“Management 101”

A Refresher from the American Management Association

1. **Transition To Leadership: 8 Steps To Check The Micromanager In You[[1]](#footnote-1)**

As new managers step into their leadership role, they should take care to avoid the micromanager trap. An obsession with details can distract managers from crucial responsibilities, such as the department’s strategic contribution to the organization.

There are other consequences to micromanagement as well. In the long run, this approach can produce resentment in employees. Creativity dries up. Customer service suffers. And a micromanager’s best employees look elsewhere for employment.

First-time managers must adapt to the more [strategic](http://playbook.amanet.org/communicate-strategic-objectives/), big-picture responsibilities of their positions. That’s the best way to earn the respect of team members. Here are eight steps to make the transition and free employees to use their skills and abilities:

**Think about your responsibilities and priorities as a manager.**

Some executives aren’t always clear about what they expect from a new manager, particularly one who is promoted from within. They think the first-time manager will understand his or her role. Take time to review your job description, and meet with your own manager to get a clear idea of your priorities. Review the immediate and long-term goals for the department to ensure you’re on the right track.

**Look into the future.**

Consider your vision for the department and its contribution to the broader corporate vision, then plan accordingly. Begin to get beyond day-to-day pressures.

Share your vision and the rationale behind it with employees. Be specific about the vision and ask your team to help you attain it. Don’t tell employees what to do. Tell them what your needs are and encourage them to think strategically about helping to meet them.

**Generate expectations for each employee in achieving the vision.**

What will each employee do to contribute to the department’s mission? The company’s? Draw up specific lists for individuals.

In addition, [delegate responsibility](http://playbook.amanet.org/delegate-effectively/) that will encourage employees to reach for the top. When you make assignments, challenge them with their increased responsibility and the opportunity to contribute to the bigger picture. Share your role in this as well.

**Put aside fears about abdicating responsibility for the department.**

This is not to suggest that you don’t supervise your staff; rather, learn to trust employees more. Practice situational leadership, in which you adapt the level of management to each employee’s capabilities and the importance of the task.

**Listen to employees.**

Listening will tell you how you can support them in meeting business goals. So if an employee has an idea, truly listen. If it won’t work, explain why not and brainstorm with the employee on how the idea can be made to work. At the very least, suggest he or she think about the problems with the idea and come back with them resolved.

**Develop the habit of praising employees.**

If you haven’t said “thank you” to an employee in the past three days, and sincerely meant it, go out of your way to find a reason to compliment a staff member’s work. Acknowledging a job well done can become as habitual as micromanaging.

**Allow mistakes to happen.**

Micromanagers may abhor mistakes, but errors can occur even when you micromanage. Learn to share the responsibility for getting tasks done with employees. As long as they don’t make the same mistake over and over, and ultimately take over the work without your input, you’ll be ahead of the game.

**Provide feedback.**

When employees demonstrate the skills, abilities, and knowledge you want, [let them know](http://playbook.amanet.org/drive-results-with-regular-feedback/). If performance falls short of expectation, sit down and discuss the matter. Don’t ignore a problem—that is, abdicating your responsibility as a leader. Discuss the matter with the employee and come up with a plan to avoid a recurrence.

1. **Delegate Effectively[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Your ability to delegate well to others is a vital function of management and a critical determinant of your ability to succeed as an executive. Delegating is both an art and a science. It is an essential skill that allows you to move from what you can do to what you can control. Through [delegation](http://www.amanet.org/training/seminars/Delegation-Boot-Camp.aspx/?pcode=XC7A&utm_source=playbook.amanet&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=playbook), you multiply your influence in your business by unlocking and using the full potential of other people.

The [starting point of delegation](http://www.forbes.com/sites/martinzwilling/2013/10/02/how-to-delegate-more-effectively-in-your-business/) is for you to develop absolute clarity about the job that needs to be done. Exactly what is the job? How will it be measured? When does the job need to be completed? What level of skill, ability, or competence will a person require to do this job in an exceptional fashion?

**Select the Right Person**

An important part of delegation is selecting the right person for the assignment of a particular task. You need to carefully match the task to the skills of the employee. Can this person do this job? Does this person have the required skills and experience to accomplish this task in an excellent fashion?

This decision is very much a matter of judgment, experience, and thoughtfulness on your part. One of the big mistakes that managers make in delegation is assigning a task to someone who does not have the skills, confidence, ability, or motivation to accomplish it.

Your choice of person, then, will largely determine the quality of the end result, and even whether the task assignment succeeds or fails.

**Explain the Results You Want**

When you delegate, explain the results that you want, and explain why you want those results. When you assign a task, the “why” is more important than the “how.” If people know why you want it done this way, or why the task is important, they will have much greater flexibility to make decisions in the accomplishment of the task. The subordinate will be more creative and innovative in accomplishing the results that you desire.

**Avoid Misunderstandings**

When you give a task verbally with nothing in writing, the possibilities of misunderstandings are enormous. By the time your employees get back to their office or desk, they will have almost forgotten what you asked them to do, and when, and to what standard. Have employees write down the assignment and then read it back to you.

Once you have had a back-and-forth conversation about the job, and the employee has repeated back to you exactly what you have asked him or her to do, and you are both clear about the assignment, you then turn over 100 percent responsibility for the completion of the task to the other person.

**Delegate the Whole Task**

It is important that you delegate a complete job, rather than just part of a job. The job that you delegate must be the responsibility of the individual, and the completion of the task must be under that person’s control entirely. Aside from yourself, the other person should not need to get the assistance or support of anyone else to do the job that you have assigned.

People thrive on responsibility for complete tasks. When you give people 100 percent of a job to do, and make them 100 percent responsible, they will be much more motivated to get the job done on schedule.

**Don’t Interfere or Take Back the Job**

Resist the temptation to go and look over the employee’s shoulder. Resist the temptation to continually offer ideas and comments on how to do the job better. Resist the temptation to interfere. When you give your employees the job, express complete confidence in their ability to get the job done as agreed.

Don’t take back the job, either. If your employee asks you if you would make a phone call for him, or get him some information, or perform a certain task that he needs done in order to do the job that you have assigned him, then he has just delegated the task back to you. Now your employee does not need to do anything until you have completed your work. He can go back to his office and play on his computer until you perform the task that you have promised. Don’t let this happen.

**Review Progress Regularly**

Finally, schedule regular meetings to review progress. It is during regular meetings that you get a chance to keep on top of things. Like a doctor taking the pulse of her patients, you take the pulse of the task by regularly asking, “How’s it going?”

A major reason for scheduling regular review meetings is to get feedback on how well people are doing with their assignments and how appropriate the task is for a particular person. Sometimes you may accidentally delegate a task that is beyond a person’s capability. The employee may want to do the job, but does not know exactly how to do it.

If you find that the task you have assigned is too much for your employees and they are in over their heads, you may need to restructure the task and break it up into smaller pieces. Or you may have to give an employee additional input or resources, or get someone else to perform part of the task that a person is not capable of completing alone. A particular task may require several skills. Sometimes the person you are assigning work to has several of the necessary skills but is lacking one of them. In this case, you can take this particular responsibility away from the individual and give it to someone who is more competent in that job area.

**3. Drive Results With Regular Feedback[[3]](#footnote-3)**

What’s the value of regular feedback? It allows managers and employees to build a rapport based on mentorship and mutual respect. Annual reviews, by contrast, tend to be overwhelmingly positive interactions that “check a box” rather than drive operational excellence.

Even a company’s standouts and stars rely on their supervisors to help them advance their skill sets and careers. After a while, without any constructive feedback, top employees will begin to wonder if their managers have simply lost interest and have no wish to help them improve or, worse, have become complacent and just let their performance suffer.

On the other side of the coin, not everyone has an ideal start to a job, and sometimes [interviewers](http://playbook.amanet.org/7-creative-interview-questions-to-ask-millennials/) hire the wrong person. Without regular reviews, the chance of such a person self-correcting is slim. You’re more likely to see an ill-fitting employee either linger as irritatingly as a stone in a shoe or be an outright disaster in his or her role. With frequent supervisor interactions, these kinds of employees would have had the knowledge necessary to course-correct.

**Frequent meetings, reasonable goals**

A clear disadvantage of the yearly or quarterly review is that it only allows supervisors to set yearly or quarterly goals, the sorts of tasks that involve long-term self-improvement and dedication. Such pie-in-the-sky objectives are inspiring and aspirational, but not necessarily very practical.

A supervisor who meets with an employee once every two weeks or so, however, can [set goals](http://playbook.amanet.org/goal-setting-effective/) that can be tangibly achieved in two weeks. Both parties can spend part of the next meeting discussing an ongoing project. If at all possible, managers should have real, concrete data waiting to show each employee, to back up both criticism and praise. When employees have actual results to look at, they can watch their own progress and understand the truth of any claims.

This technique accomplishes the neat trick of letting employees pursue long-term goals without becoming overwhelmed by the sorts of objectives that take a year or more. Working with their supervisor during regular face-to-face meetings, individuals can plan out a step-by-step strategy to get where management wants them. Play your cards right and you won’t have to tell the employee there’s a long-term plan at all. Many employees expect their managers to focus on the big picture, so a leader who’s willing to work with subordinates closely on achievable goals feels like a leader who’s interested in their employees’ day-to-day efforts.

Ultimately, employee reviews themselves are about the journey. The employee and supervisor share the ultimate goal of optimized improvement, and they must work together to set the incremental goals that get them there, developing a strong relationship as co-workers, and even friends, along the way. People who sit down face-to-face with their managers more frequently are more prone to trust those managers and take them at their word, in terms of both praise and criticism.

1. **Goal Setting Is Still The Most Effective Way To Manage Performance[[4]](#footnote-4)**

We’ve seen a lot of things change in the last few years in performance management. Some companies are moving away from annual performance reviews, and towards [more regular feedback processes](http://playbook.amanet.org/how-often-should-you-give-performance-feedback/) throughout the year. Others are eliminating hierarchical management models and going with ad-hoc teams and role-based management. But the more things change, the more one thing has remained the same. Goal setting (based on mutually agreed-upon goals) is still one of the most effective tools in the manager’s toolbox for managing performance.

Why are goals so effective? One reason has to do with measurement. You can’t change what you don’t measure, so the saying goes. Goals, especially those that are well-designed, provide a clear vehicle for an individual and a team leader to measure progress and change over time.

But it’s not enough to just have a goal. It turns out that our goal setting process is just as important as having them in the first place. There was a lot of talk about a Yale study in 1953 that claimed that the 3% of graduates that had written goals accumulated more personal wealth than the 97% of their class that didn’t. The study [turned out to be total fiction](http://www.fastcompany.com/27953/if-your-goal-success-dont-consult-these-gurus), but the underlying premise was so interesting that when [scientists did an actual study of the effect of writing down goals, they found the impact to be substantial](http://www.dominican.edu/dominicannews/study-backs-up-strategies-for-achieving-goals).

Another reason why goals are effective is that they create a sense of shared values across a team, and throughout an organization. Ideally each person’s individual goals can be directly tied back to the values and larger goals of the organization. This keeps everyone on the same page, and fosters a sense of shared effort.

There are a few key elements to keep in mind when creating your goal plans:

**Specific goals are far more effective than vague goals.**

For anyone who has ever been on a diet, this one is pretty obvious. If I say I want to lose weight, I’m much more likely to actually do it if I have a specific target of pounds to hit. This is why we so often hear about the SMART goal framework – specific goals allow us to measure success in a more meaningful way.

**Stretch or difficult goals result in higher performance than setting the bar low.**

When people are faced with a challenge, they tend to rise up to it. Pushing yourself to do something hard means you blow right past those easy goals, and when you hit a stretch goal you feel like you’ve really accomplished something.

**Group related goals are better for team performance than individually beneficial goals.**

This one is a bit of a no-brainer – having a goal that benefits the entire group will help everyone perform better than a goal that only benefits one of the individuals. But the key message for managers in this fact is to be careful that [goals within your team are aligned](http://playbook.amanet.org/employee-skills-sync-company-goals/). Having two people working at cross purposes can make the whole team

Perform worse.

While new trends in management have come and gone over the years, goal setting has remained a constant part of the team leadership process. Well-defined goals are the foundation of performance management, and help keep the team, team leaders, and the organization on track.

1. **Seven Creative Interview Questions To Ask Millennials[[5]](#footnote-5)**

So much is being written about Generation Y, a.k.a. the “Millennials” and the “Next Generation,” in terms of their influence in the workplace and on society overall, and for good reason: There are 90 million Millennials that were born roughly between the years of 1980 and 2000, and this massive demographic bubble is even larger than the Baby Boomer generation that preceded it (roughly 77 million strong). More significantly, Millennials will make up more than half of the U.S. workforce. So the 35-and-under crowd is certainly a force to be reckoned with, and your approach to attracting and retaining this talent pool will likely benefit from a specific strategy that is both challenging and selfless.

On the one hand, Millennials typically want many of the same things that their predecessor generations were looking for at work: A company that articulates a healthy mission, benefits from establishing and practicing the right values, makes a difference in its community, and serves as a [responsible](http://www.amanet.org/training/seminars/Taking-on-Greater-Responsibility-Step-up-Skills-for-Nonmanagers.aspx/?pcode=XC7A&utm_source=playbook.amanet&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=playbook) and benevolent corporate citizen. What makes them different, on the other hand, is that they’re confident in their abilities to change the world, and they’re not afraid of job change and arguably perceive a lack of job security as normal. Having witnessed their parents’ generation’s lack of job security and uncoupling with corporate America, they arguably search for employment opportunities with the goal of finding experiences that satisfy them and where they can make the most difference. Further, Millennials are the most sophisticated consumers in history. They know how to search for products and opportunities well in advance of a sale or a job interview. As such, they pose a challenge to organizations looking for retention and talent development over the long haul.

Where does that leave you in terms of your approach and strategy to interviewing earlier career candidates? How do you reinvent the interviewing process to account for this massive generation’s focus and values? And how can the interview itself become a demonstration of your organization’s culture and uniqueness as a key selling factor? Make no doubt about it: The interview will remain your opportunity to shine, and if your interviewing approach is done right, you’ll actually be able to move the post-employment talent development paradigm to the pre-employment stage by giving candidates a preview of your approach to personal and professional development.

Here’s how it works: Replace the trite and hackneyed “Tell me about yourself” and “Why do you think you’d want to work here” opening questions with much deeper, purposeful queries that help you get to know the candidates better and force them to engage in honest career introspection. Learn about what makes them special, what drives them, and how they’re going about selecting their next company or position. Wow them with your focus on matching your organization’s staffing needs with their career development needs so that it’s a win-win for both sides. Here’s what some of your questions might sound like during your interviewing opener:

* Walk me through your progression in your career, leading me up to how you landed at your current company and in your present role.
* What are the two or three criteria you’re using in selecting your next company or position? What’s important to you at this point in your career?
* What would the ideal opportunity look like in terms of the industry, company, or title that you’re pursuing?

These openers make for an easy entree into any interviewing scenario, but more importantly, they launch the interview with self-assessment questions that allow candidates to speak openly and makes themselves “vulnerable,” an important aspect of establishing trust from the very first encounter. Before the meeting concludes, ask these additional questions to gain a better feel for the candidate’s interest level:

* What would joining our organization do for you in terms of building your resume over the long term?
* Now that you’ve had a chance to research us and learn more during this interview, how would this opportunity provide a link to your future career progression?
* Likewise, if you were to accept a position with us, how would you explain that to a prospective employer five years from now?
* What would be your next logical move in progression if you remained with your current company, and how long would it take for you to get there? (Alternative: What would have to change at your present company for you to continue working there, and have you spoken with your boss about your concerns?)

Very few interviewers pose such selfless questions, and candidates will likely walk away with a very positive impression: “Wow, I’ve never been asked questions before that really focus on my needs, where I am in my career, and what I’m considering. I really appreciate how that hiring manager handled my interview. And if they approach interviewing this way, I’m guessing that this is an important part of their culture once you’re aboard . . . “ If you as an interviewer make that type of impression, you’ll no doubt have pierced their hearts in addition to engaged their heads. Millennials have forced companies to rethink everything from workplace flexibility to the nature of real-time feedback to the use of cubicles.

1. By the staff of the American Management Association, February 27, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Brian Trace, December 10, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dick Morgan, January 13, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Katy Tynan, October 21, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Paul Falcone, February 19, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)