THE SUCCESSFUL MANAGER

Practical Approaches for Building
and Leading High-Performing Teams

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High-Performing Teams
Paperback Edition

*To my family, mentors, and team members who have
enabled, advised, and supported me through my journey
as a manager and leader.*

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Foreword

Many years ago, at the end of my performance review, my boss shared some news with me.

"We're promoting you," he said, handing me a letter with my new salary and title. A wave of excitement washed over me. This was the moment I had been working so hard for over the previous couple of years.

"Along with this promotion," he continued, "you're going to be taking on a few direct reports effective immediately. I'll be communicating this news to them later today."

In an instant, my excitement gave way to anxiety. I had never managed anyone before.

Then my boss listed the names of the people who would be on my team. Two of them were peers of mine whom I had worked alongside for the past twelve months.

The anxiety now gave way to fear.

"Is there any kind of training I'll receive or any good books you recommend on managing people?" I asked.

"No not really, but don't worry. You'll figure it out as you go," he said as he sent me on my way.

Like new parents being sent home from the hospital with their first child, I had just been thrust into one of the most significant transitions people can go through in their professional lives with little clue what I was doing and virtually no resources to help me navigate the territory.

In the many years since that day, I have worked for a number of organizations and have promoted dozens of people into their first role as a manager. Unfortunately, their transitions were similar to mine.

I have also consulted for over one hundred companies of all sizes and I have found that this approach to manager promotions is the norm. Few organizations provide new managers with the resources to help ensure their success during this period of massive change. New managers are left to "figure it out" in the wild.

This makes for a slow learning curve and a bumpy ride for new managers and for the people who report to them. Most of the time, managers do not know what they are doing well and what they need to improve upon because there isn't a natural way for them to be provided with useful feedback. It isn't common for direct reports to share open and honest feedback with their managers for obvious reasons. And while a 360 review process can create an anonymous opportunity for gathering this feedback, good 360 processes are an anomaly. Not only that, but they tend not to reach far enough down in organizations to apply to new managers because of the time and expense associated with administering them.

This aim of this book is to fill that gap. Rather than being left to figure things out on your own, this book provides you with clear, practical and accessible advice on how to build and lead successful teams. It is the book I wish that I'd had when I first became a manager, as well as the book I wish I could have relied on for guidance during many stages of my journey to becoming a senior leader in large organizations.

Whether you are just starting out as a manager or you're looking to elevate your capabilities and become a top-tier

leader of teams, it is my sincere hope that this book helps you reach your goals.

Here are a few things you can expect to take away from this book:

- A clear framework to guide you in building the fundamental competencies of an outstanding manager.
- Practical examples, stories, and tips from some of the world's greatest managers of teams and large organizations.
- Diagnostics to foster self-reflection and to gauge your progress on your journey to becoming a top-tier manager.
- Descriptions of the challenges you can expect to experience as a manager and advice on how to adopt the mindset that will help you triumph and emerge as a truly great manager.

If you are a new manager or you are an MBA student expecting to make this transition soon, your path doesn't have to be a painful ride up the learning curve. Armed with the tools explained in this book, management can be a rewarding journey and one of the biggest opportunities for personal growth available to you in your professional life. All you need in order to get the most out of this book is the willingness to think deeply and critically about the type of manager you want to be and the commitment to follow through with the techniques that will support you in reaching your goal.

Likewise, if you already have plenty of management experience and are simply looking to take your skills to the next level, the same tools and mindset apply. Just as becoming an expert in martial arts hinges most upon having a set

of foundational skills and principles drilled in over time, it's mastery of the fundamentals that sets the great managers apart from the rest of the pack.

The world's best leaders have made it a lifelong practice to get better, inspire people, and win as a team. Regardless of where you are on your management journey, we are excited to see what you can achieve when you follow in their footsteps, embrace this mindset, and employ the tools and approaches contained in this book.

Chapter 1:

Why Become a Top-Tier Manager

"Management is the most noble of professions if it's prac-
ticed well. No other occupation offers as many ways to
help others learn and grow, take responsibility and be rec-
ognized for achievement, and contribute to the success of
a team.''
–Clayton Christensen in How Will You Measure Your
Life? (Harvard Business Review, 2010)

So you're a manager or you're about to become one?
If that's the case, I'm here to tell you that ***becoming a***
top-tier manager should be your number one profes-
sional goal. Every other priority pales in comparison.

Does that sound like a bold claim? Perhaps. Why do I
declare it with such confidence?

Because by definition, your skills in guiding other peo-
ple will be the single biggest driver of your success from this
point forward.

Earlier in your professional life when you were an indi-
vidual contributor, your performance was driven entirely
by you. For the most part, you controlled your destiny: If
you worked hard and applied your unique talents and skills
to doing a stellar job, your results reflected this, and chances
are you were rewarded for your efforts (provided you
worked for a decent boss).

But as a manager, your success now depends upon the results of others. If the team succeeds, you succeed. And that is precisely your role as a manager—to build and grow an outstanding team and to elicit the best team performance possible to achieve the desired results. If you have the skills of a top-tier manager, you will maximize the success of the team you are leading. If you don't, your team will not perform, and your individual success will be hampered. It doesn't matter if you're managing a single person or a huge organization; the same principle applies. Become a great manager and you will set yourself up for sustained success over time.

"But I don't just want to be a great manager, I want to be a great *leader*," I hear some of you say.

As the science of management and leadership has evolved over the past several decades, many people have drawn this distinction. Those people tend to imply that managers are simply people who have other people reporting to them, or that managers default to using authority or control to get people to do what they want, whereas leaders drive results through inspiring, motivating, and influencing their teams and the wider organization.

But a manager who relies only on authority or control to get their team to do what they want is a bad manager, and bad management capability makes for a weak leader. Becoming a truly great manager builds the foundation for being a great leader. If you focus on adopting and applying the skills in this book, you'll be well on your way to becoming an outstanding manager and leader, at which point we'll happily call you whatever you want because we all might be working for you.

If you are new to management, it's important to recognize how crucial it is to take this goal of becoming a top-tier manager to heart and build the skills of a great manager as early as possible on your journey. There are two primary reasons for this.

The first reason is that learning to master management skills is like learning to master a language.

Most of us grow up learning a primary language in our household. Later, we may learn additional languages, but beyond a certain point in our lives this tends to require a much greater level of effort. Our brains become wired a certain way and they are harder to retrain. And even if we do become proficient in another language, we may never shake the accent we have as a non-native speaker and we will always feel more comfortable expressing and understanding things using our native language.

It is similar with developing strong managerial skills and habits. The longer you wait to develop optimal skills and habits, the more engrained the sub-optimal habits will become, and the harder it will be to retrain yourself. Beyond a certain point, it can feel as difficult to change those habits as it would be to become fluent in a new language.

Also, much the way knowing how to speak a language only becomes relevant in conversation, management is a two-way communication between you and the individuals on your team. Your teammates need to understand and become fluent in the language as well for productive dialog to occur. If you begin operating with certain behaviors and tactics, your team will become accustomed to that approach, and over time it becomes harder for them to adapt to a new style. They will have developed habits and a comfort zone just like you have.

The second reason to focus on becoming a top-tier manager as early in your career as possible is that you only have a short window before you can become pigeonholed as a bad manager, and it can be difficult to break free from that box. Have you ever seen the fifty-year-old manager who is intelligent and has a ton of expertise and tacit knowledge, but has been bounced around the organization like a utility infielder without being given roles of increasing responsibility? What's holding that person back?

It's easy to blame a lack of ambition, but low ambition is commonly the result of a plateau in career growth rather than the cause of it. Sometimes a person is simply held back because of an abrasive personality or an inability to mesh with other people. But very often it is because they are not seen as having the strong management skills necessary to take on broader leadership roles.

The flip side of this is equally true. Developing strong managerial skills will accelerate your career growth. Organizations depend on good processes and systems, but people are their most valuable resource because it's the people who truly drive the results of any organization. That's why those who are most effective at managing teams of people are the ones most likely to earn the trust of leadership. Once you find yourself in this situation, you are given more opportunities. This further accelerates your learning curve, leading to even more opportunities, which creates a virtuous cycle of rapid career growth. Many large company leadership development programs such as those at Dell and General Electric are a testament to how critical they believe it is to have a deep bench of exceptional managers.

There is another virtuous cycle that takes place when you become an outstanding manager. Great people flock to

great managers, great people stick with those managers, and great people go above and beyond for those managers. The better your management capabilities are, the more you'll attract and retain great people, and the more all of you will enjoy mutual success as a team. Having great teams puts the wind at your back as you grow and take on new roles.

If you are deeper into your career with lots of management experience, don't let these warnings about embracing these practices early in your career scare you off. Anyone can improve at any stage—it primarily comes down to one's commitment and effort. Don't let your experience level, personality type, or any other factor fool you into thinking you can't become a top-tier manager. Desire is the most important element, followed by your willingness to be honest with yourself about where you need to get better and the steps you have to implement to improve. There isn't a perfect manager out there who has mastered all of the fundamentals. Truly great managers and leaders are those who have committed themselves to a lifelong journey of learning and self-improvement.

What does it mean to be a truly great manager? If you ask people *what it feels like* to work for such a manager, these are some of the things you would likely hear from them:

- They feel respected by the manager.
- They feel encouraged on a regular basis.
- They feel empowered.
- They feel they are continually growing and developing.
- They feel they are compensated fairly from a monetary and emotional perspective.
- They want to go above and beyond for their manager and their team.

When you work for a great manager, that manager makes you feel like they are the coach, you are the player, and you are both doing everything you can to win the game together. The manager is always trying to develop you and the team. You feel like the manager is on your side.

One way to look at this is through the following depiction:
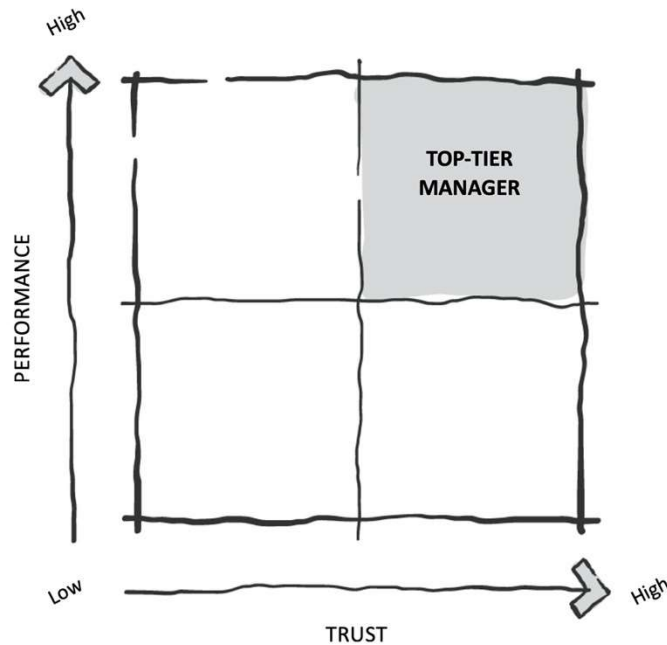
The left dimension is a manager's performance. A high-performing manager is somebody who can drive great results. Employees want to work for a manager who performs because that manager supports the employee's success in

their role. This equates to financial reward and career growth for the employee, such as the ability to take on new projects or expanded roles.

The bottom dimension is the trust the manager fosters amongst the team. Employees want to work for a manager they trust because they know the manager will do the right thing and the manager "has their back."

The manager who is low on performance and trust is both ineffective and can't be trusted to put their employees' or the company's interests before their own. This is not the manager anyone aspires to be. This is the type of manager who makes employees run for the hills because this manager doesn't get the job done and the employee doesn't trust this manager to look out for them.

A manager who is high on performance but low on trust is somebody who delivers for the broader organization, but often does so at the expense of their team members. One example of this manager is the successful "ballbuster" who grinds the team, operates in sometimes questionable ways, and likely takes all the credit. Employees may be rewarded and viewed as successful working under this manager, but chances are they become emotionally drained.

A manager who is low on performance but high on trust is somebody teammates know they can trust to do the right thing and they may even enjoy working with that manager as a person. However, they likely do not feel confident the manager is capable of leading their team in the direction of success. It's often the case that people will speak of such a manager as "a good guy" or "a nice woman," and follow that up with "but . . .". Employees working for this type of manager typically do not experience the degree of growth and professional development they desire.

A manager who is in the top right quadrant has the unique blend of performance and character that makes them truly special. Their approach engenders the strongest loyalty amongst their team—people want to work for this person. The team is more likely to win together and to enjoy the journey as well. And the manager is more likely to go places in their career as a result. Make it your mission to be in the top right quadrant and you will not only inspire people to perform and enjoy the fruits of that success, but you will foster lifelong relationships and enjoy your career journey that much more.

In the following chapters, we will dive deep into all of the fundamental characteristics, skills, and tools to support you in your endeavor to become a top-tier manager. Throughout our journey together, one of the most important qualities that will support you on your path is self-awareness.

To that end, now is the perfect opportunity to lay the groundwork with some important self-reflection. One of the best tools for self-reflection is journaling. Writing has been shown time and again to have the power to clarify your thoughts and intentions.

Before reading on, I encourage you to <u>take at least fifteen minutes</u> to reflect on your answers to these questions, ideally by writing down your thoughts and internalizing your responses:

- When it comes to successful management, what do you believe comes naturally to you? What have others told you they think you are particularly good at?
- What do you believe you are going to need to work on the most?

- What makes you the most uncomfortable to work on with respect to your own self-improvement? What do you tend to avoid or deprioritize that could become a barrier for you in reaching your full potential as a manager?
- Who in your mind has been the strongest manager you've worked with and what did you most value about their approach?
- What is your personal definition of success on your journey to reaching your full potential as a manager? Why?

If you took the time to do that, you are off to an excellent start. If you did not, please make sure you do it soon. Honest self-reflection and your intention to learn and grow will serve you well on this path, and without it you are already behind the curve.

The world needs more truly great managers, and it needs them now more than ever. Staggering numbers of people are not as satisfied in their jobs they could be, and time and again studies show one of the top determining factors of job satisfaction is the quality of the manager. We're all waiting for you to lead us to greatness. Let's dive in.

Chapter 2:

The Seven Characteristics

of Great Managers

If you were to ask the average person what comes to mind when they think about being a manager, chances are they might tell you:

"That's the person in charge."

"They're in control and making the decisions."

"They're the one telling other people what to do."

But if you ask somebody to speak about great managers, it's unlikely they would say, "They made all the decisions," or "They were really good at telling people what to do."

That's because exceptional management has little to do with the power or authority inherent in the position. Also, while sound decision-making is critical and a take-charge attitude can be helpful in certain circumstances, we all know these can be taken too far. Knowing when to back off or to go with your team's recommended course of action is just as important. Likewise, effectively tasking people is a valuable skill, but world-class managers build their teams up to the point where their team members are skilled at setting their own priorities.

As you can see, there is much more depth to becoming a great manager than the average person recognizes at first

glance. To be high on the dimensions of performance and trust, it's not just what you do that matters—i.e., the tactics and approaches you employ to lead people—it's who you are as a person and how you go about doing those things that sets you apart. To help you become truly exceptional, we will dive into seven essential characteristics of outstanding managers and leaders.

If you want to reach the heights of your potential and become exceptional as a manager, focus on being Transparent, Empathetic, Adaptable, a Clear Communicator, Humble, Empowering, and Responsive. Become a T.E.A.C.H.E.R.

This list is not framed as an acronym simply to be cute or to help you remember the traits. Teaching employees is one of the most crucial roles of a manager. By helping people gain new skills, they become more proficient at their jobs and contribute more to the team and to the organization as a whole. This not only drives results, but it leads to better employee retention, which keeps the organization's most valuable resource—its talent pool—well-stocked. And you are only as strong as the team that supports you. The more you build them up, the better off everyone will be.

In the following sections, we will discuss these characteristics in more depth, explain why they are so crucial, and explore how you can put them into practice. As you will see, while each of the individual characteristics contributes to making you a better manager, it's the combination of all of them together that makes you truly exceptional.

Transparent

Years ago, I was advising the leader of the "new business ventures" arm of a large corporation. His team was responsible for launching and incubating new start-ups. Over the first nine months in his role, this leader and his team launched two new businesses. One concept was showing significant promise, but the second was struggling. As they approached a key checkpoint where the committee making "go/no-go" decisions was likely going to shut the struggling business down, the manager approached me about his predicament.

"I'm in a difficult position," he said. "My team is having trouble coming to terms with the fact that the business they are working on isn't going to be viable. They want to go into the go/no-go meeting in two weeks with a request for three more months of funding so they can modify the business model one more time. But when I sat down with the head of the committee to see what his thoughts were, he told me the committee has already formed a strong view that the time has come to shut this one down. I haven't shared this information with my team because I'm worried it will be too demoralizing given how much work they're putting into the upcoming presentation. I was thinking about letting events

take their course and allowing the committee to communicate their recommendation in the meeting."

"Do you think your team sees this outcome coming at all?" I asked.

"Yes, but they're so worried about being a part of something that failed that they are still fighting for it. They are worried about losing their jobs. They don't need to be as worried as they are because we'll end up redeploying them on a new project or role, but it's a tough pill for them to swallow since they're all such high achievers and they're not used to experiencing failure."

"Have you told them they don't need to worry about their jobs?" I asked.

"No, I haven't wanted to say anything that might send a signal about their business not moving forward until the time was right."

It was clear to me as the objective outsider that this manager was expressing genuine concern for his team. But his chosen approach was not what was in his teammates' best interests. By shielding his team from the news and failing to communicate in an open and honest way, he was at risk of eroding their trust. And because he was considering letting them expend another two weeks of hard work and emotional energy on a futile proposal, he risked lost productivity and further frustration among his team. In short, he was not embodying the first key characteristics of great managers:

Be transparent.

The spirit of being transparent was articulated well by the CEO of Digital Equipment Corporation who, when

asked about the most important values he wished to see embraced by his organization, replied: "Let's be open, honest, trusting, and trusted by our customers, our suppliers, and each other."

Being open and honest creates an environment of trust and credibility. It shows people you are authentic and you have integrity, which are two essential ingredients of true collaboration. It also paves the way for mutual understanding and respect, which are especially crucial in situations where there are differences between people in their views, interests, or needs.

When it comes to the people reporting to you, transparency shows employees you have their best interests in mind. When you are forthright with information, it invites necessary dialog with your teammates and opens the door for them to share their thoughts and opinions. This helps them, but it makes you better as well. When everyone is working from the same information and context, and when you're able to effectively tap into your team for their points of view, this fosters better decision-making across your whole team. But when you withhold information, you open the floodgates for more questions and emails, wasted time, and poor decision-making.

Transparency also promotes a healthy work environment by reducing the opportunity for interpersonal issues and drama to capture people's attention and draw focus away from work. An employee wondering, "Why wasn't I invited to that meeting?" is a simple but common example of this type of unnecessary distraction.

The higher the stakes, the more critical transparency becomes. For example, a large public company was going

through a period of poor financial performance that required them to reduce headcount. Rumors circulated about impending layoffs. While nearly everybody knew layoffs were coming, company leadership did not provide honest answers to questions about the situation that came up during town hall meetings. They reasoned that sharing too much would create turmoil among employees and would drive talented individuals to leave the organization. But choosing to remain silent did not reduce the turmoil anyway, and once the layoffs took place and people's fears were confirmed, leadership had lost significant trust among the employee base due to their lack of transparency.

But what about situations that involve sensitive or confidential information? Of course, there may be times where it is either not possible or not prudent to be fully transparent. But such examples are exceedingly rare. In general, managers and organizations aren't as transparent as they should be. They pay lip service to it, but they consistently miss opportunities to build trust through transparency.

Ray Dalio, the founder of Bridgewater Associates, the largest hedge fund in the world, once discussed the importance of transparency using the example of a company on the verge of being sold. This is one of the most extreme examples of something the majority of companies deem to be confidential. Most companies attempt to keep knowledge of a potential acquisition hidden from the employee base until the last possible minute. But Dalio advised that even in a situation like this, it is better for a company to be open with employees rather than to try to keep it quiet. After all, the news will eventually come to light, and the damage done by not being transparent almost always outweighs the risks of

sharing the truth about the situation with openness and honesty.

The principle of transparency is so foundational that it's the basis of the book *Radical Candor* (St. Martin's Press, 2017) by Kim Scott. In this book, Scott says that people are too afraid to challenge each other in candid conversation, and she champions the many benefits of calling it like it is. It's important to note that Scott recommends balancing this with humility, kindness and an orientation toward helping everyone develop and succeed. Otherwise candid conversation can become imbalanced and even aggressive, which destroys the benefits of direct communication.

Be as clear, direct, open, and honest as you can, and your team, your peers, and your bosses will all respect you for it. Do this in as many ways as you can—whether it's discussing company plans or it's talking about your own thoughts and motivations. Transparency disarms people and fosters strong relationships. And because most people find it difficult to be transparent, doing so immediately sets you apart from the vast majority of people in a good way.

Without question, the best managers are transparent. If you want to be a great manager, learning to be transparent is the first principle to embrace.

Putting it into practice:

- Make it your default mindset to be "transparent first," and force yourself to have very strong arguments for when not to be open and forthright, rather than the other way around.
- Tell your employees you will be as open as possible, follow through on that commitment, and ask your

employees to reciprocate by being as open as possible with you.

- Always be as upfront as you can about what you are doing and why, and make sure your transparent communication reaches all levels of employees who report up through you.
- A big part of transparency is simply about ensuring people have appropriate context. Err on the side of being inclusive when inviting people to meetings and trust that they can balance their own time and make the right decision about whether to attend. (It can help to clarify when meetings are optional and to provide as much detail as possible about the meeting in advance to help an employee make the right call regarding their attendance.)
- Copy people on emails when they are helping with the work related to that email, which will further ensure employees have as much context as possible.
- Try not to hide anything from your employees. Likewise, don't hide things from your own manager. Model the behavior you would like to see in your employees when working with your own manager.
- Avoid becoming involved in any political games, which is one of the surest ways to lose the trust of people around you (including people who are not directly involved in the situation).

Empathetic

Do you recall the story of United Airlines' tremendous public relations gaffe surrounding a physician who was

dragged off of a plane from his paid seat to make room for an employee?

The CEO, Oscar Munoz, issued a statement saying, "I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers," for which he experienced significant blowback.

His second statement compounded the error when he blamed the victim—describing the passenger as defiant, belligerent, and disruptive.

It was only on his third try that the company was able to move forward in the public eye when he said, "I promise you we will do better."

This example illustrates a number of obvious gaps in effective leadership, but the one that stood out the most in the public perception was Munoz's seeming inability to understand the customer's point of view in a situation like this. This understanding of another person's point of view is the essence of our next essential characteristic of successful managers—empathy.

Every employee, including you, wants to be heard, understood, and valued. It is one of the most basic human needs we have and it's crucial in team environments. Great managers fulfill this need with their team members on a daily basis. And they do it by being empathetic.

What is empathy?

Very simply, displaying empathy means that you are able to place yourself in another person's shoes, to understand how another person may be thinking and feeling, and to use this knowledge to act and to make decisions in a way that is optimal for all parties.

But as simple as it sounds, it is one of the most underexpressed and undervalued traits in leadership. While some

of this can be explained by selection mechanisms that focus far too exclusively on a person's results and on not enough on the leadership characteristics they embody as they deliver those results, there is more to the story.

A big part of why empathy is underrepresented as a trait is that it is misunderstood. People incorrectly think of it as a "touchy-feely" trait that is only about making people feel good. Not surprisingly, this view of empathy doesn't align with many people's perception of strong leadership, so they don't pay sufficient attention to it and they fail to work on developing their own capacity for empathy.

But this idea misses the mark completely. Empathy is a foundational component of success among leaders. In fact, many experts and leaders alike believe it to be the single most important leadership trait.

Why is empathy so important?

It comes back to where we began. The best leaders—the strongest managers—are high on the dimension of trust and performance. Empathy contributes directly to both of these dimensions.

Let's begin with trust.

There is simply no better way to cultivate trust in professional relationships than to demonstrate a sympathetic understanding of the other person's situation and point of view. When a person believes they are truly heard and understood, they feel respected and they trust that you will treat them in a manner that is honest, ethical, and fair. They return that respect. Not only that, but they are so much more likely to go above and beyond for you. And they are more likely to see you as approachable, so they will surface issues

more openly and promptly, allowing you to resolve challenges with greater speed and effectiveness.

Empathy is foundational to trust. Without sufficient empathy, you cannot cultivate trusting relationships and teams. Excel at empathy, and you will position yourself to have a high-functioning, effective team.

Empathy also contributes directly to the dimension of performance. A significant portion of the decisions you make as a manager are people-related decisions. Empathy is a skill that improves your ability to make good decisions because you are better able to see all points of view and understand the potential impact of your decisions on people. Success as a manager depends upon effective decision-making.

This extends beyond your team to other teams and functions in the organization, to third parties and partners, and to customers. Whether it's collaborating with other people, or it's negotiating, or it's serving customers, just about everything you and your team do is enhanced through the skill of empathy.

Calling empathy a "skill" naturally raises a question, and it's one of the most common questions I field when coaching individuals, teams, and organizations:

Can empathy be learned or is it an innate trait?

In my experience, the answer is clearly "both." Like most skills, some people are more naturally inclined to possess the skill, but it can also be developed with intention and practice.

So how do you practice empathy?

The question itself raises the biggest challenge with respect to the cultivation of empathy. For it to be real empathy, it needs to be genuine and authentic. We've all been on the receiving end of calculated behaviors that were motivated by the other person's self-interests. And chances are things didn't work out in that person's favor. It's easy for us as humans to spot ulterior motives or a lack of genuine intentions. Such efforts usually backfire, leading to a loss of trust.

This is one of the reasons empathy is such a rare trait, especially in leadership roles. The only way to embody empathy is to genuinely place other people's concerns at the same level as your own (and often above your own), whether it's a teammate, a colleague, a partner, or a customer.

Most of us do genuinely care about the needs of other people, and that alone is sufficient basis for the cultivation of empathy. The rest can be practiced.

The simplest way to build your empathetic ability is also the most direct. All you need to do is consciously ask yourself this question as often as possible: "How would I feel in this situation if I were in that person's shoes?"

This works because, as people, we are more alike than we are different, and more often than not, your answer to that question is likely to be similar to theirs.

Over time, and especially as you get to know a person and their unique qualities, you can take empathy a step further by asking yourself, "How do they likely feel in this situation?" To be able to answer this accurately requires having a complete understanding of where that individual is coming from. It forces you to step out of your perspective

and truly adopt theirs, incorporating what you know about them as a person and what is unique about their side of the situation.

When it's appropriate, you can just ask another person where they are coming from. You don't need to be a mind-reader. In fact, your interest in them and your willingness to listen are already a demonstration of empathy.

There's no need to overcomplicate this process. Consistently put yourself in other people's shoes before you respond, make decisions, or take any other action. Consider what they must be thinking or feeling. Recall a time you were in a similar situation and how you felt. And when it comes time to act, do your best to place other people's concerns on the same level as your own.

Beyond that, it's helpful to be conscious of the biggest barrier to the cultivation of empathy: the reflexive tendency for our minds to jump back to thinking about ourselves first, whether it's arguing our point of view, defending ourselves, focusing on what we want, or any number of other self-focused responses. We don't need to try to squelch all of these; just notice them and redirect attention toward seeking to understand the other person's perspective first. After that, we are more likely to balance our point of view with theirs and arrive at the best course of action.

If you commit yourself to these simple approaches, you will undoubtedly become a more effective manager. That goes for anyone, regardless of his or her starting point on the spectrum of empathy.

Putting it into practice:

- Seek to understand other people first. Ask yourself the question, "How would I feel if I were in their shoes?" This is especially important to do before giving feedback, which is one of the most critical times to ensure you are demonstrating a high degree of empathy.
- Practice listening before speaking as often as possible.
- Try not to default to lecturing or dictating. Rely on asking questions (i.e., "Why?" or Socratic dialog) to help guide team members to the ideal course of action.
- Keep a pulse on what is going on with your team both at work and outside of work so that you can better understand their personal and professional situations.
- Schedule regular one-on-ones with your team where the focus is on their professional development and how they are doing rather than exclusively on task-focused catch-ups.
- Get to know your team members on a personal level.

Adaptable

One of the essential takeaways from Darwin's work on evolution is that the survival of a species depends less on its strength or intelligence than on its ability to adapt to its changing environment. In a matter as central to a species as its very survival, this ability to change in productive ways ranks above all else.

In recent history, a similar idea has been promoted regarding organizations. As the pace of change in most markets has increased and the threat of disruption looms in unexpected places, an organization's ability to adapt has been called the new competitive advantage.

The same principle applies to the individual, making adaptability our third essential characteristic of great managers.

Employers are increasingly in search of managers who are highly adaptable, and for obvious reasons. These managers are more open to new ideas. They are able to learn faster and mobilize quickly in new situations. They drive greater productivity through their orientation toward improving things rather than defaulting to, "That's the way things have always been done." They can adjust on the fly when things don't go according to plan without resorting to panic. All of these traits make them more effective at their jobs and more versatile. As a result, they are able to be put into a wider variety of leadership roles, including being placed in stretch roles and being put in charge of areas in which they may not have significant proven expertise.

This is why, in a survey of human resources leaders conducted by Right Management and detailed in The Flux Report (2014), over 90 percent of respondents indicated that the ability of a candidate to adapt to change and to deal with uncertainty will become even more of a top recruitment goal in the future.

One of the most important aspects of adaptability for a manager is the ability to tailor one's management style to people's differing work styles.

As an example, some people are comfortable with ambiguity and like being given space to run, and they will seek the guidance of their manager only when they need it. Others prefer structure and clearly defined tasks. If a manager is too hands-on with the first type of person, that individual may feel suffocated and become frustrated. Likewise, if a manager is too hands-off with the second type of person, that individual may feel lost and uncomfortable.

We each have different needs which are shaped by our personalities, our unique strengths and weaknesses, and our work styles. These requirements also change over time based on our development trajectory. For example, our need for hands-on management goes down as we come up the learning curve in a role. The truly effective manager is tuned into an employee's needs and is capable of adapting as the situation dictates.

It turns out that this is rarer than you might think. It's common for managers to be comfortable with a certain management style and to default to working with everybody using that approach.

Take micromanagers as an example. Micromanagers are hyper-involved in the details of people's work and they struggle to give people adequate freedom. This can be frustrating for anyone, but particularly for the employee who is highly competent and autonomous.

The other important aspect of being adaptable is being appropriately flexible. This is often one of the earliest challenges people face as they transition from individual contributor to manager.

As an individual contributor, you have control over how you do things (provided you don't work for a micromanager). Your level of control and autonomy tends to grow over time as you gain experience, and it's common for it to be at its peak in your role as an individual contributor at the very point you are promoted and become a manager. Now, as a manager, you have to let go of a meaningful portion of that control to your team members as they execute on the work. This can be a difficult thing to do for many people, particularly if you are someone who places a high standard on the quality of your work. As a manager, the people you are overseeing may not be not as skilled at doing the work as you are. After all, that disparity may be a big reason why you were promoted to the position you are in.

This is where flexibility comes into play. Adaptable managers are open to going with other people's approaches and perspectives, even if it might not be the way they would choose to do things. They see that there is more than one way to get the job done. And they recognize the importance of giving team members enough freedom and power to make their own choices, even if that sometimes means allowing them to go with a less-than-ideal approach.

Being flexible and adjusting your managerial approach to the particular individual and situation helps ensure you get the best out of your team. When you've mastered these skills, you avoid lost productivity because of employees who are spinning their wheels as a result of insufficient guidance. You also optimize your team's learning and professional growth by providing the right level and type of guidance based on each person's needs. Adaptability naturally contributes to high performance and trust.

Like our other characteristics, adaptability is a muscle that can be built through exercise.

Putting it into practice:

- Begin by recognizing that nobody has the perfect managerial style—everyone can improve.
- Determine where each of your employees are on their development trajectory in their role. Devote more time to training, coaching and providing feedback to those who are coming up the learning curve.
- Assess each employee's working style and employ managerial tactics that align with that style. We will discuss this more in a later chapter. It never hurts to ask your employees how they prefer to be managed (but you don't necessarily need to adapt to every preference).
- Accept that in most situations where you are delegating work, your job is to coach and refine rather than to change or redo a team member's work.
- When team members come with ideas or proposals, keep an open mind. Be wary of saying "no" too much.
- Don't provide all the answers to your team members. Leave things open for them to figure out. Be comfortable leaving a meeting without having everything nailed down if it fosters greater learning and independence among your team members.

Clear Communicator

"If you want me to speak for an hour, I am ready today. If you want me to speak for just a few minutes, it will take me a few weeks to prepare."
—Woodrow Wilson

After analyzing thousands of employee surveys from companies of all sizes, I have found one element most shapes employee opinions of their organizations and their managers—communication. Solid communication is an essential ingredient of effective teams and well-functioning organizations. And the bar for effective communication is climbing as companies globalize, whether that means overcoming linguistic barriers, communicating in a way that transcends cultural differences across offices, or simply keeping up with the pace of communication required in any large or distributed organization.

Clear communication is a must if you're going to become a top-tier manager. Solid communication is foundational to every aspect of your role. It's the means by which you convey the organization's strategy to your team and how you connect your team's objectives to the bigger picture. It's how you convey your goals, objectives and expectations. It's how you delegate tasks. It's how you coach and deliver feedback. It's how you recognize people and motivate them. It's how you collaborate across functions. There's nothing communication ability doesn't touch.

The importance of clear communication probably seems obvious to you. But there's a reason it's so common for communication to be raised as an issue on employee opinion surveys. It's difficult terrain to master.

For starters, it encompasses so many forms—in-person interactions, videoconferencing, phone calls, emails, texts

and direct messages, formal presentations, slide decks, memos and prose deliverables, analyses and charts, the list goes on. We all have strengths and weaknesses with respect to how effectively we communicate, yet most of us are required to communicate through most or all of these modalities, regardless of whether it happens to play to our particular strengths.

On top of this, you have to tailor your communication to the individuals involved or adapt your approach based on the situation. This becomes even trickier when you consider that we all take in information differently. Even if you communicate something clearly, there's a good chance somebody may misunderstand or misinterpret your intended message. As a manager and a leader, you increasingly see that it doesn't matter where a communication breakdown happens; instead, you recognize the need to judge the success of your communication based on how effectively it is received (and in many cases, how effectively it is cascaded to others without being distorted in a game of telephone). In other words, the recipients' perception becomes your reality, which places the onus squarely on you.

As if this weren't challenging enough, you need to communicate with the right frequency. This almost always means *more*. It's rare that we over-communicate. But it's very easy to fall short. Frequent, effective communication takes time. Often it takes time we don't feel we have as busy managers.

So how do we improve on this important characteristic of clear communication?

Begin by ensuring that you choose the best mode of communication for the situation, taking into consideration your objective, who you are communicating to, how they

best consume information like this, and so forth. Is this a situation where a conversation is best, or will a quick email suffice? Should the conversation be in-person? Should you limit who is a part of the discussion? Is it an informal discussion or is it important to prepare materials to ensure the discussion flows a certain way? Do you need charts or visuals to help the person digest data, or images or videos to better convey the emotional impact of a message?

There is no formula for answering questions like these, but strong managers build their intuition through experience and are thoughtful about how they approach communication.

In certain cases, organizations have recognized the situational effectiveness of various forms of communication and they have embedded specific recommendations or requirements into how they operate. For example, Amazon does not allow employees to use PowerPoint/slide presentations when communicating strategy. Instead, they require people to write strategy documents in the form of a memo. The reason for this is that prose forces a higher degree of clarity in logic and flow. Amazon has found that this company norm improves people's quality of thinking and decision-making.

This is the time to take into account your own strengths and weaknesses with respect to communication channels and to balance them against the other considerations.

Several years ago, while working at General Electric, I reported to a manager who was not an effective communicator over email. Her emails tended to be terse and she didn't take the time to provide sufficient explanation. But when she gave in-person feedback, she took the time to clarify issues and always showed that she cared. Surprisingly, despite her clear strengths when managing in an in-person

situation, she almost always opted to work remotely and encouraged others to do the same. This decision did not play to her strengths and the team's productivity clearly suffered because of this approach.

Once you have determined the best modality and communication approach for a given situation, take the time to clarify your communication objective.

What does success look like in this situation?

To help define success for yourself, you can use the following questions as a helpful frame:

What do you want the other person(s) to *know?*

What do you want the other person(s) to *feel?*

What do you want the other person(s) to *do?*

After taking the time to clarify your objective and define success (a process that does not always need to take significant time and can become intuitive and automatic in many situations with practice), it's time to move to executing your communication.

How do you improve your effectiveness in executing your communication?

First, communicate *more*. This is a piece of generic advice that likely applies to just about everyone.

Second, *prepare*. I can't stress enough how far a little preparation can take you, especially with respect to any form of verbal communication. Outline points that you need to convey in a conversation and bring notes for yourself. Practice the words you'll choose when articulating something that requires sensitivity. Rehearse a presentation over and over in advance until you're comfortable you can deliver it to the best of your ability.

Third, *practice*. Any skill can be enhanced through intentional practice. If you're a weak writer, sign up for a class in written communication. If you're not a good presenter because you're afraid of public speaking, sign up for a workshop or join Toastmasters. If you struggle speaking off-the-cuff when facilitating meetings, try taking an improv class.

Fourth, *listen*. Communication should virtually always be a two-way interaction. Listen more than you speak. Ask questions. It's important that the other people feel heard, but that's also your vehicle for understanding how well your communication is being understood. Listening is a skill just like anything else, and it can also be practiced.

And lastly, remember that one of the most overlooked aspects of in-person communication is the importance of non-verbal communication. Your body language, energy level, and tone say more to the other person/people than your words. And you guessed it, non-verbal communication can also be practiced just like all the other aspects of communication.

Putting it into practice:

- Communicate constantly. It's almost impossible to over-communicate. Don't wait for the questions to come in; make it your goal to preempt as many questions as you can.
- Keep your door open as often as possible. Give your employees the freedom to come in spontaneously with questions.
- Determine other people's preferred communication channels based on the situation (e.g., in person,

phone, email) and try to lean on using the ones that are most effective with them.

- Likewise, determine your own strengths (e.g., written, verbal, phone, in-person, etc.) and play to those strengths while proactively working on improving in your areas of weakness (e.g., if writing is not a strength, consider taking a writing course).
- Prepare and practice before you communicate. This can assist you with clarity and brevity. It's commonly the case that, rather than speaking off the cuff, the best communicators organize their thoughts ahead of time and practice what they are going to say.
- Foster communication among your employees by asking them questions.
- Talk to your team on a daily basis. If there isn't anything in particular you need to discuss, don't shy away from non-work-related topics. This fosters an open communication forum between you and your team and can often trigger questions or topics neither of you had thought of until you were in the moment.

Humble

Teddy Roosevelt famously said, "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."

But these days, we have come to expect our business leaders to be brash, outspoken, arrogant individuals. It's as

though we believe on some level that those traits are necessary to survive as a leader, or at the very least that they come as a package deal with strong leadership capability.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Arrogance is always a weakness, even if it takes time to catch up with some people. We all know stories of leaders whose egos eventually became their downfall. And while some are able to succeed in spite of their egos, we'll never know how much more successful they might have been had it not been for their arrogance.

The best leaders—the ones with the deepest and most profound impact on those around them and the ones who have contributed the most to the lasting success of organizations—are humble.

In a study on successful CEOs in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, humility was directly correlated with empowered employees, a key driver of the success of their companies. As the study explained, "Humble people willingly seek accurate self-knowledge and accept their imperfections while remaining fully aware of their talents and abilities. They appreciate others' positive worth, strengths, and contributions and thus have no need for entitlement or dominance over others."

As a manager of people, humility directly translates into better decision-making. A humble manager does not need to be right. They place a higher value on what is true than on their opinion, and they would rather come to the right answer than worry about their sense of pride or their need to exercise authority.

As Arron Grow of the School of Applied Leadership at the City University of Seattle says, "Many leaders want to

control everything. But some things can't be known up front or beforehand. You have to know when to take charge—and when to let go and not try to force everything to go your way. Sometimes, it's important to admit that you don't know the best answer and wait until you have the best information to make a decision or change."

A humble manager is also willing to take this a step further and admit when they are wrong. "When you're willing to share your own missteps, and how you dealt with and recovered from them, you earn trust from your team," Grow says. This is another way of saying "be accountable," and it can be one of the strongest ways of building trust and loyalty among your team and with your peers and superiors.

And because such a manager is willing to place themselves on the same plane as everyone around them, they are more in touch with people's needs. This translates into a competitive advantage. Kevin Brogan, Vice President of Meadows Casino, puts it this way: "The best managers are those who have an intimate knowledge of the needs of both their customers and their employees."

While it may at first seem strange to discuss ways in which you can practice humility, this essential characteristic of great managers shares commonality with being empathetic. It can be practiced and developed, but it takes a certain amount of willingness. Not everyone has this willingness. Some people's egos are too strong to allow for such a change to take place. It may take a powerful event or circumstance to humble those people before they are willing to see themselves in a new, less superior light.

But most of us recognize we aren't perfect and are willing to admit our weaknesses. And that alone is enough of a

foundation upon which to practice humility. Every bit of effort you put into it will pay dividends, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Putting it into practice:

- Engage in self-reflection. One of the most powerful tools is to write in a journal—chronicle what you did well during the day and what you could have handled better. As Confucius said, "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest."
- Ask for input frequently from your team. Remember that people want to work for managers who value their opinions.
- Admit mistakes. It's difficult to admit when you mess up, but doing so only increases people's respect for you.
- Accept that you don't have all the answers. Get comfortable with ambiguity.
- Know when to take charge and when to let go.
- Don't force everything to go your way.
- If someone can be trusted, back off and let them do their job. Don't micromanage.
- Don't worry if some of this doesn't come easily to you at first. Like all valuable characteristics, it may take time, and the most important component to growth is your intention and effort.

Empowering

In the opening chapter we discussed how the shift from being an individual contributor to a manager is such a significant one because your individual success is now dictated by the success of your team rather than by your own solitary contributions.

As a manager, you aren't supposed to be doing everyone else's jobs, of course, or you wouldn't have a team. Yet many new managers struggle with relaxing control. It's a common mistake for a new manager to try to be everywhere, approving every decision, and overseeing every work product, rather than shifting their focus toward building and growing an outstanding team.

When observing managers who take on more expansive roles over time and comparing them with those who do not, one of the primary differences is the degree to which managers empower their teams.

There is a straightforward reason for this: leverage. The more involved you need to be in the day-to-day tasks of each of your team member's jobs, the less you are able to focus on the aspects that are unique to your leadership role, such as setting the direction for your group, working with your peers, and managing up. Micromanagement of subordinates also limits your bandwidth for taking on additional responsibilities and it reduces the organization's confidence in your ability to handle managing larger teams—especially big leadership positions that require managing other managers.

It's been said by many leadership experts that empowering other people not only goes hand-in-hand with great leadership, but empowering other people *is* great leadership. Laszlo Bock, Google's SVP of People Operations, ex-

plained it this way: "Your end goal is what can we do to-gether to problem-solve. I've contributed my piece, and then I step back."

As a manager, "your piece" in the problem-solving equation may be smaller than you realize. It's common for employees to come to you with problems and look for you to solve them. But your job is not to solve all the problems your team members present to you. Your piece is to break down barriers that stand in the way of your employees being successful—in other words, the problems they truly cannot solve on their own. Each time you solve a problem that they might be able to solve themselves, they become more dependent on you (i.e., less empowered), and an opportunity is missed for their growth and development. When a problem is raised to you, it's useful to identify which of four types it is:

1. Is the employee simply venting about something with no solution? While a little bit of occasional venting happens, it's best to respond to their venting with the question, "Is there any action either of us can take to help improve the situation?" (This is usually enough to help someone realize they are spending time on an unproductive thread. Over time, it retrains people to focus on positive action rather than venting negativity.)

2. Is it a problem the employee can solve on their own? Turn the question back around on them and ask them what they think would be the best way to solve it.

3. Is it a problem the employee can solve on their own with some coaching from you? Ask them how they might solve it, but offer some suggestions to nudge

them in the right direction, and coach them through the problem-solving process.

4. Is it a problem that truly requires you to help solve it? Take action and break down the barrier!

As an example, suppose a team member comes to you needing some important information from another group in the organization.

This is clearly not an employee venting (#1), so you might begin by asking them who they have gone to so far to seek out the information. If they tell you nobody, then try asking who they think might be the best person to reach out to for the information (#2). If they aren't sure who to go to, progress a step further and offer a little more support. Give them suggestions for who might have the information they need, but let them take it from there if possible (#3). But suppose you learn that they already went to the appropriate person and were denied, so they need you to connect with that person's manager to help break down the barrier. Then step in and do so (#4).

The point this illustration is attempting to convey is to try not to exceed the amount of support you need to provide in a situation so you can maximize how much your teammate learns and how much independence they gain over time.

This is not to be misinterpreted as a reluctance to help, and it takes some art to ensure your approach comes across in the appropriate way to your team members. You want to offer as much help as you can. But as a manager, the best help you can provide in a given situation is to use it as an opportunity to build an employee's own problem-solving

skills, to guide them toward increasing levels of independence and autonomy, and where necessary, to step in to swiftly tackle those barriers that only you can break down.

Empowering an employee is the most potent way to promote their learning and development. We all learn best through direct experience. By giving your team members the appropriate degree of autonomy and responsibility, you stretch them beyond their current capability and stimulate professional growth. It is certainly possible to swing too far in this direction and "give too much rope," but great managers learn how to strike the right balance with each of their employees and empower them to take on as much as they can handle.

Empowerment is both a mindset and a set of practical behaviors.

Putting it into practice:

- Remember that the more hands-off you are able to be with an employee, the better it is for both you and your team member.
- Know when to take charge and when to let go. Let people do their jobs.
- Don't jump immediately to solving problems team members present to you. Turn it around and help them work through the problem-solving process, stepping in to break down barriers when it's appropriate.
- Seek input from team members and involve them in decisions beyond their scope of responsibility so they gain exposure to thinking through bigger problems and grow as a result.

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- Give people stretch assignments.
- In a situation where you are introducing one of your team members to others they will be working with for the first time, position your employee in the most elevated way you can based on what is reasonable for their role and experience level. It's common for people to prefer to talk to or work with the most senior person they can. If they default to wanting to work with you, this limits the opportunity for your team member to grow and reduces your leverage.
- If possible, identify a potential successor for yourself and spend extra effort coaching and empowering that person to take on more responsibility over time. Sometimes great managers are temporarily held back from taking on new roles because their current role is too critical and there isn't a ready backfill.

Responsive

It's been said that a person's success is determined by three traits—availability, affability, and ability—in decreasing order of importance. While it's a bit tongue-in-cheek, it contains an often-overlooked truth: It doesn't matter if you're the greatest talent that ever lived, you have to be there when you're needed if you're going to be of any value.

That is the spirit of the seventh characteristic of great managers—responsiveness. It's a trait we value in everyone with whom we work, not just managers. But it's especially critical if you want to be among the top tier of managers.

As a manager, a big part of your job is setting priorities, delegating work to team members, and following up on that

work. Along the way, team members get stuck and reach out to you for support. If they get what they need quickly, they'll be back on track. But if they're waiting for you because you're too busy, they will slow down or come to a stop until you're available to help them.

This is why responsiveness is so essential to the productivity of your team. By being responsive, you set the tone for action among your team and you are less likely to be the bottleneck for things getting done.

As an example, take the situation where your team member has finished a draft of a deliverable. Let's assume it is their top priority and they are awaiting feedback from you. Every hour that goes by without you responding to them is an hour of lost productivity on their top priority. Effective managers learn to subordinate their own work—whether that's responding to emails, returning phone calls, or working on their own deliverables—to provide support to their team members first whenever possible. That means they focus first on delegating, getting team members going on tasks, and responding to questions to help get their team members back on track with tasks before they turn their attention back to their individual priorities. This ensures their team members are productive as much as possible, rather than sitting idly or filling time with lower-priority work.

Responsiveness also contributes directly to building trust among a team. It is a way to demonstrate respect for your employees, one of the foundational elements of being a strong manager. People are more motivated to go above and beyond when they work for a manager who demonstrates respect for them.

Being responsive also sets up a positive feedback loop—when employees know they'll get a timely response, they

are more likely to reach out to you with questions or issues, fostering the right level of open communication that is the hallmark of the most successful teams.

Although a straightforward characteristic, it's easy to underestimate the impact that a greater degree of responsiveness can have on your effectiveness as a manager.

Putting it into practice:

- Make it a priority to give your employees the time they deserve.
- If you don't have time to provide a full response, it's better to provide an immediate response and tell that person when you will get back to them. (Even a quick note such as "I received your email. I'll review tonight and get back to you tomorrow morning," tells an employee the ball is in your court and it takes the stress off of them.)
- Provide your team with guidelines around using various communication methods, such as which circumstances are best to call/email/text and expected response times for each of those methods. As an example, you might tell employees you will respond to emails within 48 hours but that they should text if they need a response that day.
- Similarly, try to communicate your availability and schedule so people know when to expect your responsiveness to dip due to the demands of your calendar.

The seven characteristics in summary

Be a T.E.A.C.H.E.R. and you have meaningfully set yourself apart as a manager. If you are transparent, empathetic, adaptable, a clear communicator, humble, empowering and responsive, you exude natural leadership competency. Managers who embody these characteristics build the strongest teams, and the ability to build and grow outstanding teams is the number one attribute organizations look for when filling higher-level leadership roles.

As we dive into the next chapters, remember that these seven characteristics are the foundation for outstanding management. Whether it's setting priorities, delegating, hiring, delivering a performance review, or any other job of a manager, it's important that these seven characteristics permeate everything you do. Everyone has their relative strengths and weaknesses as a manager, and we can all improve on any dimension by implementing the practices. Embrace self-reflection as often as you can and make it your consistent practice to improve on these dimensions in everything you do. This will firmly establish you on the path to greatness as a manager.

Chapter 3:

Setting Goals and

Expectations for Your Team

The success of an organization, a team, or an individual depends on the consistent achievement of goals. The goals we set are quite literally the benchmark upon which we measure our success. If we meet or exceed expectations, we're winning. If we fall short, we're losing.

But goals themselves are inherently subjective. Suppose someone who never runs woke up one day and said, "I am going to train for the next month so I can run a mile in under four minutes." If, when the big day came, they clocked a mile in five minutes and they went home feeling crushed by their defeat, I certainly wouldn't share their view that they had failed. The problem was the goal itself, since breaking a four-minute mile is a feat only truly great runners achieve with a lot more than one month of training.

This may seem like an unrealistic example, but a similar scenario happens in organizations all the time. Companies will set grandiose financial targets and come up drastically short. Leaders will commit to unreasonable deadlines. Individuals will take their first job out of school with the expectation that they'll be running a division within three years.

The flip side is also common, such as project managers sandbagging their timelines, or sales leaders setting targets their teams will blow out of the water even if they only show up to work two days a week.

As a stark example of poor goal setting, Chris Zook's book *Profit from the Core* (HBR Press, 2010) highlights that when setting growth goals beyond their core business, companies only achieve the goals 8 percent of the time.

Zig Ziglar once wisely said, "A goal properly set is halfway reached." Because of the subjectivity involved in the process, there is an art and science to setting goals, and it's one of the most important skills for a manager to master. But the typical manager spends very little time focused on the act of establishing properly set goals.

A goal that is properly set is one that supports achieving the best possible results of an individual, a team, and an organization. It establishes the marker of success for an individual or a team in a way that everyone can agree upon. It aligns with and ties into the broader objectives of a team or organization, making it clear to people how their effort supports the success of the team or organization. It is motivating and pushes people to perform at their optimal ability, but it doesn't overstretch them or burn them out.
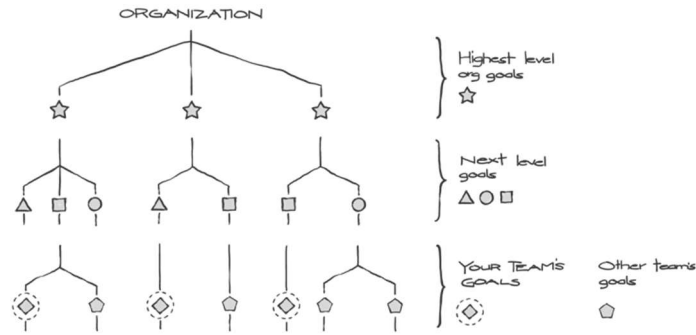
It is critical to understand how your team's goals fit with the broader organization to ensure everyone is positioned to succeed.

As a manager, your first order of business is making sure you and every person on your team have well-defined goals that are written down and mutually agreed upon. You want to be in a position where you could lay out every single one of your teammates' goals and say to yourself, "Yes, if we achieved every one of these things—and we genuinely believe that's well within our reach—we will be successful as a team in our own eyes, in the eyes of my manager, and in the eyes of the broader organization."

Because goals are such an essential element to driving employee performance, it's crucial that the employee be bought into those goals. It's for this reason that the best approach to goal setting is to have your team members take the lead in writing down their own goals, while you play the role of providing feedback and suggesting refinements until the goals are optimally defined. To help guide your team and ensure their goals plug into your broader objectives, it

can be helpful to share a version of your own goals with them. The more transparent you are able to be, the better the results you tend to see in the quality of their goals and the degree to which they align with yours. Likewise, if you make them aware that their goals will be shared up the chain with your manager, it drives home the importance of cascading, mutually reinforcing goals.

When establishing goals for an employee, there are three categories to focus on: mission, performance and development.

Mission

At the highest level, it is valuable to begin with having the employee define their mission in one to three sentences. An employee's mission is simply what they have been hired to do—it communicates their major responsibilities as well as their highest-level objective(s) over the next 12 to 24 months.

As an example, a mission statement may read: "As call center manager, my mission is to manage the call-center team of 10 individuals and drive 20 percent improvement in wait time, calls/day/rep, and overall customer satisfaction within two years." Another example is, "As a product manager, my mission is to manage the ABC line of products, growing revenue by 10 percent and margins by 15 percent by collaborating with sales, marketing, supply chain, and manufacturing."

The reason it is so helpful to begin with the employee's mission is because it establishes their overall purpose in simple language. This guides goal setting and keeps people focused on the big picture. If done effectively, it answers

two key questions that gauge an employee's success in their role: "What were you brought in to achieve?" and "Were you successful in achieving it?"

Performance goals

Performance goals are what most people think about when it comes to goal setting on the job. Performance goals establish the specific results the employee is responsible for achieving over a given time frame. It's common for employees to have several performance goals, often revolving around specific projects they are working on. Examples of performance goals include:

Role	Performance Goal
Sales Rep	Meet annual revenue target of $500,000 in product sales.
Engineer	Complete design of component X within 6 months, meeting all cost and quality targets for the project.
Marketer	Successfully execute marketing campaign by September 30 that drives 1,000+ new customer leads while taying within the budget commitment of $50,000 for the campaign.

There are two types of performance goals: "results" (or "outcome") and "process" goals. Results goals focus on the specific outcome that defines success. The sales rep example

above is a straightforward example of a results goal. A process goal focuses on intermediate steps that can support a broader result or outcome. So, using the same sales rep as an example, that individual could also have a process goal of "make at least thirty sales calls with potential customers per week."

Development goals

The last category of goals focuses on the employee's professional growth and development. Unfortunately, many managers neglect to include concrete development objectives when engaging in goal setting with employees. But development goals are just as critical as performance goals. All of us have skills and capabilities we need to be building to get better in our current roles, as well as to position us to take on new roles and responsibilities. Examples of development goals include:

Role	Development Goal
Sales Rep	Build confidence/capability in presenting to customers by completing 10 mock customer presentations to manager/teammates by mid-year performance review.
Engineer	Complete Design for Six Sigma certification course by end of year to advance technical capabilities and support promotion into next level.
Marketer	Build written communication skill by successfully completing online course "Writing for Creatives and Marketers" by end of Q2.

It's often the case that the presence of certain well-developed soft skills becomes the difference between the employee who moves up in the organization and the employee who is held back. If we aren't clear about development goals, we risk uneven professional development of our employees. If we do focus on them, we tend to see more motivated employees with higher morale, because they see the process as tangible evidence that you and the organization care about their learning and development.

Expectations versus goals

There is a fourth category to address as a manager, but they aren't goals per se. While goals tend to focus on *what* you want your employees to accomplish, it's also important to establish clear expectations about *how* you want your employees to go about this.

Do you expect employees to show up by 8:30 a.m. every day or are you fine if they come and go as they please as long as they accomplish their goals? Do you need them to respond to customer emails within 24 hours? Do you want them to check in with you on a daily basis or only when they need you?

In other words, are there specific behaviors you want to see them avoid or behaviors you want to see them model if they are to be successful on your team? Are there attitudes that you want to encourage or discourage? It's important to communicate these standards to teammates. The clearer you are in communicating your expectations, the better you will be at driving the behaviors, attitudes, and actions that support success on your team.

Now that we have established the importance of well-defined goals and expectations as the foundation for driving success among your team, let's look at what makes a set of goals well-defined. In this section, we'll explore best practices in goal setting.

SMART goals

No discussion on goal setting would be complete without the "SMART" goal framework. A SMART goal is:

- *Specific* — The goal must be well-defined and clear to anyone reading it such that there isn't any ambiguity.
- *Measurable* — A good goal has an objective or quantifiable way to measure whether or not it has been achieved.
- *Attainable* — The goal should stretch a person to perform at their best, but it needs to be achievable. It's a balancing act of pushing someone just out of their comfort zone, but knowing that on the whole they will have more success than failure.
- *Relevant* — The goal needs to align with the broader objectives of the team and organization to have proper impact.
- *Time-bound* — The goal needs to articulate a specific deadline by which it will be accomplished.

Weak Goal	SMART Alternative
Successfully launch new product X	Because sales of its replacement have been declining 10% per year, launch new product X by June and achieve $2M in revenue by end of year.
Become a better presenter	Attend company's presentation skils training workshop, complete three public presentations by March, and obtain manager's feedback to improve my presentation skills and position me to lead training workshops for sales reps.
Generate greater number of qualified leads than last year	Drive 10% improvement in lead generation in Q3 versus prior year through content marketing campaign in alignment with company objective of growing sales through digital marketing.

Because the SMART framework has been around for so long, countless alternative criteria have been proposed (e.g., A for action-oriented, R for realistic, among many others). The variations aren't important; the spirit of all of them is the same. If you want a particular goal to be effective, you want it to be clear, understandable, important to the bigger picture, and something that you can check back in on and establish if it's been achieved within the desired time frame without any room for debate. And if you're striking the right balance, it's also within reach, but it serves to stretch and motivate.

It's worth mentioning that, although you want to push yourself and your team to make sure goals contain these elements, there will be goals that don't lend themselves to having measurable outcomes.

For example, suppose one of your teammate's performance goals pertains to their successfully creating a high-quality slide presentation and presenting it in a big meeting. How will you measure quality when it is inherently subjective? This is a common situation that arises when setting goals. The best thing you can do is be as specific as possible about your definition of success, even if it's in qualitative terms.

By way of example, you might agree on a set of criteria you will use to gauge success such as the quality of the presentation's storyline, the accuracy of the analyses, the engagement level of the meeting participants, the success in driving the group to a decision, and so forth.

Another common challenge people face has to do with how to address any inherent arbitrariness in a given goal. Perhaps there isn't a clear external reason for when a project needs to be completed by, or maybe you're establishing a goal for year-over-year improvement on a metric and there isn't an external guideline or benchmark dictating where you should set the goal.

Even if it feels arbitrary, it's still best to establish a target because it makes the goal concrete. You can always adjust the target later to make it more appropriate. The most important thing is that you work together with your teammate to co-create the target. Sometimes that process can feel a bit like a negotiation, where they propose a number and you push them to stretch a bit further. But it's important that you land on a target for which they feel a sense of ownership and buy-in.

Remember that the SMART framework is just a guideline. Goal setting is both an art and a science, and if you're

doing things well, you will be adjusting your approach to make it appropriate for the situation.

The right mix

When working with an employee to define a set of goals, experience has shown that the best mix of goals includes both performance and development goals, as well as both results and process goals.

Performance goals are critical for ensuring an employee is successful at their job and delivering on what the team and the broader organization needs from them. Development goals are essential to helping the employee level up in their skills and competencies and are strongly linked to employee engagement and retention.

Results goals are important because they clearly articulate the specific outcome an employee is trying to achieve. But it is common for the outcome embedded in a results goal to depend on factors beyond an employee's control (e.g., a product manager may have the goal of growing their category by 10 percent year over year, but other functions directly support or inhibit their ability to reach that goal).

On the other hand, process goals can be more narrowly defined such that they are under the control of an individual. This makes them a useful tool to balance with results goals. The important thing to focus on with a process goal is ensuring there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the process goal and the specific outcomes one is trying to achieve (e.g., in the sales rep example above, making more sales calls is a very clear productivity driver that translates into higher revenue).

The right number

One of the most common mistake managers make is pushing for (or allowing) an employee to have too many goals. These managers fall into the trap of thinking everything is important and they try to include it all. This is just another form of unrealistic goal setting. What usually happens is that the employee only has room to truly focus on a few things at a time anyway. Too many goals can cause someone who actually did a great job to feel demoralized because of their failure to accomplish every one of their goals.

Remember that there is power in focus. It's better to dig a few deep wells than to dig a dozen wells one foot deep. One of your most essential roles as a manager is to be very clear on priorities. Having clarity on what is most important and ensuring you and your team deliver on the essential will set you apart as a manager.

One rule of thumb is to aim for three primary goals, and don't exceed five. I have rarely ever exceeded three when helping my team members set up goals. In some cases, a goal may be broad, and it may need to be supported by subgoals. As an example, you may have a primary results goal (e.g., "Deliver 10 percent efficiency improvement") and break it down into a number of process goals (e.g., "Complete time study by end of Q1"). Alternatively, you may have a primary goal over a longer time frame (e.g., "Double sales by end of year") that can be broken down into shorter-term goals (e.g., "exceed $100,000 in sales in Q1").

Once you've established a focused set of goals, be sure you and the employee agree on the relative priority level of

each of the performance goals. One way to do this is to assign a percentage weight correlating with the importance level or the expected time/effort spent across the goals. This keeps everyone honest. It also may lead you to the recognition that it would be better to remove certain goals from the list (e.g., if 80 percent of employee effort is geared toward the top goal and 5 percent is left for the bottom goal, it probably makes sense to cut the bottom goal).

The right time frame

The pace of change in organizations has increased in recent decades, and there is no sign of it slowing. Many companies and organizations of all types have been faced with the need to change their dated performance management systems to align with the speed of modern times. It's naïve to think that an employee can set a goal in the beginning of the year and have that goal remain relevant throughout the entirety of the year. Things come up. Conditions change. Priorities need to be revised.

While the right time frame for goal setting will vary based on the particular role and situation, it's best to think about goals as cascading, where annual goals are composed of semi-annual or quarterly goals, and those are broken down further if appropriate.

Through experience, I have landed on quarterly goal setting as being the most broadly useful time frame to focus on for most roles and situations. It allows sufficient time to drive meaningful results, but it is a short enough time window to allow for the frequent adjustments that need to be made as priorities shift throughout the year. It also enables you to address shortfalls and performance issues that arise

along the way in a timely fashion. Goals don't always change quarter to quarter, and sometimes they only require small refinements (such as revising what turned out to be an unrealistic goal to make it more achievable). But reviewing goals every quarter encourages accountability and it supports your efforts to manage up in an effective way—a topic we will delve into in more depth in a later chapter.

A final word about goals and expectations

One of the characteristics we see in superb leaders is that they have clarity about where they want to go in the form of a vision and strategy, they consistently socialize it within and beyond their teams, they have an achievable plan for how to get there, and they demonstrate their ability to deliver on expectations by executing against that plan. And what is successful execution of a plan but a case of setting and achieving goals?

Goal setting is a big topic and it's one you see many leaders struggle to get right. But if you're working with your team to write out goals according to the principles we have just discussed, and if you take the time to frequently revisit and adjust those goals, you will gain the benefits of effective goal setting even if some of the goals turn out not to have been perfectly defined on your first attempt.

Time and again, when dissecting the drivers of success of leading organizations, you find highly effective goal setting from top to bottom in that organization. It's for this reason that I encourage you to spend the time to master the art and science of goal setting if you want to reach your full potential as a great manager.