5 Pieces of Advice for First-Time Managers

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Summary. Becoming the "boss" is a huge career transition and it comes with a lot of new responsibilities. And making this transition to being a first-time manager takes time, patience, and practice. Here are five tips from our authors that every first-time manager should take to heart.

- New managers often wait for yearly reviews to solicit feedback from their teams, but being a good manager means being open to feedback at all times.

- Trust is not bestowed by a manager onto the team. Rather, it's earned.

- Create team rituals to build trust with your coworkers.

- If something goes wrong on your team — a missed deadline or unmet goals — don't default to blaming the individual. Instead, take a system's approach to solve the problem.

- Finally, know that it's okay to ask for help. **close**

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Becoming the "boss" is a huge career transition and it comes with a lot of new responsibilities. You're now a part of something bigger than yourself. Your success is no longer dependent on your work but on the work delivered by the people you coach. For first-time managers, making this shift and learning how to lead well takes time, patience, and practice.

One common trap you might fall into is prioritizing being liked over leading in ways that actually help your team members grow. We all care how others perceive us. We all want to be accepted for who we are. As a new boss, you may feel extra pressure to prove your worth, to secure an early win, or be overly "hands on" when helping others deliver results. But there are better, more productive ways, to motivate others to do their best work.

To help you avoid some of these mistakes, and smoothly transition into your new role, we've put together five tips from our authors that every first-time manager should take to heart:

1) Build a culture of feedback from the start.

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New managers often wait for yearly reviews to solicit feedback from their teams, but being a good manager means being open to feedback at all times.

Author Ursula Kraslova, in her article, "Ask an Expert: What Skills Do I Need to Become a Great Manager?", shares some advice around how to create an ongoing culture of feedback.

Set up regular (weekly or biweekly) one-on-one meetings with each member of your team to ensure open and honest communication. During these meetings, check in with them about any challenges they may be facing, what they need from you to do their best work, and how you can improve as their boss or better work together.

Kraslova suggests asking these questions to guide your conversations: Am I clear in the expectations I set? Do I give you enough time to complete your tasks? Does my communication style work for you? What do you need from me or the company to get past the roadblocks you're facing?

2) Know that trust is given, not earned.

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Another tip Kraslova shares in her article is that new managers should view trust as a two-way street.

As a new manager, here's what you need to remember: People are hired because they're experts in their fields or show potential to do great work. Withholding trust can make them feel you're not acknowledging the skills that brought them to the table in the first place, and potentially lead them to resent you.

The suggestion isn't to hand your team members a to-do list and disappear. Rather, Kraslova says that, once you've laid out your expectations for a project, you trust them to execute it and come to you when they need help — as opposed to looking over their shoulders.

Remember that you (or your company) hired your team members for a reason. It all comes down to trust. If you want to show confidence in your direct reports and develop a respectful relationship, give them the benefit of the doubt. You want to build an environment where people feel safe enough to experiment, fail, learn from their mistakes, and grow.

3) Create team rituals to build trust with your coworkers.

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In the hybrid world of work, new managers may be faced with a difficult challenge: leading a team who you have never met in person. This means you'll likely need to build trust and camaraderie between people in different locations and time zones.

In his article, "Make Your Remote Team 'Feel' Like a Team," organizational psychologist David Burkus shares some fun ideas for new managers to develop a welcoming culture on remote or hybrid teams:

- **"Meme Monday."** Ask everyone on your team to share a quick (and appropriate) image or gif that captures how their weekend went.

- **Value backgrounds.** Have each member of your team write down their core values. Then, create a series of virtual backgrounds based on those words. Before your next meeting, ask each person to select the background that reflects how they're feeling that day.

- **"Rose and Thorn."** At the beginning of your weekly meeting, ask each member of your team to share one positive (rose) and one negative (thorn) thing that happened to them in the past week.

4) Eliminate blame culture.

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In his article, "Blame Culture Is Toxic. Here's How to Stop It," author Michael Timms writes that blaming others for your problems can diminish your (and your team members') accountability. When you use blame — as opposed to thoughtful analysis and communication — to diagnose an issue, you turn yourself into a passive victim and encourage your direct reports to do the same.

If something goes wrong on your team — missed deadlines or unmet goals — don't default to blaming the individuals. Instead, take a system's approach to solve the problem. This means you consider the problem as a whole, and not in parts.

Instead of asking "Who's at fault?", strong leaders ask, "Where did the process break down?"

Timm uses this example: If one of your team members accidentally deletes a survey template, don't jump to blame them. Instead, encourage everyone on the team to think about what caused the problem. When you brainstorm, you are likely to realize that there are no safety protocols in place to protect templates and files. A simple solution could be to create a folder to store copies of all the templates.

Discussing how to prevent a mistake — rather than shaming colleagues and peers — goes a long way in promoting trust on your team as opposed to fear or contempt.

5) Finally, know that it's okay to ask for help.

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In a survey of first-time managers and their direct reports conducted by Ben Laker, Vijay Pereira, Ashish Malik, and Marcello Mariani in "What First-Time Managers Can Do to Address Burnout," 65% of respondents admitted to feeling uncertain or anxious about their role transition. This induced stress and set the stage for burnout.

Here's how the authors suggest you cope: Ask for help. While it may seem like a hard task when you're a new leader, remind yourself that you don't have to know it all.

Reach out to your trusted peers, mentors, or your own manager. Don't let the initial stress of your new role turn into the chronic stress of burnout. Speak up and ask for what you need before it gets to this point. This is not just something you should do for yourself, but also for your team — because working alongside someone who is burned out can affect your team's productivity.
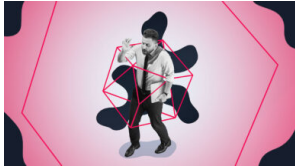
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