From the editors of *Manager's Minute*, a NationalSeminarsTraining.com publication,
Brian Frederick, Tracy Benbrook, and Tyler Allen

The Best-Kept Secrets About
MANAGING
PEOPLE

Leadership Secrets No One Ever Told You —
But You REALLY Need to Know!

• Build Credibility • Strengthen Your Team • Boost Performance
• Handle Generational Gaps • Ignite Your Career!

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5 Steps to Building Your Credibility as a Manager

When you're in a management position, credibility is crucial. Every action you perform needs to convey the message that you're in charge and you know exactly what you're doing. But establishing credibility can be one of the most difficult things you'll ever have to do as a manager. Even worse, one wrong move and you can destroy everything you've built. But don't worry, by following a few simple steps, you can establish or repair your credibility with your staff, making you a more effective manager immediately.

Step 1: Make a good impression — The best way to build credibility in the eyes of employees is by making a good first impression. But don't worry, even if you've been in your position for years and perhaps didn't make the best initial impression, you can still remedy this. Take a look at your professional image, from your values and demeanor down to the way you dress. Identify areas in which you could improve your professionalism, then use these changes as a stepping-stone to establish (or reestablish) your authority.

Step 2: Be consistent — After you make a positive impression, it's important to keep that momentum moving forward. Doing this means maintaining consistency. This will help your staff understand what you expect, as well as help build a sense of team goals and mutual accomplishment.

Step 3: Develop openness and honesty — Become known as a straight shooter; your employees will respect that even when you're making unpopular decisions. If you don't break your promises, and keep your word whenever possible, your team will respect your leadership.

Step 4: Be respectful — Friendly gestures go a long way to establishing goodwill. Little things, like saying "hello" when passing in the hallway, will help your staff respect you as a person, as well as a boss. Above all, always be respectful. Remember the adage "If you want respect, give respect." Most people, especially staff, will respond to this.

Step 5: Develop clear communication channels — Have an open-door policy, seek out employee feedback, and encourage discussion. These things will help you stay abreast of what's going on in your department, as well as create an atmosphere where employees will feel comfortable coming to you with problems. This will build relationships, which in turn will improve your credibility.

7 Things to Focus on If You Want a Fabulous Career in Management

It's a common question for new managers and supervisors:

"What skills do I need to take my career to the next level?"

Obviously, if your job requires a unique set of technical or software skills, that's number one. Face it, it's really tough to get your staff behind you if you don't have the ability to use — or at least understand — the tools they need to do their jobs.

But if technical skills are number one, then leadership skills are number 1A. And when you're evaluating your management and leadership abilities, you must take your personality into account. Are you most comfortable standing in the bright spotlight, or would you rather work behind the scenes? Either way is OK as long as you exhibit certain behaviors that almost guarantee that you'll succeed.

Great managers in all walks of life demonstrate the same basic set of traits for leadership.

Here is a quick rundown of a few of the most important:

1. Set Goals

Yeah, it's kind of a "No, duh?" kind of thing, but you'd be *amazed* at how many new supervisors we talk to who haven't completed this first, most basic step. What motivates you the most? Is it money, attention, career, family? What do you really want? Create your own definition of success, so you'll know when you arrive. Ask yourself where you want to be in one year. In two years? In five? Create a success map — your personal plan for reaching your career destination. Include small steps you can take now to use your leadership skills and feel successful. And write it down to give it permanence. Make it something you look at every day ... once a month ... whatever.

2. Embrace Failure as a Chance to Learn

Successful leaders are willing to take risks and make mistakes. Go beyond your fear of being wrong and tap into your rich intuitive sense of leadership. Consider each mistake you make an unplanned learning opportunity. Focus on what you learned from the experience — not on being wrong — and decide how you'd do it differently next time.

3. Toot Your Own Horn Because Chances Are No One Else Will Do It!

Let's look at a fictional new manager, Sarah. "If I work really hard, the right people will notice," Sarah thought. But it didn't take long for Sarah to realize how wrong she was.

Sarah received an award for her contributions to a nonprofit newsletter, for example, but although she'd written several outstanding articles, no one in her company ever saw them. Sarah needs to learn what many successful leaders have discovered: Wait for someone to notice your achievements, and you'll likely wait forever. You must make them notice! Sarah could distribute copies of the newsletter articles to her boss and perhaps write an article about her award for the company newsletter. Actions like these will bring the recognition she deserves. You can't count on others to understand how great your talents are. When you make yourself visible and honestly take credit for your achievements, you model leadership behavior.

4. Identify Your "Mapping Mentors"

For some reason, when corporate downsizing was rampant after the dot-com bubble burst, we heard from many veteran managers that the concept of "mentoring" in today's organizations was dead. What??? With apologies to our jaded brethren, we take the exact opposite view. In today's lightning-fast workplace, a men-

tor isn't a luxury — it's a necessity! You wouldn't go into a foreign country without a map. So why try to discover your company's leadership paths without a guide or mentor? A mentor offers you support, encouragement, and insight. You, in turn, can make your mentor look good. Look for someone who has the right positional power and experience — someone who can help you reach your goals.

5. For Goodness' Sake, Don't Get Too Comfortable!

The phrase "job security" is a contradiction in terms today. For this reason, your leadership path must include plans for increasing your promotability and marketability. Continue your education, volunteer in professional organizations and in your community, and broaden your networking group.

6. Expand Your Personal and Professional Network

When the piles of work on your desk seemingly never stop growing, this is the one step that many new managers and supervisors neglect. But even when your time is tight, take the chance to step outside your comfort zone and talk to people in other departments, people you don't know well. Begin your networking by bringing people information. Don't focus on what you can get from people, concentrate on what you have to share.

Your expertise, your conversational skills, and your knowledge of people and your industry are gifts you can give to others. Consider every person you talk to a potential resource.

7. Keep Your Eyes and Ears Open

"Did you hear that the vice president is being transferred? Rumor has it that they're promoting from within. At least that's what his secretary just told me." Is this gossip or information you can use to your advantage? Although engaging in idle gossip can be a career-killer, don't discount what may seem like office politics too hastily. The key is to listen closely and be careful about what you repeat. Part of being a strong leader is having information and knowing exactly what's going on in the office.

Adopting these seven qualities will make you a happier and more productive supervisor — and will guarantee that your career will take exactly the path you want.

Connecting Employees to Your Mission

If your organization is like most, at some point, people took the time to come up with a great mission statement. Something that really reflects your organization's core values and what everyone wants to achieve. They even took the time to post it on the walls of the break room and in the company handbook. And yet somehow, it's often never talked about again.

"We're committed to excellence." "We want to provide superior customer service." "The absolute best value." "Exceed industry standards." "Be recognized as a leader." "Improve quality of life." "Be the premier provider."

Sound familiar?

If your company's mission statement has turned into a catchphrase instead of something that's actively lived, it could be time to open up a dialogue with your team!

1. Explain why the mission statement is important to you — how it reflects your own mission and goals.

2. If your team is more back-room support and less on the front lines, bring up testimonials, customer stories, or even a guest speaker from another department.

3. Talk openly about your competition and also about your strengths and what sets you apart.

4. Ask them to think about the mission statement — what part they find most important and how they can forward it. Because if you keep the mission statement regularly at the forefront of everyone's minds, with buy-in about why it matters and how it relates to them personally, people will become more involved. They'll care more. They'll make the organization's mission statement part of their own — because they'll feel connected. It's about really helping employees see that their jobs matter. Not just to themselves (we all need to eat) but to the organization and to everyone the organization touches.

Management Communication:
Effectively Communicating for Improved Results

As a manager, communication is one of the most important aspects of your job. More than anything else, you need to make sure that you both understand and are being understood. But this isn't always easy. Even if you consider yourself a good communicator, there's a good chance you're breaking some of the cardinal rules of management communication. With that in mind, here are some tips to help you communicate more effectively with your staff:

Listen more than you speak — If you're like most managers, you often neglect the listening part of communication. It's only natural, but if you aren't actively listening you're only getting half the picture. Be mindful of this and really listen to what others are saying.

Be specific — This seems like a no-brainer, but it's one of the most common communication mistakes managers make: they don't provide specific and detailed instructions. When this happens, employees tend to get confused and do the wrong thing, costing you time and money.

Avoid negative language — This might seem like a minor thing to many people, but when managers use positive language they tend to get better results. This means focusing on what you want, not what you don't want.

Give feedback — Rather than waiting for performance reviews or project wrap-ups, make it a habit to give your employees feedback on a regular basis. This will reinforce that they are following the right course of action, as well as head off problems.

Build strong relationships — When you have a good relationship with your staff, they'll feel more comfortable coming to you with problems and questions. Things as simple as asking them "How are you?" or casually chatting about non-work-related events can go a long way to creating stronger relationships and better overall communication.

Be accessible — This is a major reason why projects get off track: the manager simply isn't around to answer questions as they arise. If you want to be sure that everything stays on track and that communication lines remain open, you need to be available to your team when they have questions.

Communication is vital in any endeavor. If you're not accurately conveying information and instruction, your team will be confused on what exactly it is they should be doing. But by establishing clear, open channels of communication, you're setting yourself and your employees up for increased success.

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

- Myths and Facts About Motivation
- Tips for Creating a Motivated Team
- Morale-Boosting Employee Rewards
- Building a Positive Work Environment

Motivating Employees: Myth vs. Reality

As a manager, motivation is an important part of your job. You need to find a way to get the most from your employees, keeping them on task and always striving for more. But if you subscribe to traditional management knowledge, you're probably making false assumptions about what really works to motivate your staff. Here are some of the most common misconceptions and alternative approaches that will reap better rewards.

Myth 1: Fear is a good motivator — Some organizations like to use the Darth Vader school of management philosophy: if you keep employees in constant fear of losing their jobs, they'll stay hungry and on edge.

The Reality: Fear is only a good motivator for a short time. If employees are constantly worried about their positions, stress will skyrocket and they'll become burned out, hurting productivity.

Try This: Instead of threatening, try positive reinforcement. People are much more likely to strive for excellence when they believe their efforts are noticed and recognized.

Myth 2: Some people just refuse to be motivated — The old school of thought believes that some employees are just lazy and won't respond to anything, neither the carrot nor the stick.

The Reality: Just like everyone has their own hopes and desires, everyone has specific motivators. It's your job as a manager to discover what drives each member of your staff and use that to push them forward.

Try This: Identify what is holding back poor performers, then find out what it will take to get them up to par. The downside of this is that sometimes an employee is just not a good fit for your organization.

Myth 3: People prefer to set their own goals — Some managers like to take a hands-off approach to their staff, allowing each employee to determine his or her own goals and how they fit in with the overall target.

The Reality: While lots of employees do relish a certain amount of freedom in their work, unclear goals and benchmarks can cause unnecessary stress and lead to missed deadlines and poor-quality work.

Try This: Work hand-in-hand with your employees to develop goals. Find out what their strengths and weaknesses are, then involve them in the goal-setting process.

Myth 4: You can systematically apply a motivation system to cover all employees — Some managers believe that one consistent motivation strategy should be sufficient to keep all employees engaged. Consistency allows everyone to know exactly what is expected and what the results of success and failure will be.

The Reality: Just like everyone has a different personality, not everyone responds to the same motivators. What works for one employee is not guaranteed to work for another.

Try This: Take the time to talk to each member of your staff individually. Find out what makes him or her tick, then use this knowledge to push the right motivation buttons.

Myth 5: Money is the best motivator — In order to reward or encourage employees, some companies will simply throw more money at them, assuming this will keep morale high.

The Reality: While everyone would like to have more money, more money does not necessarily equal job happiness.

Try This: While very few employees in have turned down a pay increase, multiple studies have shown that a good work environment where employees are happy is a much better motivator than money. So focus more of your efforts on making sure you're creating a positive, supportive, enjoyable work climate for your employees. (We'll give you ideas of how to do this on page 25.)

4 Tips for Creating a Highly Motivated and Productive Team

As a manager of a team, you know how important it is that the individuals on the team are all motivated, involved, and productive. But no matter how great the people you hire, outside factors can create obstacles — and it's up to you to help resolve them! Let's look at some steps you need to take if you want your employees to give it their all, all the time.

1. Examine and improve your communication process. To have a truly enthusiastic, productive team, you must create an environment of openness and sharing. If you're unsure exactly how to do this, learn more! Take courses, attend a seminar, read books or articles, or do some research online. Help your employees improve their communication skills by giving them training opportunities as well. Although effective communication is the cornerstone of team success, we're usually not taught how to do it well. Most of us can use some step-by-step instructions on how to communicate well with those around us.

2. Address office politics. Just because office politics is a fact of life doesn't mean you can't do something about making it less

destructive to the effectiveness of your employees. Ignoring it doesn't make it go away; as a matter of fact, it usually makes it worse. Addressing the issue head-on will not make it completely go away, but unless you're willing to bring it up, you have no chance of stopping its damaging effect on your employees. Tell people you're not interested in scoring political points but only in getting the job done, and teach your employees to do the same.

3. Encourage risk-taking. Start with small things. Let your employees try different ways of doing their jobs. If it doesn't work, don't talk about failure — instead, discuss what was learned in the process. Ask for input on what they'd try differently next time. Open up your employees' willingness to try new things, and you might be surprised at the results. Just because it's the "way it's always been done" or the way you think it should be done, doesn't mean it's the best way.

4. Train, train, and train some more. Don't limit your thinking on training to the skill set needed to perform a specific job. Start thinking about all the skills needed to create a positive, productive work environment, including:
- Communication and negotiation skills
- How to handle conflict and confrontation
- Time management, prioritization, and organizational skills
- Stress management
- Assertiveness skills and beyond

When you look at the whole person, not just the skills required to do a job, you have a better chance of creating and maintaining a productive, highly motivated team. And don't forget to encourage mentorship — sometimes the best source of knowledge and training is other members of the team! Remember, it all starts with you!

5 Morale-Boosting Employee Rewards

Many companies have been hit hard by tough economic times — and as a manager, you know how rough it can be for your team's morale to find out that benefits are being cut, salaries frozen, or even that some positions may be in jeopardy. How do you reward employee performance when your organization may be financially strapped?

1. Working from home: Even the option of working from home a single day a week — or a month — can be a great reward for an employee. Let's face it, gas prices keep rising and every day without driving can help ease an employee's personal budget. And employees who are able to work from home at times feel trusted and valued by their organization — and the good ones repay that trust!

2. Written thank-yous: It's a great emotional lift when a person's work is recognized. And taking the time to write a specific thank-you when employees go above and beyond, or even just to show your appreciation that they have a great attitude, can really put a smile on their faces — and show that you really do notice and appreciate it.

3. Create a recognition program: Formally recognizing outstanding achievements on a regular basis is a great incentive. And you can even get everybody involved by asking for coworkers' nominations — and reading them aloud. Sometimes the recognition alone is enough, but consider alternative rewards as well — like leaving early for a day, or seeing if you can budget in a lunch or inexpensive gift card.

4. Team-building day — or even just an hour: It doesn't even have to be out of the office — but a performance-based team-building event can be motivating and fun. Inexpensive options could be as simple as a game of Pictionary or Hangman on an office whiteboard, or a game of charades. Of course, you have to pick an activity that fits the personalities of your team — but a chance to laugh and have some fun together can really increase morale.

5. Flexible scheduling: If it's possible for your department, offering flexible scheduling is a great way to reward employees and keep them happy. Employees able to arrive and leave an hour early or an hour later can not only take advantage of their own peak productivity times, but they can have a weight lifted off their shoulders if they're juggling family obligations.

Keys to Building a Positive Work Environment

It's a fact — employees are more productive when they work in a good environment. When they're happy and satisfied, they work harder and are more productive. But what makes a good work environment?

The simple answer is there is no simple answer. But while it may be difficult to pinpoint one specific thing that makes a great work atmosphere, there are several characteristics that are shared by organizations with positive environments. These include:

Adaptability — A flexible work environment will go a long way to keeping employees happy. By allowing people the freedom to make their own decisions, you encourage them to invest in their jobs and give them a real sense of ownership.

Valuing employees — You should do your best as a leader to ensure that everyone feels important to the company, that their work is valued. This also means that when you're developing policy, it's important to consider how it will affect all members of the company, from the lowliest part-timer to the top executives.

Caring — This is perhaps the most important characteristic shared by organizations with great environments — the employees feel like their bosses actually care about them. If you didn't already realize it, just by showing an interest in your workers you can generate a ton of goodwill, both toward yourself and the organization in general.

Balance — If you want your employees to truly enjoy their jobs, it's critical that you encourage and maintain a work-life balance. This means if you're cracking the whip and working everyone overtime to get something finished, give them a break when it's over. Maybe you could let them have the day or at least the morning off. Whatever you do, let your team know that you understand their personal life is important too.

These are just a few characteristics that are shared by great companies, and by no means should be considered an exhaustive list. But if you want to foster a great culture, you simply cannot afford to ignore your team's happiness.

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

- Barriers to Employee Productivity
- Dealing With Problem Employees
- Employee Ownership & Accountability
- How to Criticize With Tact and Diplomacy

7 Barriers to Employee Productivity

Every manager wants to get the best out of his or her employees. When trying to help your employees reach peak levels of productivity, you must first find out what is hindering their progress — and then fix it! Let's take a deeper look at 7 potential roadblocks to employee productivity:

1. **Equipment, tools, software, or on-the-job support is out of date/broken/inadequate for the job required**. Your employees cannot be productive if they don't have the tools to get the job done. Think about it this way: If you need to tighten a screw and you don't have a screwdriver, you'll use whatever is at hand. Have you ever used a knife to tighten a screw? You got the job done, but it took a lot longer, and you probably broke the tip of the knife in the process. Not exactly an efficient or effective way to get the job done, is it?

2. **Decision making is centralized and autonomy/personal accountability is not emphasized**. In highly autocratic work environments, employees are discouraged from thinking for themselves. If they don't think for themselves, they never really take ownership of their jobs. They just follow the rules being dictated from above. Individuality and creativity are ruined in the process.

3. Business politics pull teams/departments in different directions. Office politics will never go away. It's a fact of company life. However, destructive office politics can demoralize an organization, hamper productivity, and increase turnover. Deceit, gossip, rivalry, and power plays are fine for movies and TV, but they are potential disasters in the workplace.

4. Incentive plans are insufficient and reward both poor and good performance. Nothing can be more discouraging than seeing someone who barely contributes get the same incentive bonus as those who give it their all. Incentive plans that do not take into account the exact, measurable contributions of each individual are not only ineffective, they're counterproductive.

5. Employees don't take risks necessary to keep your organization competitive and forward-thinking. Many employees can recall attending meetings where managers saluted the month's top performers. Very few, if any, have attended meetings where an executive praised a daring effort that failed. In a recent survey of 690 employed Americans, BlessingWhite, a Princeton-based consultancy, asked employees whether they are encouraged to take risks. Only 26 percent of employees said they are often encouraged to take risks. A startling 41 percent said they are never asked to do so. Never. How can organizations adapt to changing conditions if their employees never try anything new?

6. **Employees are no longer asked for their input and involvement**. Like centralized decision making, keeping employees out of the loop when it comes to what works and what doesn't work is another sign that your productivity will decrease. Who knows better how to do the job than the person actually doing it?

7. **No one is measuring productivity to support awareness and accountability**. Sometimes it's not that no one is measuring productivity, it's that no one is communicating those measurements to the employees who are expected to meet the job requirements.

If any of these additional barriers to productivity are present in your company, it's time to take immediate action if you want better results from your employees!

Dealing With Problem Employees

If you've ever worked in management or a leadership position, you've almost surely dealt with a problem employee. Rude, aggressive, insubordinate, untrustworthy, and unproductive — dealing with difficult workers is one of the greatest challenges you'll face as a manager.

But how do you handle a problem employee? If you have the authority you can fire him or her, but that might have a negative impact on morale. You can keep giving the employee the work no one wants in the hope that he or she quits, but that might just make the problem worse. You can do nothing and hope the problem goes away, but it probably won't.

No, the best thing you can do is work with the problem employee, get to the root of his or her issue, and find a way to deal with it. But how do you do that?

The first step to managing a difficult employee is to separate your personal and professional feelings. Regardless of the fact that this person drives you up the wall, you need to put your personal negative feelings away and assess his or her performance professionally and objectively. This is easier said than

done, but it is absolutely crucial for making legitimate inroads with the person.

Next you need to approach the difficult worker in a nonthreatening manner. Find a time when you can get the problem worker alone and approach him or her in a way that isn't angry or threatening, carefully explain your problems with the behavior, and solicit responses on how to change it.

Whatever happens, don't get sucked into an argument. This is often exactly what the problem employee wants, and it will cause you to lose the upper hand in the conversation. Keep your cool, actively listen to what he or she is saying, and respond as you see fit. Don't feel pressured to make a decision or change immediately; feel free to fall back to the position of discussing again at a future point.

When you feel like you have a good insight into what is causing this employee's problem behaviors, identify and follow through on a plan to correct it. This is the most vital step, because if you don't follow through, you risk exacerbating the situation.

When confronted with a rational argument from you, most employees will recognize their negative behavior and take steps to correct it. In any case, it's of the utmost importance that you follow company guidelines for dealing with problem behavior and take timely action to turn it around.

Helping Employees Develop Ownership & Accountability

A great challenge of leaders is getting employees at all levels to embrace accountability and personal ownership of workplace issues like productivity and harmony. However, the motivation behind this desire has little to do with business leaders' selfless need for earthly goodness.

Few business leaders invest their money or gamble their family's fortunes on the belief that they might one day win a humanitarian medal. No, the long and short of it is this: BUSINESS! It is by and large understood, that if someone feels ownership or responsibility for something, there is a significantly greater likelihood that he or she will treat it with respect, ensure its welfare, and probably even help raise its value.

For example, most people occasionally wash and wax their personal automobiles; however, few people wash a rental car before they turn it in, or clean a hotel room before they check out. Business leaders want their employees to value their work, work space, and the goals of the organization. If they do, they'll be more productive and more reliable and have greater loyalty to the organization.

Now that we have a reasonable understanding of why business owners desire accountability and ownership from employees, we can determine what might cause an employee to embrace accountability and ownership.

First, convey the need. Working with the employee to identify a need, structure, and outcome to the desired result can lead to ownership.

Second is the need for and understanding of discipline. The root word of discipline is ***disciple***. The word is derived from Latin, and means to train or be trained. ***Disciple*** can be used as a noun or a verb. This insight allows us to discern the proper order of worker/owner sociology. Employees deserve discipline, and studies indicate they expect it and desire it. Clearly, engagement and productivity are equals in the realm of results-driven business. However, engagement must come before productivity.

Employees are far more likely to accept personal ownership and commitment than someone whose only interaction with upper-level management is when he or she makes a mistake. In fact, it was a presumption of Dr. Peter Drucker that employees "need, deserve … ***and desire***" accountability and discipline.

The French anthropologist Paul Gagnon occasionally discusses the behavioral concept of "The Feast of the Big Man." This is the historically proven idea that "every culture figures out a way

to redistribute wealth." If a person accumulates too much of anything, he or she develops an internal need to accept "ownership and accountability," and then reward the person(s) who helped get it.

It's like people buying a gift for someone out of obligation or feeling guilty passing a homeless person without offering a helping hand. In short, historical and anthropological evidence shows that human beings are inclined to act and react in very predictable ways.

When "given to" in abundance, the average human will "give back" freely. Wise managers/business leaders know that engagement must set the foundation for productivity. Supervisors at all levels must give:

- Praise
- Recognition
- Training
- Discipline
- A familial environment

If you do these things, you will notice your employees embracing ownership and accountability and they'll, in turn, give back to you. Caesar knew it. Alexander knew it. The Great Khans knew it. And now you know it!

How to Criticize With Tact and Diplomacy

Consider the following three approaches to criticize without attacking:

1. The 4-to-1 Rule (4 Ws to 1 H)

- What? Ask "what happened?" Don't tell people, ask instead.
- When? Consider the best time to have this conversation.
- Who? Consider the person being criticized. Use a mood and mode that he or she will accept.
- Where? Use a neutral location unless you need to assert your authority. In that case, use your office.
- How? Sandwich your comments between praise: praise, one issue for improvement, praise — this softens the blow.

2. Critiquing vs. Criticizing

- Define goals — What is the purpose of offering this feedback?
- Set deadlines — Establish a time frame for improvement.

- Offer positive feedback — Identify areas of success as well as areas that need improvement.
  - Give specific suggestions for improvement — This will help the person in question actively attack his or her weaknesses.

3. Direct Criticism

- State the action or area that needs to be addressed.
- State the result of the action and why it is negative.
- Ask if the result was intended or merely an accident.
- Wait for feedback and actively listen to responses.
- Follow up with discussion of future options.

Use these strategies to provide meaningful and well-received criticism.

TEAMWORK

- Etiquette & Common Courtesy
- Keeping Your Team Focused
- Crossing the Generation Gap
- The Manager's Role in Conflict Resolution
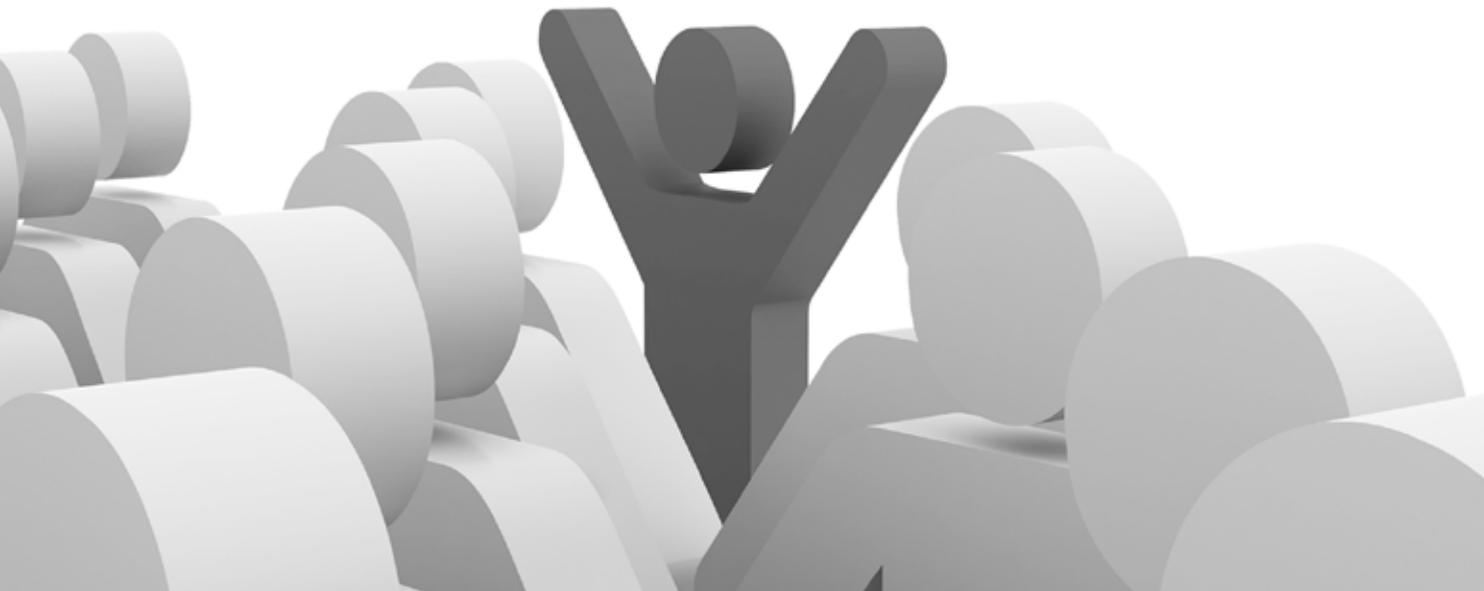
Encouraging Good Etiquette in Your Staff

(aka: Preventing the Death of Common Courtesy)

You know who they are. They're the people in the supermarket with their cart blocking the entire aisle while they decide which brand of cereal to buy. Or they're in a restaurant, talking loudly on their cell phone while you try to enjoy a quiet dinner with friends or family. Maybe it's the person who finished off the last of the coffee at work and then neglected to brew another pot. They're people with no sense of common courtesy, and it seems to be a growing epidemic.

Now wait a minute, before you start dismissing this entire section as a meanspirited tirade in the vein of an Andy Rooney-esque, fist-shaking rant on young people and their lack of manners, take a moment and consider your life. How often are you forced to inconvenience yourself simply because someone else has little to no awareness of how his or her actions are impacting you? If you're like most people, this probably happens quite a lot.

But of course you're asking yourself: What can I do about it? Believe it or not, in your role as a manager you can go a long way to encouraging and developing etiquette in your staff, traits they will take with them long after they've left your employ. Here is a step-by-step guide to encouraging your staff to be more considerate to one another, fostering a better environment at work and hopefully a slightly more considerate world outside.

1. Identify — Believe it or not, most people who act inconsiderately aren't willfully doing so. While this isn't always the case — some people are just jerks — many inconsiderate behaviors are simply the result of ignorance, and the offenders don't realize that what they're doing is wrong. As a manager, you're in the perfect position to point out these behaviors and encourage improved etiquette.

2. Confront — This is the most difficult step for most people, but it's also the most important. If someone is behaving in an unacceptable manner, it's not just your right to point it out, but your duty. Now, this doesn't mean you should start an argument or passive-aggressively attack them. Instead, draw attention to their behavior and its negative impact on others. Politely ask them to be more mindful in the future. You run the risk of offending some people, but you'll be surprised how many people will immediately correct their behavior.

3. Appeal to a higher authority — Unless you're the sole owner of your company, there's almost always a higher authority to whom you can appeal. If people consistently refuse to adapt their offensive behavior, then it becomes necessary to take the problem to someone with the direct authority to deal with it. Whether this is a higher manager, an HR representative, or, in the real world, a police officer, these people are skilled at mediating problems. And faced with the threat of negative consequences, all but the most stubborn people will actively try to be more considerate of others.

4. Encourage politeness and respect — As a child you were probably taught the importance of saying "please" and "thank you." Unfortunately, many people seem to have forgotten this lesson. But that's why it's great to be in management. Though you probably don't rule by decree, your words should carry enough weight that a simple encouragement of politeness and respect should immediately improve civil discourse.

5. Lead by example — This is an often overlooked key. If you want your staff (or neighbors, etc.) to show more consideration, you need to show more consideration to them. Take a look at your own behavior and try to identify times when you have been less than considerate. If you have a hard time finding them, ask a friend to point out times when you were rude or showed poor etiquette. Then be mindful of this and try to consider others' feelings more in the future.

6. Stick to your principles — Don't compromise when it comes to etiquette. If you feel that someone is in the wrong, don't let anyone convince you differently. This doesn't mean instigating World War III over an empty coffeepot, but instead standing your ground. Be strong about what you know is right, and most times others will come around. (Of course, the important flip side of this is being able to admit when you are wrong and apologizing gracefully — don't worry, it can take lots of practice to get right, just stick with it.)

7. Be consistent — Finally, one of the best ways to create a more considerate workplace is by maintaining consistency. That means if something is wrong when one person does it, it's wrong when anyone does it, from the loftiest executive to the lowliest part-timer. Maintain a consistent approach when it comes to encouraging consideration and good etiquette, and you'll be pleasantly surprised by the great results you get.

Keeping Your Team Focused

As a manager, you know how difficult it can be to keep your team focused and on task. Some employees in particular are easily distracted and quickly forget what it is that they were supposed to be doing. But when people lose sight of the goal and don't focus, your overall productivity and efficiency decrease. So what do you do?

Here are several solutions you can implement immediately to help keep your team on track and hitting their goals:

1. Get rid of distractions — This should be obvious. If certain members of your team can't get things done because something keeps distracting them, then simply remove the distraction. Without these attention vampires sucking energy from your team, they'll find it much easier to keep focused and get things done.

2. Recruit veteran team members to keep things on track — As a manager, it's impossible for you to oversee everything at once. That's why you should enlist the help of veteran team members who know their roles and responsibilities to help keep everyone else on track.

3. Set reasonable goals — It's hard to maintain focus when you're striving for unrealistic goals. When your team is unable to envision a successful solution to a problem or how to reach a goal, it's easy to get discouraged and lose focus.

4. Review regularly — You already know how important communication is to your overall effectiveness, but what you may not realize is how important it is to keeping your employees focused. By regularly reviewing problems and benchmarks, you reassure your ultimate goal, reminding them to adhere to the task at hand.

5. Reward success — Recognizing and rewarding successful completion of progress is a great way to keep your team's eyes on the prize. Positive reinforcement can go a long way to keeping them on track.

Crossing the Generation Gap

Once upon a time, the oldest employees in any organization were the executives. The management team was slightly younger than them, the team leads even younger, and so on and so forth until you reached the bottom of the ladder, where the new graduates, the youngest people in the company, were lodged. When this was the case, generational differences weren't very noticeable, because each person's boss was only a few years older than his or her team. But it's not so anymore.

In today's uber-competitive work environment, organizations seek out and find the best candidate for each position regardless of age. While this is great for productivity, it creates a unique problem, one that was virtually nonexistent in the past: the generation gap between employees. Different generations have different priorities and need to be motivated in different ways. And with employees of vastly differing generations working side by side, this can create a ton of problems.

Do you know how to handle this? How do you foster bonding among employees from different generations? Here are some simple strategies you can adapt to minimize the effect of age differences on your employees and create a stronger team.

Find a common ground — Though employees from different generations may not share the same values, there's a good chance that they have at least a few common interests. It could be a local sports team or a shared love of cooking, but whatever it is, encouraging your staff to relate to one another on a more personal level, even if it's not business-related, will build ties among employees, improving overall productivity.

Consider a mentoring program — This is a great strategy for any organization. It facilitates knowledge transfer between veteran employees and their less-experienced counterparts. In addition to limiting brain drain when you lose older employees to promotion or retirement, it's also a two-way street, as the younger employees, who are often more technology-savvy, can help their mentors discover the benefits of new tools.

Understand motivational differences — Employees from Generation Y are used to reaping instant rewards. When they want something, they expect to get it now. Staff members from older generations, on the other hand, tend to be much more patient. By understanding the differences in what motivates workers of different ages, you can address their individual needs and desires more effectively.

Know the lingo — Word meanings change over time. This is a phenomenon that has been expedited by the advent of texting and other forms of electronic communication. It's your job

as a manager to create a common language of professionalism as a lingua franca for workers of all generations. By establishing a common understanding of language, you're preventing a whole host of problems before they arise.

Conflict in the Workplace:
A Manager's Guide to Resolution

Conflict is an unwanted but inevitable occurrence in most organizations. When you bring together people with different personalities and value systems, personality clashes are bound to arise. And it's your job as a manager to smooth over these rough patches and ensure that teamwork isn't affected by personal spats.

To do this, you need to approach conflicts with an open mind and a clear plan of action. Here's a list of tips to help you get to the root of personality problems and keep your team effective and efficient.

Keep an open mind — Nothing is more detrimental to effective problem solving than approaching an issue with preconceived notions. Even if a conflict between two employees involves a known troublemaker, don't automatically assume this person is at fault.

Identify the cause of the problem — Getting to the root of the problem will help you find an effective solution, as well as prevent future problems from arising.

Nip issues in the bud — It's much easier to solve a disagreement in the early stages, rather than waiting until things get out of hand. Learn to identify and prevent problems before they arise.

Be an active listener — Pay attention to what people are really saying, and read between the lines. An employee involved in conflict at work may have issues in his or her personal life that are spilling over. By actively listening to what the employee is saying, you can help find real solutions.

Find a solution everyone can live with — Conflict resolution rarely ends with everyone leaving the table feeling like they got exactly what they wanted. But as a manager, to successfully resolve conflicts, you need to find compromises that both parties can live with.

LEADERSHIP LAUGHS

Employees Make the
Strangest Excuses

We asked our ***Manager's Minute*** readers what strange excuses for missing work they'd heard from employees, and then laughed our heads off at what we heard. We thought you might enjoy a chuckle or two as well … so here they are:

- "I got my toe got caught in the sheet and I can't get out of bed."

- "I have to go and give my horse an enema."

- "I have to have brain surgery but will probably be in on Monday or Tuesday."

- "I can't get a ride and since my parents are 'kinda hippies,' I follow their lead and carpool versus driving myself."

- "Can't come to work because the spider bite I got has made me immunocompromised and I can't be around other people who may be sick."

- Day One: "I can't come in because I can't find my car keys."
  Day Two: "I can't come in, the gopher took my car keys."

- "I can't find my false teeth, so I can't come to work."

- "I can't come to work because my hairdryer was in my luggage that was lost by the airlines."

- "I won't be in today because my monkey's highchair fell over and hit my foot."

- "I will not be in today because I'm in a Mexican jail for drunk and disorderly."

- "I can't come in because I hit a deer on the way to work and killed it so I need the day off to dress it out and get it in my freezer."

- "My only shoes were packed in my suitcase and it didn't make my flight so I can't come to work today."

- "My guppy is having babies and I have to stay home to take care of them."

- "I had a flat in L.A. and had to wait for my husband to come from Phoenix to fix it."

- "I can't come to work because I can't find my hairbrush."

- "I'm calling in DEAD as I've used up all of my sick days."

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