feel overwhelmed. That's normal. Almost all new managers tell me that they had no idea how consuming it would be. They often report that "the honeymoon period was so short" or "I had no idea what I was getting into." (Usually they're not complaining—just stunned.)

I'm not trying to drown you in pessimism.

Managing people can be an experience that makes you feel really good about yourself—as long as you understand that it's not a tidy, orderly, predictable

business. Flexibility and maturity will come in handy. So does a dose of good-natured humor that brightens everyone's day.

What's your reward? The best managers often gain more responsibility—fast. More is expected of them, so senior executives tend to raise the bar steadily to see how well these promising supervisors respond to fresh challenges. It can be a heady climb, and big things await those who can overcome early obstacles, bear down, and deliver stellar results.

Just because you're not good friends with your employees doesn't mean relationships no longer matter. The opposite is true. The bonds you establish with your staff serve as the invisible glue that brings everyone together to work toward a common goal.

Suspend Judgment

In your first few months as a new manager, don't take things too hard. Avoid chastising yourself for rookie mistakes. Commit to learning at least one lesson from each day, even if you embarrass yourself in the process. Don't insist on judging every decision or magnifying every mishap. Keep your priorities straight and take it one day at a time.



“Use” Your Employees—Without Making Them Feel Used

New managers sometimes let the rush of authority go to their heads. They suddenly feel awash with entitlement. They start to view themselves as special, different, superior. They may exempt themselves from standard rules of decorum, such as saying “please” or “thank you.”

For example, I met a marketing manager, Wes, who was six weeks into his new position. His bosses couldn’t understand how Wes had faltered so fast. He had alienated his employees



No Friend of Mine

Draw the line between *manager* and *employee* now, not later. Don’t assume just because you’ve worked alongside buddies in the past that they’ll remain friends. The dynamics of the relationship must change now that you’re a manager. It’s best that everyone remain cordial and professional, but not so friendly that you play favorites or stir jealousies. Your best bet: find your friends somewhere else.

by imposing all kinds of crazy edicts, ranging from an absurdly rigid dress code to having them log their day’s work in 15-minute increments on elaborate reporting forms that he designed and distributed. The staff was verging on mutiny.

Wes wasn’t a villain. He had just lost his bearings.

As he put it sheepishly to

me, “I guess I got carried away by this whole thing. Being in charge brings out another side of me that even I don’t always recognize. Sometimes I think my people are tools to be used to get a job done, and I forget they’re actually human beings.”

I advised Wes to settle down, draft a management credo, and make corrections in his leadership style. Even though his employees saw him as a micromanaging tyrant, the truth was he had lost his confidence and overcompensated by tightening his grip over his staff.

Even if you keep your ego under wraps as a new manager, you must still find a way to harness your employees’ talents to maximum effect. Put crassly, that means using your employees to make you look good. Put not so crassly, it means working

together to make the whole group look good because all employees and their manager are succeeding. The effective manager does this wisely and with the full buy-in of employees, rather than exploiting them shamelessly and then hogging the credit for their hard work.

The best way to use employees is to get everything into the open. Let them know exactly how they're being used. That's right: make it clear what you want from them and why their performance matters. These phrases may help:

- *As a result of your work, we will be able to...*
- *I'm asking you to make a larger contribution by getting the following work done...*
- *Here's a way for us to use your skills more effectively...*

By leveling with your staffers, you make them feel important (not vice versa). Let them know that you need their best effort and they'll feel like valuable team members rather than cogs in a wheel.

If you'll benefit from their hard work, don't keep it a secret. Most employees know full well that they can choose whether to make you look like a genius or a goat. We see examples of this in professional sports. When a basketball team gives up on its coach, the players may slack off because they want to get the coach fired—or they may intentionally foil the coach's plans. If the coach tries to exploit players improperly, the backlash can lead to a humiliating and public termination.

You can avoid such problems with the members of your team by publicly and personally recognizing their efforts and by rewarding them. Show them that you appreciate what they're doing and you'll get better results with less effort. It's the right thing to do—and it's efficient and effective managing.

Check Your Ego

Beware of equating strong, gutsy, aggressive management with suffocating your workers in needless directives. If you indulge your sense of self-importance and discount the opinions of others, you will come across as an insecure manager who needs to build himself or herself up at the expense of others. You will alienate the support and willing cooperation of those you manage. In other words, you set yourself up to fail.





Exploit Pride, Not Labor

You'll score big wins by getting your employees to push themselves to attain better results. But at the same time, you don't want to turn them into drones who grow overworked and resentful. Solution: let them judge themselves. Have them review their own performance as a prelude to the formal appraisal process where you give your input. Most workers will come down tougher on themselves than you would, thus allowing you to ally yourself with them (whether you agree with their honest self-evaluation or advise them to lighten up).

Testing Your Assumptions

Most new managers assume they know exactly what it takes to thrive in their new position. But jumping to such conclusions can lead them astray.

From my experience advising new managers, here are the three most common assumptions they make:

- The same skills that got me here will help me succeed.
- Employees expect me to have all the answers.
- My employees aren't all that different from me.

Let's hold each of these assumptions up to the light and see what we discover.

Assumption 1: Just Do the Same Thing, but Better

Why were you promoted into management? Don't think for a moment your professional expertise instantly qualifies you to lead others. Sure, you may be a math whiz or a gifted creative thinker. But whatever accolades you've earned based on your specialized knowledge will in no way guarantee that you'll make a great manager.

In fact, your ability to manage people has almost nothing to do with the technical savvy you've gained that has led you to this point in your career. While you may need to train employees and share your wisdom, the more pressing task ahead is to earn their trust and motivate them to perform exceptionally.

It's scary but true: As a new manager, you're starting from scratch. You cannot fall back on whatever got you this far.

Assumption 2: I Must Have All the Answers

One of the hardest lessons for new managers to learn is to say, “I don’t know.”

If you think your employees will expect you to know everything, you’re wrong. They realize you’re just doing your job—and your job is to keep an eye on them. When they ask you questions, they may certainly hope for a satisfying answer. But if you don’t supply it, they’re not going to mock you behind your back or suspect you’re an impostor. They’ll probably either forget about it or—if they really want an answer—ask someone else.

No manager knows it all. Ironically, some of the best leaders actually know less than their employees about the innards of the business. This ignorance allows them to bring a much-valued fresh perspective to the workplace.

The true test of your managing isn’t what you know or don’t know. It’s how you relate to your employees and how you go about helping them find answers.

Assumption 3: I’ll Manage Employees Like I Manage Myself

Here’s a news flash that you better process now, not later: your staffers are not reflections of you. They were not made in your image, and they do not have all the same beliefs, biases, and hopes as you.

This may sound obvious. But many managers, flying high on the they’re-just-like-me assumption, wind up systematically alienating every one of their employees.

Say you like to play devil’s advocate when analyzing an issue. This helps you see both sides before you draw a conclusion. Fair enough.

Yet one of your employees may not appreciate your thought process. In fact, she may view your critical response to her idea as a thinly veiled rejection. She may think you really believe that—that you don’t want to give her proposal serious consideration. She won’t see it as harmless devil’s advocacy; she’ll walk away convinced that you just love to knock employees’ good ideas, and she may spread the word among her coworkers.

Perhaps you've established a solid track record as a technician. Great. But most of those skills won't necessarily help you handle others. That's an eye-opener for many hotshots who're promoted into management. They figure that they're unstoppable, only to find that all their specialized training doesn't matter much when they go face to face with their staff.

If you must make an assumption, here's a safe one: your employees are all different. They can listen to the same speech and hear different messages. What frightens you might excite them, and what motivates you might bore them.

Acknowledge the diversity among your team. Don't project onto others as you see yourself. The more you can treat each individual separately, the more you'll grow to marvel at the wide range of attitudes and behaviors that your employees bring to work every day.

Manager's Checklist for Chapter 1

- Model yourself after star managers. Analyze the keys to their success, and use this as your template.
- Gain confidence by becoming more aware—but less judgmental—of how you manage others.
- Write a management credo that lists the traits you want to embody and the commitments you're willing to make to succeed.
- Expect to be overwhelmed as a new manager. Prepare to pay an early price for success.
- Exploit your employees' pride, not their labor. It's fine to use them for your own gain as long as you satisfy their interests, too.
- Avoid assumptions that block your ability to manage your employees.