



BC EXCLUDED EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

MyInfo:

Management Myths & Tips

Finding Out...

Why?

Your Options

How We Can Help

This MyInfo sheet will be of interest to those of you who are new to management or have moved into a more senior role. We outline the most common mistakes that new managers and recommend how to avoid and overcome them.

MYTHS AND MISTAKES IN MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

When you first transition into a management role—or from manager to director—it is important to ask yourself: How do I avoid common pitfalls and mistakes? Maybe this is the first time that you've been tasked with managing both people and delivering on your own work. Perhaps you've spent most of your career in a non-supervisory management role, and this will be the first time you've ever managed staff. It is entirely possible that you won't be supervising anyone at all but will simply need to 'up your game' when it comes to strategic thinking, making sound business decisions or simply trying to understand what the executive wants. This MyInfo sheet will help you to understand common mistakes and how to avoid and/or correct them. It is simply one tool among many that will help ensure success as your move into your new role.

We all know managers, supervisors and even co-workers whom we would never want to work with—or for—again. And there are others that we would be delighted to work for again—and in a heartbeat. One of the primary challenges with working in the BC Public Service in an excluded management role is that no roadmap exists that clearly outlines the steps necessary to become a 'good manager'—while still meeting all of your other job requirements.

Transitioning from co-worker to supervisor can be challenging. How will you go about defining yourself as a leader to former peers, new colleagues and your new supervisor? Are you hoping that management skills will suddenly descend from on high or are you taking deliberate steps to develop yourself as a leader and manager of people?

NEW MANAGERS: IDENTIFYING MYTHS AND MISTAKES

Harvard Business School Professor Linda Hill is an expert on first-time managers and outlines common myths and misperceptions that can lead to mistakes—and particularly in the early days. Poor management can lead to substantial human, economic, reputational and professional costs. New managers must therefore take their responsibilities seriously and strive for continuous improvement.

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Myth/Mistake 1: Managers wield significant authority.

New managers are often standouts in their previous jobs, and as such, enjoyed a fair degree of independence and autonomy. With a new job and title, they expect to feel more authority. Well, surprise! Most new managers report they are shocked by how constrained they feel. They are enmeshed in a web of relationships, not only with subordinates, but also with bosses, peers, and others inside and outside the organization. Relentless and often conflicting demands can result in a daily routine that is pressured, hectic and fragmented.” 1) Remember that this is one, albeit rough, period of your life and career. It is time limited and, although it often feels like every waking moment is consumed with thoughts of work, there are other aspects of your life that will not change. Maintaining a broader perspective is an important facet of self-management.

Myth/Mistake 2: Authority flows from the manager’s position.

New managers frequently believe that a title is sufficient to confer authority. They soon learn however, that when direct reports are *told* to do something, they won’t necessarily respond. In fact, the more talented the subordinate, the less likely s/he will simply follow orders. Good managers earn their subordinates’ respect and trust. Without it they will never exercise significant authority. Managers need to demonstrate their character, competence, and ability to get things done before subordinates will follow their lead.

Myth/Mistake 3: Managers must control their direct reports.

New managers are often insecure. This manifests as a desire to seek absolute compliance from their subordinates, particularly in the early days. Compliance however, is not the same as commitment. If people aren’t committed, they don’t take the initiative, and if subordinates aren’t taking the initiative, the manager can’t delegate effectively. Managers should nurture a strong sense of common commitment to shared goals—rather than one of blind allegiance to the managers’ dictates.

Myth/Mistake 4: Managers must focus on forging good individual relationships.

Managers need to focus not on friendship, but on building a team. New managers who focus primarily on cultivating strong one-to-one relationships tend to neglect a fundamental aspect of effective leadership: Namely, to harness the collective power of the group to improve individual performance. Encouraging a culture of collaboration and mutual support will lead to a more cohesive and effective team.

Myth /Mistake: The manager’s job is to ensure things run smoothly.

Keeping an operation running smoothly is a difficult task and can absorb all of a new managers time and energy. Nevertheless, this is not all a manager does. Managers are also responsible for recommending and initiating changes that will enhance their department’s performance. Often—and it comes as a surprise to most—this means challenging organizational processes, norms or structures that exist above and beyond their area of formal authority.

TOP 5 ACTIONS YOU CAN, AND SHOULD, UNDERTAKE IN YOUR NEW ROLE

Whether you are becoming a manager for the first time or transitioning from a manager to a director, or from director to executive, there are a few key issues you need to pay attention to. Ascertaining your responsibilities and taking time to get to know your employees can be easy to dismiss when first starting in a new position. Nevertheless, finding time to do so will save you significant effort down the road. The BCEEA supports members to define a path and take the steps necessary to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

1. Do some strategic planning on your own behalf.

Even if you are transitioning from a management position into a new role, spend some time thinking about what you want to achieve, what support systems you need to build, and how you will evaluate your progress.

Taking the time to define your own parameters and write down what you hope to achieve can help clarify your thoughts and provide a benchmark for future reference. Ask yourself:

- What type of manager are you? Do you know?
- How will you build relationships with your subordinates, peers and the executive?
- Do you want to be seen as supportive of corporate initiatives, and a 'go to' person that 'makes things happen', or would you rather be the voice of reason, with a quiet leadership style based on the sharing of your expertise?
- Do you possess a driving creative spark, or are you happy being the person pulling together all of the details necessary to realize someone else's vision?

Remember, although your new role offers an opportunity to build on past successes, only you can determine your future direction.

2. Involve rather than demand.

Avoid 'riding in with guns blazing'. New managers often try to do too much too quickly in their first weeks and months on the job. "Think of the first 90 days as a listen and learn opportunity," says Dr. Thacker, President of New York-based consulting firm Strategic Performance Solutions. "Learn who your subordinates are, what drives them, what motivates them", states Elizabeth Garone from the Wall Street Journal.

Yes, as a new manager you have the power to initiate change. Be careful however, not to abuse that authority by making unnecessary changes 'just because'. Talk to your employees first and listen to their suggestions. Don't turn everything upside down without their input. If you do, you'll wind up with some very unhappy workers.

The challenge with becoming a director or moving into the executive is that you are often brought into the new role to 'fix' a situation or team. This is all the more reason to do your homework; consult experts within your new branch and/or department; and make sure staff is involved in decision-making. This will ensure that they will 'own' the end result, and thus be more supportive of any alterations to the status quo.

3. Build networks that support your goals.

"Begin building a network of your peers," says Dr. Thacker "and don't forget to include upper management and subordinates in your network". Adds Elizabeth Garone, "ask advice of the people who have been in the roles for a number of years".

Include staff in your support network. Get to know them on a personal level. Show some humanity and genuine interest in who they are, and they'll feel much more comfortable working for you.

Make friends with staff in other departments/divisions and try to understand your responsibilities for:

- Executive interaction
- Budget and financial processes
- Emergency preparedness
- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
- 'Go Green' initiatives
- Human Resources practices

Taking the initiative and finding out for yourself will only confirm and solidify what is expected of you with respect to your new role.

4. Find a balance between control freak and door mat.

When you step into a management role, you are responsible for the productivity of your employees and for generating results. Don't use this as an excuse to micro-manage or become overbearing. Controlling every little detail will only spark resentment: You will be effectively telling employees you don't trust them to do their jobs.

That being said, it is not easy transitioning from pack member to leader. You can't be a doormat or a pushover just because you want everyone to like you. Be assertive when necessary and courteous at all times.

5. Admit your mistakes.

When you're a new manager, you're bound to make mistakes. You might have been careless or simply didn't know any better. Whatever the reason, openly admit your mistakes and apologize or correct them. Your employees will respect you for it.

Even seasoned managers make mistakes, but learning from them is just part of the job. Although you are responsible for decisions made in your section or branch, try not to become risk adverse. Contingency planning will only take you so far: The ability to think on your feet, accept responsibility, and address unexpected challenges will set you apart.

The quest to become a great manager represents a lifelong goal. It is not a skill that is mastered after only a few months on the job. In fact, many employees may struggle for years to be promoted into management, but once there, realize it isn't for them. Managers must possess a very particular drive and personality in order to be effective. If it's not for you, don't be ashamed. Nevertheless, if you are a new manager, be sure to give yourself enough time to learn the ropes. More than any individual profession, managing people represents both the most complex of challenges while also offering the greatest of rewards.

Please remember that this MyInfo sheet has been developed to provide general tips and does not take into account any individual circumstances, constitute legal advice, represent government policy or replace a personal consultation.

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