

The Transition to Manager

Promotion to the role of Manager often results in a considerable change in expectations from your own Manager, even if you have previously been doing some aspects of the role.

As a Manager, you may be responsible for managing a range of things including the generation of work or new customers, workflow, people, information, communication, brand, budgets, and the company's culture.

In some cases, the new title is assumed without specifically discussing what will be different, or new expectations. While 'trial and error' is one way of getting up to speed, that can decrease your chances of being successful and there are less difficult and more effective ways of making the transition.

Without management responsibilities		Manager
Basic to mid-level of access to information regarding own work.	Trust	Increased responsibility with access to confidential information regarding the people and business.
Managed.	Autonomy	Self-managing.
Expected to perform as part of a team or in a specific role.	Performance expectation	Expected to ensure others perform, in addition to high personal performance.
Remunerated and rewarded at the appropriate level.	Reward and recognition	Remunerated and rewarded at a higher level due to the added responsibilities.
Might not know about the big picture of the company. May be less conscious of the impact of negative comments about the company.	Mindset	Big picture is essential to do the role. 'Ownership mentality' focused on acting in the best interests of the company at all times.
Think about problems, sometimes solutions.	Problem solving	Solution focused.
Reacting to requests and instructions.	Proactive	Planning and driving the business. Proactive.
Accountability for self.	Accountability	Responsibility for people, wider relationship base and team performance.
One of the team.	Social interaction	In charge of the team with leadership responsibilities.
Given opportunities to develop.	Coaching	Identifies or creates opportunities to develop self and the team.

Mate or boss?

One of the most challenging things can be to suddenly find yourself managing people you have been in a team with, at the same level as, or friends with outside work. How should you act at work and, harder still, does the social aspect of your relationship need to change?

As one of the team you may have speculated with colleagues about many things to do with your colleagues, management, or what was happening in the business. As a manager you are likely to have access to a lot of confidential information. How will you manage your colleagues asking what the CEO's salary is or who is next up for promotion? Being entrusted with this level of information is a big responsibility. The ramifications of 'loose lips' can be as serious as losing your job or company failure at the extreme.

You may need to develop a higher level of judgment, greater discretion, and a tough skin. At times you may need to say, "You know you shouldn't be asking me that" (followed by a smile).

At work or play, if you are to have a high standard of professional conduct, maintain your integrity, and fulfil the requirements of the role there are new questions and situations you will need to become adept at managing.

Manager - day one

Asking questions and taking time to fully understand your team and the company is essential if you are going to avoid making basic mistakes or alienating others.

Find out what your manager expects. Questions you could ask:

- What are the key things you expect me to achieve in the next 3, 6, 12 months?
- What do you see as the greatest priority?
- Are we going to have a regular meeting day/time?
- What levels of authority do I have to make decisions? Financial? Resourcing? Workflow?
- Are there any deadlines I need to know about in the first couple of weeks?
- What has been the management style of the person running the team? Do you have any tips on what has worked and what hasn't?
- Are there any current issues I should be made aware of? What has been done to date to manage those?
- What regular reporting am I required to do?
- How can I best get up to speed as a Manager? Who should I talk to? What do I need to know? Anything I should avoid?
- Do you have any other advice for me?

By openly talking about expectations up front, you can start to fill in the gaps and build your understanding of your new role and your team. Suspend judgment as long as you can as things are not always as other people perceive them to be, and this can mean you make changes or decisions too early on in your role that you may wish you hadn't.

On the other hand, serious issues need to be addressed immediately to ensure you are able to manage successfully.

Assessment

Take the time to look around at your colleagues and observe how they dress, communicate and conduct themselves. Weigh up who you want to pay more attention to in the coming months - those you think have a style and standing you would like to develop.

You might like to keep notes on the things you want to focus on with regard to leadership development and any feedback you get, so that you have a plan. Focus on areas to develop and things to avoid, and remind yourself of your strengths (this is great when you are having a bad day).

Often one of the most difficult things, but also most valuable, is to practice active listening. Instead of listening to answer, intently focused on listening to learn. You will need to make sure you answer when necessary. However, all too often, people are so focused on making sure they can say their piece, to show they knew the answer all along, that important information gets missed and a learning opportunity is wasted. Listening and asking questions should be high on your list of priorities.

Developing your management skills

Asking for regular feedback is a great way to build a relationship with your manager and fast track learning, as well as nipping any potential issues in the bud. It's often a relief for a manager to know one of their team will welcome constructive feedback.

Self-study

Read about the things you are experiencing at work and try to build up knowledge, solutions, and ideas that fit your current requirements.

There is no shortage of online material or books to point you in the right direction but it is easy to waste time with things that aren't directly relevant or average. Harvard Business Review and business books on the specific topics you need support with are a good starting point and often the easiest way to learn and retain information.

Get recommendations, look in the bestselling lists, and ask people with specialist skills and colleagues who demonstrate the skills and capability you are most interested in learning.

Mentor

Getting a mentor can be invaluable. Is your new manager the most logical choice? If not it could be someone the company uses, a former manager of your own, or you could ask senior people who you respect, either in your company or externally, if they are interested. If not, find a recommendation for someone with the right experience and a solid track record.

If you are going to work with an external person or someone not known to the company, check they practice best practice principles and that the information you give them about yourself, your organisation, and the people you discuss will always be kept confidential.

Ensure you specifically ask if there is any reason why they shouldn't do the mentoring. Do they know anyone at the company, own shares in the company, or share professional service providers? If so, what is their connection with this person(s)?

It is your responsibility, just as much as it is theirs, to ensure there is no conflict of interest, and failure to do so can create all sorts of minor and sometimes serious problems.