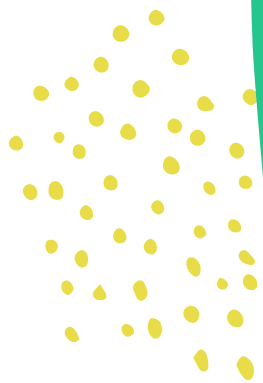# Guide to 5 Mistakes New Managers / Leaders Make

(And Strategies that Turn it Around)

by Barbara Khozam

It's an exciting day! You've just earned a promotion as the manager of your department after dedicating over seven years of hard work.

The recognition and pay raise are well-deserved rewards. With most of your coworkers being friends and your in-depth knowledge of the job, it seems like a smooth ride ahead, doesn't it?

This scenario is all too familiar—a skilled employee climbs the ranks to a leadership role, receives no training, and is suddenly expected to excel. Unfortunately, this frequently leads to new leaders feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and contemplating resignation.

But fear not! This chapter is here to guide you with five quick and practical steps that you can implement right away to navigate this new managerial terrain successfully.

LET'S GET STARTED!

Mistake #1 FAILURE TO SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

A prominent challenge faced by many new managers lies in the failure to establish clear expectations from the outset. Frequently, assumptions are made that all team members comprehend their roles, responsibilities, performance standards, job duties, codes of conduct, and communication norms. However, the reality often diverges significantly.

Past managerial practices may have overlooked tardiness or extended breaks, tolerated late and incomplete reports, or exhibited inconsistencies in customer interactions. The absence of explicit guidelines leads to a spectrum of behaviors within the team, fostering discontent and becoming the primary source of complaints.

Rules

A REAL WORLD EXAMPLE

A new boss told me that her workplace didn't have clear job descriptions or rules, even about being on time. When she talked to employees about being late, they would say things like, "I came in at this time last month, and no one said anything," or "Mike came in at this time yesterday, and nothing happened."

Because there were no clear rules, employees could use past times they were late as excuses. This absence of established guidelines created a scenario where employees could cite prior occurrences as a defense, underscoring the need for clear and standardized expectations in the workplace.
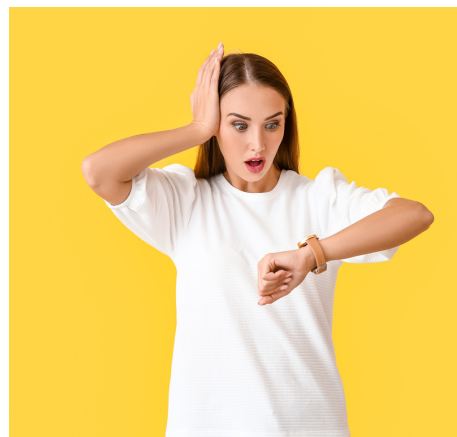
Strategies to Turn This Around

1 Initiate Early Communication: In your initial month as a manager, conduct a comprehensive meeting with your team to delve into their respective roles, responsibilities, and performance standards. Foster an environment that encourages open and meaningful discussions, promoting a collective understanding.

2 Consensus and Commitment: Seek consensus on the aforementioned aspects during the discussions and obtain signatures from all team members. This collective commitment establishes a shared understanding and agreement, laying the groundwork for a cohesive and accountable team.

3 Documentation for Accountability: Formalize the agreed-upon expectations by placing a copy in the personnel records of each team member. This documentation serves as a tangible reference point for accountability and provides a structured framework for addressing performance issues.

Mistake #2 FAILURE TO CULTIVATE / BUILD NEW RELATIONSHIPS
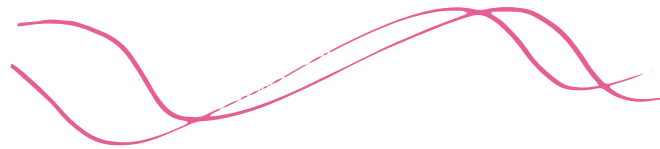
Establishing clear boundaries and cultivating professional relationships with your team is essential, regardless of any pre-existing personal connections. Failure to define these boundaries from the outset can lead to potential challenges.

For new leaders, the transition from colleague to manager requires a careful balance in cultivating professional relationships, especially when pre-existing personal connections exist within the team. Setting clear boundaries from the outset is crucial to delineate roles and expectations.

Failure to do so may lead to challenges such as perceived favoritism or a lack of clarity in leadership expectations. Navigating these dynamics involves transparent communication of expectations and the consistent application of fair and impartial decision-making. By proactively managing these relationships, leaders can foster a work environment that prioritizes professionalism, transparency, and the overall success of the team.

A REAL WORLD EXAMPLE

One of my clients became the manager for a team of 15 new employees. When he started, he set up regular one-on-one meetings with each team member twice a month.

At first, the employees weren't thrilled about it. They complained, saying, "Now that you're the boss, we have to have these stupid meetings." But he didn't give up.

He continued with the meetings. When I checked in with him six months later, he shared something truly remarkable.

First, the meetings had been streamlined from approximately 30 minutes to just 15 minutes.

Second there was a noticeable boost in the team's morale and productivity.

His success hinged on transforming his connection with the team in these meetings.

It went beyond discussing work performance; he inquired about their job satisfaction and delved into personal matters that might impact their focus at work.

He identified effective communication methods for each individual, ultimately demonstrating genuine care.

Consequently, employees felt valued, fostering trust in their new leader.

Strategies to Turn This Around

1 Demonstrate Respect: Exhibit respectful conduct in all interactions, recognizing the importance of courtesy and professionalism, even if personal liking varies.

2 Conduct Regular One-on-One Meetings: Consistently allocate time, whether weekly, biweekly, or monthly, to purposefully foster positive connections with team members. This intentional commitment enables you to deeply grasp their strengths, challenges, and career aspirations, fostering trust and building meaningful connections.

3 Implement Regular Communication Sessions: Hold daily huddles and/or weekly meetings to ensure employees feel informed and involved, addressing a top motivator for most individuals in the workplace.

4 Encourage Open Communication: Engage in monthly check-ins with team members, dedicating an average of 5 minutes to inquire about their needs, challenges, and noteworthy accomplishments. Demonstrate active listening to understand their responses and address the concerns they raise, maintaining a practical approach to resolving issues. Foster a workplace culture that encourages team members to openly express their ideas and concerns. This not only promotes collaboration but also ensures that everyone feels valued and heard.

MISTAKE #3 DELEGATING TO YOUR "FAVORITE"

When collaborating with organizational leaders and their teams, I often conduct anonymous surveys to gather insights on how employees and managers perceive each other.

One revealing question centers around favoritism, where approximately 88% of employees acknowledge that their manager plays favorites.

Interestingly, when managers are asked directly if they play favorites, the response is typically a resounding "no." This discrepancy highlights the challenge, as many new leaders may be unaware of unintentional favoritism in their actions.
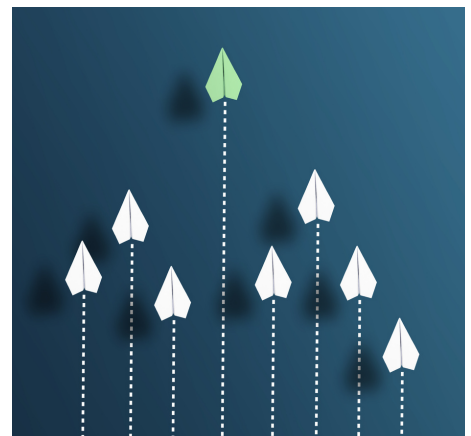
A Real World Example

EXAMPLES OF FAVORITISM:

1. Having regular lunch outings with a specific employee friend

Solution: If you go to lunch with one employee, you should make an effort to have lunch with all employees.

2. A colleague of mine, who recently became a manager, went on vacation and brought back souvenirs for only some of her team members, stating that she believed others wouldn't be interested or like them.

Solution: When bringing souvenirs, it's advisable to either bring one for everyone or none at all.

3. At a waste management facility, a manager assigns more tasks to the top performers. This approach poses two issues. Firstly, the high performers may feel overwhelmed and face burnout. Secondly, it leaves the underperformers feeling excluded, and the lowest performers are inadvertently rewarded with lighter workloads.


Solution: Opt for even delegation. If there's hesitation about someone handling an entire project, break it into smaller tasks with frequent check-ins. Alternatively, involve the employee in breaking down the project and let them decide on check-in intervals. This approach not only ensures fair delegation but also demonstrates trust in the team's capabilities.

Strategies to Turn This Around

1   Stay mindful of your behavior and decisions.

2   Distribute tasks equitably among team members.

3   Assign responsibilities considering the strengths and development objectives of each team member.

4   Empower your team by granting autonomy and entrusting them with meaningful responsibilities.
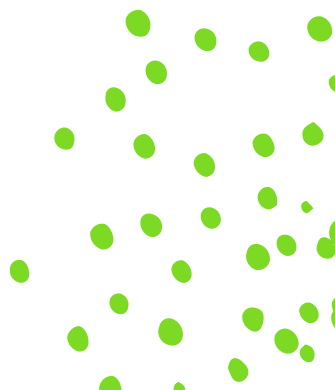
Mistake #4 Failure to give feedback - Good or Bad

All employees crave feedback, be it positive or constructive. According to a recent Gallup organization study, a significant 67% of employees identify recognition as their primary performance motivator.

Interestingly, 80% of managers believe they excel at providing recognition; however, a mere 12% of employees feel genuinely appreciated for their contributions, irrespective of their experience level. Evidently, there exists a noticeable knowledge-action gap.

While some managers may argue that a paycheck is sufficient acknowledgment for completing tasks, consistent research highlights that employees actively seek recognition on a weekly basis.

This doesn't imply the need for daily celebrations, but it does underscore the crucial importance of paying attention and acknowledging commendable actions. As the saying aptly puts it, "Behavior that is rewarded is repeated."

Offering constructive feedback is equally crucial. It should be delivered promptly, be concise, and focus on specific activities or behaviors that can be improved, without criticizing the individual. In cases of consistent underperformance, a progressive discipline approach is necessary.

A Real World Example

n the leadership landscape, there's a TV program named "Undercover Boss." In this show, company leaders go incognito for a week to observe their employees at work. At the week's end, there's a meeting where the leader reveals their identity and shares feedback.

In almost every episode, there's a touching moment.

After getting positive feedback, an employee might tear up, saying something like, "I've never been recognized before." Despite their outstanding work, these individuals often operate in the shadows, their outstanding contributions overlooked. This simple act of recognition sparks a renewed enthusiasm in these employees, motivating them to continue excelling.

Strategies to Turn This Around

1 Establish an individual performance log for each team member to track their achievements and areas for improvement systematically. Record noteworthy events, both positive and negative, along with dates and your corresponding actions, fostering a comprehensive understanding of their performance journey.

2 Provide feedback, whether positive or negative, within a 24-hour timeframe. This not only ensures swift acknowledgment but also promotes a culture of continual improvement.

3 Integrate positive feedback moments into your daily routine by scheduling them every day. Witness the transformative impact on attitudes as consistent recognition becomes a natural and uplifting part of the team's daily experience.

Your feedback matters!

Mistake #5 Forgetting to "Lead By Example"

As a leader, your every move is under observation. Your team pays attention as you step out of your car in the morning and observes your entrance into a room. They keenly observe your approach to handling performance issues, taking cues from your actions. The behaviors you exhibit are mirrored and matched by your team, influencing the overall atmosphere and dynamics within the workplace.

A Real World Example

During a 6-hour leadership workshop I was facilitating, there was a participant who consistently arrived late, not only for the overall session but also after every break.

This individual, who exhibited a persistently negative demeanor, challenged many points I presented. Following the workshop, he approached me, expressing his frustration, "Barbara, I'm at a loss. My employees are consistently late, and their attitudes are overwhelmingly negative."

It became evident that, occasionally, when faced with widespread issues within your team, it's crucial to introspect and evaluate your own behavior and attitude.

Strategies to Turn This Around

1   Demonstrate Mindful Behavior and a Positive Attitude: Lead with awareness and maintain a positive demeanor, leaving negativity outside the workplace.

2   Practice Honest and Transparent Communication: Embrace honesty within the bounds of confidentiality, admit mistakes, and encourage open communication within the team.

3   Embrace a Strong Work Ethic: Set a high standard for productivity, adhere to deadlines, and showcase commitment to your responsibilities, fostering a culture of hard work.

4   Show Empathy and Prioritize Well-being: Display empathy, understand team members' challenges, and prioritize a healthy work-life balance. Encourage breaks and self-care practices to promote well-being within the team.

Summary

Utilize this chapter as a roadmap to develop impactful leadership skills, foster a positive team culture, and achieve success in your managerial position. Periodically revisit and contemplate these key points to facilitate ongoing enhancement in your leadership strategy. Congratulations on your new role – you've got this!

Questions?

Contact Barbara for your complimentary consultation. Click <u>HERE</u> Now!

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