

Managers still need to be managed

By Fiorella Callocchia - featured in Canadian HR Reporter

The first three months are a crucial time for new managers. Somebody moving into a new management position will likely find her charges will go easy at first, waiting to see just what makes her tick – they have essentially put her on probation.

And so the first three months are an equally important time for the new manager's manager. He must make sure the new manager does as much right as possible to set the foundation for a successful term as group leader.

Promotion can sometime be a double edge sword after all. On the one hand, it is usually a form of recognition but on the other, it is the greatest responsibility to be the "custodian of the human spirits" that report to you.

Likely she (the new manager) achieved success by demonstrating strong technical performance and capability. However to be a successful manager requires another toolkit that may be less familiar... a leadership toolkit, specifically well tuned people skills.

Fortunately some important lessons have been learned that, while obviously no guarantee, certainly seem to improve the chances of success. There are clearly some things that work and some that don't. (Below is a list of some "best practices" on how senior managers can enhance the effectiveness of their new managers.)

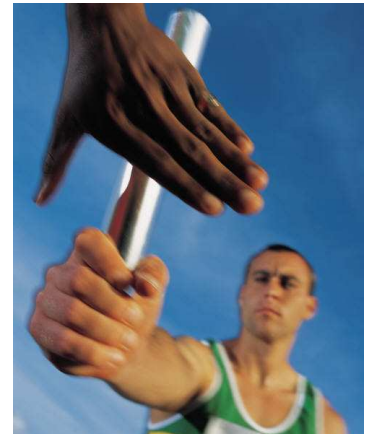
To help a new manager succeed in a new role with confidence and competence, the new manager's manager has to help facilitate a smooth transition.

For example, by sitting down with the new manager and carefully and clearly explaining what the company expects from her in her new role: What are the technical and managerial responsibilities and accountabilities? How will she be measured in terms of performance? Talk about the people challenges and best approaches.

Let her know what employees will be looking for and the different hats she might have to wear: coach, mentor, guide, teacher, leader and sometimes, a friend.

Ensure she understands the reporting relationships both on and off the organizational chart.

Once she is clear on what the various stakeholders - employees, her manager, senior management, peers, customers and suppliers – expect from her, remind her that in the first 100 days she'll be in the "probationary period" with her employees. Don't spook her, but she has to know that during this time she must prove herself to direct reports. Share with her some of these best practices. They are practical, easy to use and often, complete common sense.



- To get people on side and give them reason to be positive, the new manager should strive for some "quick-wins." Look for positive small changes that can be made to prove to employees she is the right person for the job.
- She should take the "temperature" of the department by meeting one-on-one with each employee to introduce herself, discuss any concerns or issues the employee may have and to get an understanding of what the employees expect. Do a lot of listening, observing and understanding situations. Now is a good time for a team building session and events that bring people together in a comfortable, casual setting.
- If possible and practical, the new manager should meet with the previous manager to discuss the various challenges in the role. What issues should be dealt with immediately? In the long term?
- Taking the time to review the employee personnel files and staff performance history will help. Sometimes under new leadership, below average performers can learn to shine like polished diamonds. Time should also be made to improve her understanding of the business, where is the industry going over the next year? How will this impact the company, her department?
- All Human Resources policies should be clear, and applied fairly, consistently and equitably.
- She should review all goals and objectives with employees and share her expectations and leadership philosophies.
- All legal obligations should be reviewed with respect to employment such as human rights, employment standards and occupational health & safety. If the employees are unionized, the collective agreement should be read.
- Go over the performance reviews of the staff and determine their strengths and limitations and develop learning plans for them. She should show an interest in their self-development and lead by example in this area.
- A good working relationship with the HR Department should be encouraged. HR usually knows what is going in other parts of the organization that might be helpful. She should know about all the programs and benefits available.
- New managers should be cautious about overt friendships with employees. It can be viewed as favouritism. When somebody becomes a manager, especially if promoted from within, they need to discuss the new boundaries and limits.
- She should talk to peers and learn their best practices. It is ok to make a mistake, just don't make the same one twice.
- Provide a reading list of the latest leadership books and encourage them to attend workshops to understand the latest techniques in hiring, motivating, coaching and retaining key talent.

- Performance reviews must be conducted on a timely basis and salary increases communicated in person.
- Any issues raised by employees should be responded to promptly but make sure she has all the information first. She has to accept that she can't be everyone's hero or friend.
- It is a good idea to learn who the key players are and try to understand the "cliques". Figure out who the informal ring-leaders are and win their trust and confidence as quickly as possible.
- Above all, unless absolutely necessary, do not terminate staff. The new manager should take time to make her own determination as to who is a keeper and who is not.

When somebody moves into a new management position, nobody should pretend it is business as usual, and for goodness sake, don't try to tell employees that. A new manager usually creates fear in the minds of most employees since they feel they have to prove themselves all over again. If the new manager is following in the footsteps of a tyrant, she may run into some cynicism and mistrust. Conversely, if she is following in the footsteps of "the most wonderful manager we ever had", make sure she knows why employees feel that way.

Most important, she should avoid being someone she is not. It's too stressful. Some lessons are learned on the fly and no book or article can help you.