Research Shows That Your First-Time Managers Aren't Ready to Lead. Now, What?

Here are four moves that, as senior leader, you can make to put your new manager securely in the driver's seat.

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A Note From The Editor

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Here's a staggering fact: A 2016 survey of 500 managers from micro-learning platform Grovo found that 44 percent felt unprepared for their role. Additionally, 87 percent wished they'd had more training before becoming a manager.

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Numbers like these suggest that organizations aren't providing first-time managers with enough, or maybe *any* training, that they're just getting a new title, a raise, a fhandshake and a friendly "good luck." But that isn't the truth. In fact, 99 percent of companies in the Grovo survey said they offer management training.

So, what's the disconnect? What seems to be happening is that managers are just receiving the *wrong* type of preparation. To improve training for first-time managers, here's what you can do to help new leaders overcome the typical challenges:

Do encourage collaboration.

One of the hardest transitions new managers have is learning how to foster collaboration. They need to transition from knowing how to work in a group to how to create the right work environment.

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"[Great leaders] prioritize two-way communication and trust within their teams," Summer Salomonsen, chief learning officer of San Francisco-based Grovo, said in an email.

Regularly giving and soliciting feedback is the foundation for collaboration. It shows team members that they are in a safe space, where their unique contributions are appreciated. So, model this behavior with all employees – especially those being considered for management positions.

Another modeling behavior to display if you're a senior leader is to sit in on brainstorming sessions. Ask questions and give praise. Then sit down with potential managers. Find out what they observed and how they felt.

Having them talk through what they experienced from a collaborative management session will show them how important it is for them to lead the same way.

Don't let new leaders lose sight of

their employees.

After a promotion, many new managers feel more loyal to their company. While this is natural, it shouldn’t mean that a new leader is less loyal to the people the or she manages. Instead, the new leader needs to recognize team members’ needs and advocate for their well-being and development.

Rich Arundel, co-founder and general manager of North America operations for the New York-based online payment platform Currencycloud, suggests teaching “mirror” management. This occurs when new managers follow cues from their employees and adapt their behavior accordingly.

For example, if an employee is the quiet type, he or she will likely respond better to a manager who uses a softer tone.

“As a manager, you have as much obligation to your employees as you do to your company,” Arundel said by email. “Employees will respect you and work harder for you if they genuinely believe you have their best interests at heart and care about their career.”

To get new managers to understand this “mirror” technique, have them write down their own natural characteristics. How do they speak, observe and think? Then have them write down leadership behaviors they think will help them make the most of their own traits.

Do address the awkwardness.

Often, new managers become the bosses of their former peers. And this can lead to awkward situations. An employee’s joke might cross a line, for instance. The new manager might feel uncomfortable giving an order.

“Additionally, others on the team may have applied for the same role,” Matt Becker, coaching and mentoring manager at the

managed healthcare company CareSource, in Dayton, Ohio, said via email. “[Others] may resent that they didn’t receive the promotion.”

With all that potential for tension, address the elephant in the room.

First, before any promotional decision, be clear about how the choice will be made. Explain to each candidate what’s being considered. Then, when the choice is made, publicly announce how the candidate selected met all the criteria.

Provide conflict-resolution training for the first-time manager. Give him or her the chance to practice giving orders to friends. If need be, bring in team members to role-play and express their feelings about having a friend who’s now their superior.

Don’t encourage your new manager’s “DIY” mentality.

New managers want to prove they deserve the role. Since they’re new at leading, they’re unsure how to do this. They focus on trying to do as much as possible by themselves — the same as they did when they were individual contributors. But this do-it-yourself attitude can lead to poor leadership and burnout.

Karl Alomar is the COO of the New York City-based cloud-computing platform DigitalOcean. To become a successful manager, he told me, a first-timer needs to let go of his or her old notions of success. “The best managers empower their teams and in turn create more velocity by expanding on the work just one person could do,” he said.

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So, encourage that team empowerment. Stress the importance of

delegation in manager training. Provide practice scenarios in which new leaders have a project description and a list of employees. See how they would divide up the tasks. Then provide feedback so these new leaders can learn how to use the strengths of others instead of their own time and energy.

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