

MANAGEMENT FUNDAMENTALS

Eight Steps Any Manager Can Take
To Become A Highly-Engaged Leader

by Bruce Tulgan

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Managing Is Like Staying in Shape

Most managers often don't, well... *manage*, unless there is a "special occasion":

1. Something goes wrong
2. More work has to be heaped onto an employee
3. Changes of course or new strategies have to be communicated
4. Someone is doing a great job and their efforts have to be recognized

But good management is just like staying in shape – it requires developing the habit of managing every day. Anything less? That's **undermanagement**. And it is costing you, your team, and your employer every single day.

Thankfully, there are **eight steps** anyone can take to become a highly-engaged leader.

STEP ONE

Get in the Habit of Managing Every Day



Stop managing by special occasion!

Dedicate at least **one hour** of your time each day to managing. If this seems like a lot of time, consider this: How many people are you responsible for managing? How long would it take to have a 10- to 15-minute conversation with each of those people?

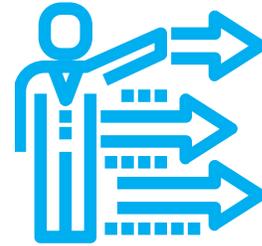
Don't make the mistake of thinking you don't have enough time to manage your team every day – putting in that time up front will save you and everyone else so many headaches later on!

The sweet spot for most well-performing teams is to meet individually with everyone **at least once every two weeks**. Less than that, and you run a much higher risk of being out of the loop when you need to be on top of the details.

Keep one-on-ones brief, routine, and ask really good questions:

- What do you need from me?
- What is your plan? What steps will you follow?
- How long will each step take?

STEP TWO



Learn to Talk Like a Performance Coach

The best coaches may have that special ability to inspire people, but effective coaching is a skill that anyone can practice.

The number one thing to practice to become better at coaching as a manager is being specific: talk about work and performance using **describing** language, rather than **naming** language.

NAMING:

You're too slow.

DESCRIBING: It's taking you 60 minutes to finish a task that takes most of your coworkers 30 minutes to finish. Let's figure out how we can get you to complete it in less time.

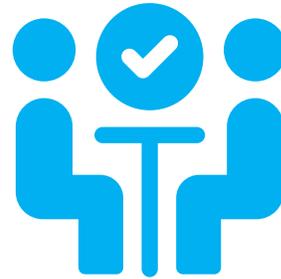
NAMING:

You need to have a better attitude.

DESCRIBING: It's tough for your team members to work with you when you are often raising your voice, scowling, and complaining.

Remember, this only works if you're spending the time to meet regularly with direct reports one-on-one.

STEP THREE



Take It One Person at a Time

Everyone you manage will need a different kind of support from you.

There is a simple tool managers can use to help them customize their management style for each person, called the **Manager's Landscape**.

For each person you manage, answer the following:

- WHO** is this person at work?
- WHY** do I need to manage this person?
- WHAT** do I need to talk about with this person?
- HOW** do I need to talk to this person?
- WHEN** should I talk to this person?
- WHERE** should I talk to this person?

List these questions at the top of a page, horizontally, and then list the names of your team members down the left-hand side. Use this grid as your Manager's Landscape, a quick reference that can help guide your management efforts for each individual.

STEP FOUR

Make Accountability a Process, Not a Slogan



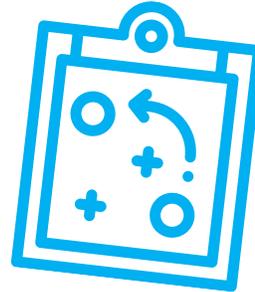
A lot of managers suddenly announce one day that, from now on, they are going to start holding people accountable.

Of course, the problem is that most of them don't have an established way of holding people accountable. Simply starting to have regular, ongoing, one-on-one dialogues with your employees will go a long way. When people know that someone is paying attention, they are more likely to put their best effort in.

From there, creating accountability follows this basic framework:

- **Spell out clear expectations.** Make sure everyone knows, in no uncertain terms, what is expected of them.
- **Define what a good job, bad job, and great job look like.** Then there is less room for interpretation on performance down the line.
- **Establish next steps or a project plan.** Make sure you and your employees are on the same page from the start.
- **Tie rewards, and consequences, to the performance expectations you agreed on together.**

STEP FIVE



Tell People What to Do, *and* How to Do It

Too many managers allow recurring performance problems to persist because they are uncomfortable with telling people how to perform certain tasks or responsibilities.

If someone is struggling with the work, it is up to you to help them!

Don't wait until someone has demonstrated a long track record of failure to start coaching their performance. Jump in when they need you from the start, with whatever level of support makes sense for the employee and the task in question.

- **Ask, “What do you need from me?”** The solution will never be effective unless you understand the nature of the problem. Figure out if the employee needs guidance, training, or resources in order to improve.
- **Provide standard operating procedures, checklists, or other planning tools.** If there is already a best practice established by the organization, do your employees a favor by informing them of that process from the start.
- **Don't be afraid of micromanaging when necessary.** If your employee is asking for help, or clearly could use it, don't be afraid of telling them what to do and how to do it. Provide more guidance at the beginning and then scale back accordingly.

STEP SIX



Track Performance Every Step of the Way

Tracking performance is difficult for most managers to keep up with, and it's understandable why. The key to success is having a simple system that can be routinely referenced and edited.

Once you've spent time spelling out expectations and guidelines up front, you only need to be as involved in monitoring performance as is necessary for you to course correct if needed.

- 1. Watch employees work.** Spot-check an employee doing their actual work. This works best for jobs such as manufacturing, nursing, or construction.
- 2. Ask for an account.** In every one-on-one conversation with every employee, ask for an account of what that person has done since your last conversation.
- 3. Help employees use self-monitoring tools.** Work with them to develop checklists or project aids.
- 4. Review work in progress.** Ask for early drafts, or samples of work, and make sure you really review that work in detail.
- 5. Ask around a little.** Get opinions from coworkers and other managers.

STEP SEVEN



Solve Small Problems, Before They Turn into Big Ones

If you are engaged with your direct reports in ongoing, consistent one-on-one dialogues, then you are already doing the hardest part of the work necessary to stay on top of small problems.

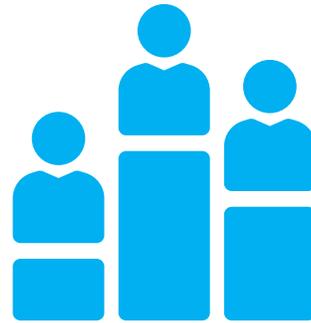
The second step is simply being confident enough to step in and make sure things are on the right track. Most managers would rather not engage in difficult conversations or confrontations with employees.

The problem is that, if you don't have some difficult conversations early on, you are **guaranteed** to have tougher ones in the future.

- 1. Keep track in writing.** Having a written record of agreed-upon expectations and guidelines will make small course corrections easier.
- 2. Focus on the behavior you want to see.** The best way to avoid small problems is to make them seem less like problems, and more like opportunities for improvement. Remember, use **describing** language, not **naming** language.
- 3. Follow up and provide support.** Don't allow employees to sink-or-swim. The team's success relies on everyone.

STEP EIGHT

Do More for Some People,
and Less for Others,
Based on Performance



Don't buy into the myth that fairness means treating everyone the same, regardless of their performance. You have limited resources with which to reward people, so do more for the people who are giving you their absolute best.

Of course, the key is that you are providing the sufficient guidance, direction, support, and coaching necessary for everyone on your team to have opportunities to earn what they truly deserve.

Differential rewards really work if you adopt the philosophy of **Control, Timing, and Customization**:

- **Control.** Put people in control of their own rewards by spelling out exactly what they must do in order to earn them.
- **Timing.** The closer in proximity the reward is to the performance in question, the more powerful the reward will be.
- **Customization.** The more you are able to identify **non-financial rewards** that matter to each individual employee, the greater a value proposition you can make to them in exchange for their best performance.

GO AHEAD – BE A BETTER BOSS!



These eight steps are all you need to start improving as a manager today.

But in order to maintain success long-term, you have to regularly revise and adjust.

Once you establish your new method of management and have it working for you, you will have a lot of great new data about your employees, their work, and yourself as a leader.

Don't waste that data! Ask yourself:

- Who needs to be managed more closely?
- Who needs a little more space?
- Who is likely to improve? Who is not? Why?
- Who should be developed? Should anyone be fired?
- Who requires special accommodations and rewards?

Check in with yourself once every few months to ask these questions, adjust your Manager's Landscape regularly, and become a better manager for your team.

ABOUT RAINMAKER THINKING



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