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6 Fundamentals That Can Make You A Better Manager In 2014



Photo: Wikipedia

When it comes to management, I've always been a bigger believer in fundamentals than fancy. Sure, there's nothing at all wrong with, say, presentation skills that spellbind an audience of thousands, but when it comes to operational effectiveness, chances are that will be determined by how well you execute fundamentals day in and day out. In that spirit, here are 6 fundamentals that can make you a better manager in 2014.

1. Be open to new ways of looking at things - The best managers are flexible, adaptable, and closely attuned to their environment. They're always looking for opportunities. Be a good listener. Many of the best process improvement ideas routinely come from employees in the trenches, as they're the ones closest to the actual work. Rigidity is the enemy of progress. Don't be afraid to shift the paradigm and move away from, "This is the way we've always done it here."

2. Expect excellence - Set high but not unattainable standards and expect your employees to meet them. The best managers are ultimately not those who are "toughest" or "nicest," but those who get the best results from people in their charge. Once your employees recognize you have unfailingly high standards, that's key data they won't forget. If your employees know you demand excellence from yourself, they're more likely to find it in themselves.

3. Make sure your employees know – clearly – where they need to focus - About those high standards just noted in point number 2... be sure your employees' job objectives clearly reflect them. Well-conceived, measurable employee objectives are a manager's best friend. They move job performance from the realm of the subjective into – no surprise – the *objective*. If created thoughtfully at the start of the year, objectives will be a valuable guide for both employee and manager as the year unfolds.

4. Protect your time as if it were gold (or perhaps Bitcoins?) – Time is an underrated but crucial management asset, essential to thoughtful decision making. Managers are routinely pulled in too many directions. I know I was, which often resulted in *just getting stuff done*...rushed work rather than optimized work. The most effective executives I knew protected their schedules vigilantly. They did what they needed to do, of course, but they prioritized well, delegated effectively, and left themselves with enough time to carefully think through what they most needed to.

5. Communicate regularly by providing meaningful feedback in real time – Sure, effective communication may sound a little trite, but that's because it's so fundamental to sound management. Strong managers invariably are excellent communicators. Providing ample feedback – both positive and negative – is a core skill. Make yourself readily available to those you manage. Be there, be present, be accessible. Even if you're managing remotely, you're still easily reachable by phone, email, text, etc. Better to be physically remote and easy to communicate with... than to be physically nearby but a distant communicator.

6. Don't duck conflict, but deal with it directly and fairly – As any manager knows, the workplace environment is a fertile breeding ground for conflict. Interpersonal issues, compensation, recognition, cost-cutting, layoffs, management-employee relations... there's never a shortage of emotionally charged issues that can lead to conflict. As much as it's often tempting to look the other way, the best managers aren't "conflict avoiders" – they address problems quickly and fairly. Employees are keen observers; they note who takes action when needed and who doesn't. They respect managers who confront difficult situations, just as they'll lose respect for those who chronically avoid them.

Management is a complex endeavor requiring a diverse skill set.

Mastery of fundamentals provides a solid foundation on which to build everyday operations.

These are six basic ones, by no means an exhaustive list, but six reliable old ones to help get a new year off to a strong start.

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