

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

.....of.....

FIRST-TIME MANAGERS

————— ART PETTY —————

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Editor: Laura Bantz
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The failure rate for
first-time managers
is as high as
50% in the first year.

INTRODUCTION

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Although shocking, that statistic is all too real. Becoming a manager for the first time is a daunting task, and so many first-time managers do not receive adequate training and support for the transition to their new role. Some may be fortunate and have excellent support, but there are so many facets to the art and science of management.

As creatures of nature, we tend to have a common set of reactions and behaviors to certain input and stimuli. Our surroundings, our routines, and our personal preferences all come together to create our habits – those actions, whether intentional or unintentional, that seem to define our behaviors and ways of going about our lives. Sometimes, we may not even be aware of the habits that have taken residence in our lives.

Some habits tend to propel us to production and creation, whereas some habits tend to drive us to self-destruction and ruin. The good news is that through a created awareness of our own habits and ways, we can redefine them and ensure that we are taking steps to establish forward-moving, healthy habits to improve our lives.

Of course, managers are humans and are subject to the same rules of habit as the rest of us. As a new manager, we are often barely onboarded to our new role and are then thrown to the proverbial wolves to figure it out.

INTRODUCTION

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This ebook was created to help new managers, and seasoned managers alike, study some fundamental habits of effective and respected managers and begin to incorporate them into your daily work lives.

Some basic ideas to keep in mind:

- Habits take time to form. In general, it takes 21 days of consistent and conscious action toward establishing a habit is successful. Help yourself along by creating calendar reminders, posting notes around as gentle reminders, and even engaging others in helping you to be accountable to yourself.
- Bad habits may need to be broken. First, we must admit that we possess a bad habit. Only then can we establish a new, better habit in its place through the conscious practice described above.
- Mistakes will be made. Establishing new habits and routine is HARD. Don't be overly tough on yourself – rather, pick yourself up, discover what went wrong, make the necessary change, and move on.
- Keep a journal of your desired habits and a daily account of your days. Taking some quiet time at the beginning and ending of each day to reflect and write can bring ideas, concepts, and personal insight to the surface that no other activity can.
- Take some time to smell the roses. Our fast-paced lives often cloud the little things that bring everyone joy. Incorporate some quiet time for yourself into your daily habits.

Congratulations on your new role as manager! This is truly the beginning of a journey, so give yourself some time to soak it in, learn from those around you, and never give up! Enjoy these High Performance Habits of Successful First-Time Managers, and treat every day as a learning experience.

1.

Get Yourself Used to the New
Rules of Engagement

Friend on Friday,
Boss on Monday

1. Accept that Everything is Different.

Sorry, but you are no longer one of the gang. The conversations won't be as free flowing and your lunch buddies not as excited to have you tag along with them. You're the boss, and everyone recognizes your ability to influence their experience in minor or major ways. Steel yourself for this cold slap of reality. Friday's friends are Monday's employees.

2. Don't Confuse Smiles and Congratulations with Support.

Not everyone is excited about your promotion. I once left a job and firm I loved over my belief that the wrong person had been promoted into a senior leadership role over me. (In hindsight, I knew that I had to move to grow, but not getting the promotion felt like a vote of no confidence.)

If your team is filled with good, motivated individuals, there's bound to be some jealousy or even animosity over your promotion. After all, like me, they likely believed they were the best person for the job. Don't confuse the smiles and congratulations with commitment and support. You're starting over in the credibility and respect departments.



3. Engage early with Empathy and Respect.

You've done your homework with your boss, and you understand your marching orders and objectives. Now, it's time to connect with your team members and both ask and listen. Everyone is curious about what it means to have you as the new boss. Focus on the business objectives; acknowledge the momentary awkwardness of the new relationship and underscore your commitment to the business and team. Skip the head-shrinking discussions and keep the focus on the larger group or function.

4. Push the Focus to the Team's Operations.

I've used the 3-Question Meeting technique repeatedly to great success. Schedule a follow-on one-on-one meeting and share this three question agenda:

- ➔ What's working?
- ➔ What's not?
- ➔ What do you need from me to help you and our team strengthen our performance?

This meeting is for your education and your employee's opportunity to share their ideas, frustrations, and requests. Listen hard and re

sist the urge to co-opt the discussion.

I've found this meeting to be a critical component of moving beyond any awkwardness from the relationship change. It shifts the focus to what people care about in their working environment and arms you with valuable insights that might not have been as visible as a peer.

Plan on sharing the results of the meeting (without attribution) with the group at-large. A series of quick decisions on some of the easier issues will show goodwill. Placing the group in charge of fixing the bigger issues will earn credibility.

5. Schedule Career Discussions Early in Your Second Quarter.

It may seem counterintuitive to avoid the most personal of all manager-employee discussions a few months, however, it is essential. Your focus must be on gaining awareness of operations, issues, and opportunities

You need time to assess the situation and better understand what's working and what's not. You also need time to begin matching your talent with your team's objectives and priorities



in the organization.

Put the professional development meetings on everyone's schedule beginning sometime in month four of your new role.

6. Learn and Use Positive and Constructive Feedback Daily.

One of the fatal mistakes of many first-time managers is avoiding delivering feedback. Lacking guidance how to prepare for and conduct a proper feedback discussion, it is pushed off to a future date. Of course, that future date never arrives.

Study and practice.

And don't forget the positive feedback! Just make sure it is behavioral, specific, and business focused.

7. Practice Extreme Accountability.

Accountability starts with you. Get out front of the big issues. Show your support for your team members. Hold yourself accountable to your commitments. (The 3-Question Meetings will offer ample opportunities for you to identify things you can fix.

Remember, commitment is commitment, and everyone is watching.)

Be careful to avoid special treatment of star players or problem employees. It's easy to fall into the trap of creating multiple sets of rules. Easy and wrong.

8. Avoid Micromanaging at All Costs.

Write this down: No one likes a micromanager. Repeat it daily. Don't do it.

9. Be Transparent About Your Agenda.

In reality, your only agenda should be on better aligning your function and team with your firm's priorities and then striving to get the right people in the right positions armed with the right tools and processes. Preach and practice this daily.

2. ALWAYS PREPARE YOUR ATTITUDE AHEAD OF ANY SITUATION

Prepare your attitude.

Yep, that's it.

People wear their attitudes on their faces, in their posture and body language and certainly in their verbal communication.

You want to make certain your attitude is saying, "I'm here to help, not command and I need your help to succeed."

You want to help your new team members move closer to discovery mode and away from defend mode.

Here are some prompters to help make certain you project the right attitude as you get started as a new manager:

- Accept that being promoted to lead a team should be humbling.

- Know that you now play a direct role in their success.
- Recognize, you cannot succeed on your own unless they succeed.
- Internalize that you are in your new role to serve, not command.
- Be confident that over time, you will have ample opportunity to form and frame the team and environment. Day one as a first-time manager is not the time.

RECOGNIZE AND LIVE THE ANCIENT TRUISM: BE KIND-FOR EVERYONE YOU MEET IS WAGING A GREAT BATTLE

- Accept: you may have been an expert last Friday, but on Monday, you are a beginner.
- Wear your smile as a calling card.
- Stifle your propensity to critique current approaches.
- Wield polite questions and active listening as your primary tools.

Do a Lot More Listening and Observing

If you've ever worked under a totalitarian dictator of a manager, you know how oppressive this experience is for everyone involved.

One of the frequent laments I hear from individuals is, "I have a lot of ideas, but no one listens."

Manager, your job is to listen.

In fact, it's to give your team members a voice. And in return, your expectation should be for action.

The different viewpoints and perspectives of your team members are a source of strength—the raw materials of success.

Unfortunately, many managers view different perspectives as lack of align-



ment or support. Some view voicing different perspectives as treason.

Don't be this manager.

It's time to flip your thinking and your action on the different perspectives of your team members.

4. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EMPLOYEES, BUT AVOID MICROMANAGING

I've long believed to my core that management is an immersive, involved activity.

It's never micromanaging, but it is showing respect to your team members by paying attention and fulfilling on coaching and sponsoring activities.

Push away from your desk and keyboard and get out there and observe, support, and do everything you can to teach and model the values.

For those individuals who value space and autonomy, give it to them, but don't abandon them to their work. Ask if they need help. Offer encouragement and find out what's in their way and help knock it down. And then get out of the way.

Paying attention is a high form of respect. I believe the values above indicated respect is non-negotiable.

5. Become a meeting master

As a first-time manager, you have a unique opportunity to develop, display, and propagate effective meeting habits with your team.

12 Ideas to Help You Build Better Meetings:

1. Respect Monday Mornings!

Set the right tone for the week by not meeting first thing! The single worst idea you might have is to schedule an early Monday morning meeting with your team. Just don't do it. No one knows what's going on yet. Last week is far away in the rear-view mirror, and it takes time for everyone to find their bearings in the new week. If you must connect on Monday, place the session later in the afternoon.

2. Don't Make the Meetings About You

Do not set up meetings as a primary means of educating you on what's going on with your team. Instead, connect one-on-one and save everyone the painful group manager educa-



3. No Meeting Shall Be Held Without a Clear Purpose

Share relevant corporate news. Discuss overall team and firm performance indicators. Provide context for strategy. Frame a challenging situation that you are asking the team to solve. No matter what, make certain there's a purpose behind this time-consuming and expensive group gathering. No purpose, no meeting.

4. Stand and Deliver. Seriously!

If you must conduct status updates, take a page from the world of Agile/Scrum project management and facilitate a brief stand-up session where individuals have two minutes to indicate their progress on their key priorities as well as indicate any potential challenges or obstacles. And yes, stand.

5. No One Cares What Everyone Else is Doing!

People care a little, but no one loves the meeting format where the sole purpose is for everyone to share everything they've been doing. (I call this the "Round-the-Table Meeting Death March.") These are painful sessions,

that may induce nausea based on some of the puffy, self-serving updates.

6. Does it Pass the So-What Test?

If you run regular operations or activity reviews, create a common template for your team members to use when developing their updates. Everything on the agenda must pass the "so what?" test.

**NO MATTER WHAT,
MAKE CERTAIN
THERE'S A PURPOSE
BEHIND THIS TIME-
CONSUMING AND
EXPENSIVE GROUP
GATHERING.**

7. Share the Spotlight!

For the limited number of recurring meetings you conduct, rotate agenda ownership and meeting management.

8. Reinforce Accountability.

For every problem identified by someone, an action must be identified, an owner assigned, and a follow-on date established. Take notes and hold people accountable to their commitments. You'll be amazed at how modeling your demand for accountability stimulates accountability across the group.

9. It's Tempting, But Don't Do It!

Skip the public inquisition or execution if a team member falls short on a commitment.

Do indicate publicly that you would like to talk with him/her offline and that they should set up an appointment. Everyone else in the room understands what you are doing, and they appreciate you for not embarrassing anyone in the live setting.

10. Location, Location, Location.

Change venues when you can. Just a change of scenery can boost the energy of the team for a recurring meeting.

Speaking of recurring meetings...

Minimize these things. Too many and they clog our calendars and choke off our productive work time.

11. There's Nothing Magical About Hour-Long Meetings.

My favorite meetings last no longer than twenty minutes. People may linger to network, connect on a problem or opportunity or socialize a bit, but don't feel compelled to fill the rest of the hour.

12. Creativity isn't a switch.

If your meeting is about idea-generation, don't expect people to be creative-on-demand. Distribute the topic/brainstorm questions ahead of the meeting and encourage people to draft and submit ideas anonymously. Write out the ideas on a whiteboard and use those to jump and build.



6. USE EVERY ENCOUNTER EVERY DAY TO PROMOTE HIGH PERFORMANCE IN OTHERS

Every single day, you are given an incredible number of opportunities to do the right thing in support of creating an effective working environment.

Consider:

- Treat everyone with respect, no matter how challenging the situation.
- Dispense positive feedback liberally. Of course, it must be earned, behavioral and business focused.
- Learn to deliver effective, constructive feedback. Good people want more feedback on improving. It's up to you to learn how to do this in a timely and proper manner.
- If you make a mistake, admit it and apologize. Show that you are human.
- Resist the urge to make team members your friends. People don't do their best work for their friends—they do it for managers they respect.
- If you say you are going to do something, do it. Everyone's watching.

16

Create Credibility Through Common Values



Everyone around you is looking for reasons to trust or not trust you.

Too many of us give heaping helpings of reasons not to trust us.

One way to solve this challenge is to clarify what you stand for.

Effectively, you are defining the values sacred to you as a manager and an individual.

One manager's values:

- Personal accountability for results is inviolable. Your commitment is your commitment. My commitment is commitment.
- Collaboration is non-negotiable. Collaborate as a model team member, or you will leave the team.
- The Do Must Match the Tell for all of us. Every single day.
- Fight like crazy over tasks, but it can never be personal. Respect is non-negotiable. It must be present in every interchange.

- When we screw up, we must own it. We also must forgive as long as the mistake is one we learn from and strive never to repeat.

I love those values for their lack of ambiguity and their mutual accountability.

If you're operating as a manager with anything less than these clear, pointed values, you are operating on a shaky foundation.

Take action to shore it up today.

8. MOVE FROM STATUS CHECKING TO HELP CHECKING

As you encounter people or groups during the day, shift your opening question from, “How’s it going?” to “How can I help?”

This simple frame change is inviting, not off-putting.

The interchange shifts from an awkward mumbling or elongated description of status to one that is either over in a second or laser-focused on an obstacle.

The dialog around an obstacle will help you

understand status and context. Once people know you are serious about helping, you will be surprised how hard they work to solve the issues on their own.

Nonetheless, when your help is requested, it's your time to stand and deliver. Remember to approach your interactions with the intent of helping.

9. Write daily in your leadership journal

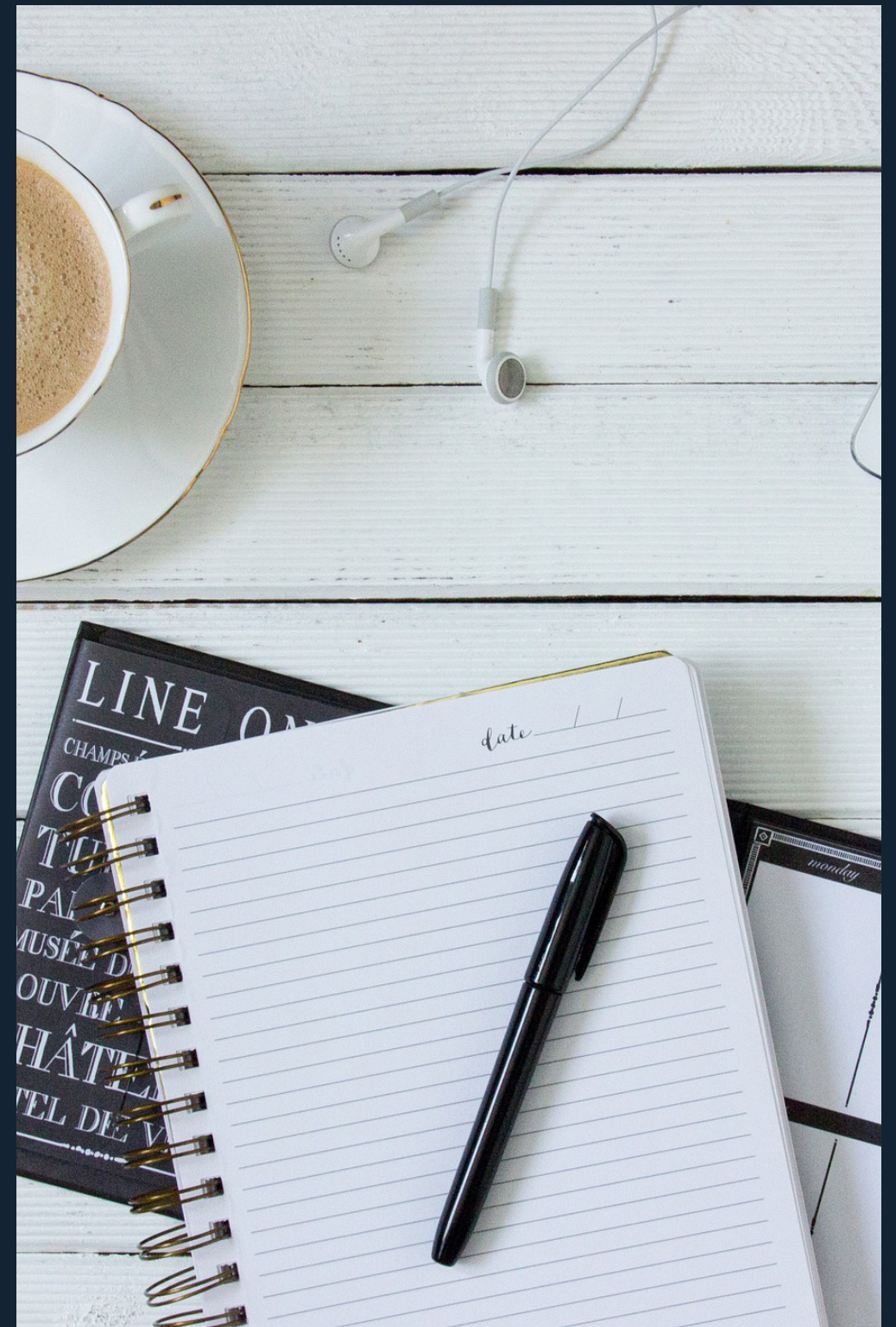
The productive uses of a leadership journal are limited only by your imagination.

The idea of journaling sounds old-fashioned and even anachronistic in our era.

Nonetheless, much like the simple but powerful checklist tool for productivity and quality, a properly maintained journal is a powerful and eminently utilitarian tool for promoting continuous personal improvement.

For those responsible for guiding others, a leadership journal might quickly become your best friend in your drive to strengthen your daily effectiveness.

Choose your preferred medium—digital or analog—but starting today add a leadership journal to your personal, professional development activities.



10. CULTIVATE THE TOOLS TO RESPOND TO SUDDEN CONFRONTATIONS

Many managers freeze in the face of confrontation.

They move into a full-scale amygdala hijack as chemicals flood the body and fight or flight reflexes kick-in.

My favorite technique for navigating this is to run through a mental reboot. Part of this process involves using questions to buy time for your system to calm down and allow your brain to earn its keep.

If you invest the time to both develop a deliberate response to challenging confrontations, and you have some go-to questions to help the process, you are ready for nearly any situation.

20

Two of my favorite time-buying survival questions or prompts include:

- "I can see this is important to you. Help me understand your situation a bit better."
- "I can imagine the challenges that have place you in this position. How can I help you navigate them?"

Neither of those prompts addresses the specific issue. Both are intended to show empathy for the individual and then broaden the discussion.

**JUST REMEMBER, NO ONE
GETS BETTER AT CHALLENGING
CONVERSATIONS AVOIDING THEM.
IT'S TIME TO ENGAGE!**

Many of us avoid challenging conversations because we are fearful of the unexpected. Armed with a well-practiced mental reboot process and some generic prompts to help gain context and buy time, once again, fear is marginalized.

11. DITCH THE OPEN DOOR POLICY

There are certain cringe-promoting phrases in our organizational lives, and, “I’ve got an open door policy” just gives me the heebie-jeebies. While I suspect some manager somewhere means good by it, I’ve watched too many managers misuse, abuse, and outright lie about their so-called open doors.

The royal tone of “you can enter my kingdom” aside, this thinking and approach are out-of-sync in a world that demands leaders narrow the power gap by seeking out teams and individuals on their terms and their turf.

There's no longer room in this world for a passive, reactive approach symbolized by the, “I’ve got an open door policy” approach. Leave it to the era of Mad Men.

Get up out of your desk or office and go out and find a way to make yourself incredibly useful by supporting, observing, coaching, and finding ways to make the lives of your group members a bit easier. Flex to their communication needs, instead of assuming people should adjust to yours.

An open-door policy is no longer enough.



12. Communicate Through Questioning

In a world drunk on the speed of change and filled with uncertainty, the right questions provoke thinking and in many cases give-way to actions, experiments, and ideas that provoke more questions and beget more ideas.

Questions are the seeds of ideas and innovations.

And you set the tone for curiosity on your team. Your curiosity is contagious!

Questions free people to think and to speculate and to follow threads in pursuit of strengthening some aspect of the business.

In my own experience, the most effective leaders I've encountered are masters at asking questions that promote critical thinking.



They have their own opinions in many cases, yet, they understand employing a leader-hold-back approach supports the development of curiosity and creativity across the group.

What Is Your Questions-to-Directives Ratio?

For the next few days, keep a log of the number of times you ask open-ended, exploratory questions ("Did you finish that work?" doesn't count!) versus issuing answers or directives. If your ratio is skewed toward the questions, great, keep it up. If not, here are some question prompters to put to work as part of your developmental activity.

7 Questions to Stimulate Curiosity on Your Team

1. "What if?"

I love this simple, two-word preface to a mind-bending question.

- "What if we develop a new product that eats our old one in the marketplace. Will it eat the competitor's as well?"
- "What if we changed this process to empower our employees to make decisions directly with customers without seeking approval from a manager?"
- "What if we changed our view of who our real competition is in the marketplace?"

2. "What do you know that is new?"

The consultant Ram Charan describes this questioning habit of former GE Chairman and CEO, Jack Welch. Instead of a friendly greeting upon first encountering a person, Welch offered, "What do you know that's new?" and was serious about hearing answers.

I coopted this question for my use and found that it stimulated the observational habits of my team members since they understood I was genuinely looking for something new.

**KEEP A LOG OF THE
NUMBER OF TIMES
YOU ASK OPEN-
ENDED, EXPLORATORY
QUESTIONS VERSUS
ISSUING ANSWERS OR
DIRECTIVES.**

3. “What do we need to know to make this decision?”

A favorite, for the holistic thinking it promotes—especially in group settings. Most decision-making processes are fraught with peril, including incomplete data, ample opinions and entire servings of biases.

This simple question challenges groups and individuals to think around and through a problem and develop a broader or more precise set of data points essential for making an informed choice.

4. “What does this mean for us/our customers?”

I use this liberally in situations where changes in the external environment or industry or competitor announcements send everyone into panic mode.

5. “How would you approach this situation if you framed it as an opportunity instead of a problem?”

This question makes the doomsayers crazy because it forces them out of their foxholes into the realm of possibilities.

6. “What are the trigger events in faraway markets and technologies that will change everything?”

I love this one in strategy settings where it's imperative to move beyond the four-wall and inside-out thinking that traps so many groups.

7. “What are the real burdens our customers hire our products to remove?”

In a world where we are conditioned to focus on features, rethinking the headaches your offerings are resolving for customers is a great way to rethink your innovation efforts.

13. DELIVER FEEDBACK IN A 3:1 RATIO OF POSITIVE TO CONSTRUCTIVE

In my feedback courses and coaching, I find that one of the most difficult issues for people to grasp is the need to deliver ample quantities of positive (behavioral and business-focused) feedback.

I teach a technique for this, and I encourage people to spend a few weeks and keep a tally of their positive to constructive feedback ratio.

Most start out heavily weighted to the negative. Your target is to get to a 3:1 positive to constructive mix with your feedback.

Those who succeed at this describe a noticeable difference in the tone, tenor, and creativity of their team members and a positive uptick in their own energy and enthusiasm.

Strive to look beyond the gaps and flaws for the beauty in every situation. Take qualified feedback seriously and use it to get better.

14. FIND YOURSELF A SWIM BUDDY

I long ago co-opted the concept of Swim Buddy from the Navy Seals.

The Swim Buddy is someone who has your back, asks you the tough questions and is comfortable telling you your baby or idea is ugly.

Everyone needs a Swim Buddy!

Cultivate a coworker relationship with someone you trust to not pump sunshine when you need thunder and lightning.

Have this person ask those questions and hold you accountable for answers that aren't complete BS.

Strengthen Yourself Regularly



Learning to lead effectively is one long continuous improvement process. No one comes to this role fully prepared for the rigors, twists, and turns created by people and conditions.

It's a learned process that emphasizes experimentation and adaptation in response to the ample surprises you'll encounter in your daily efforts.

One great way to prepare yourself

for success is to approach each work-day with a deliberate commitment to striving to be your best leadership self.

What did you do yesterday to become a smarter, more effective leader and manager?

Some of us go for years sprinting through our days but not pushing ourselves to grow.

Here are ideas to strengthen yourself daily:

- Read one article
- Read a chapter in a book
- Listen to a relevant podcast
- Talk with a mentor
- Ask for feedback on your performance
- Watch a Ted Talk
- Attend an internally sponsored training event
- Connect with an expert on a topic you are interested in exploring

10

KEYS TO SUCCESS AS A FIRST-TIME MANAGER

29

1. You Lead the Climb, Taking Risks and Securing the Path

No leading from the back. You take risks, grope and grasp for toe-holds with new strategies and organizational change, clear away the obstacles and secure the way forward. And then you get the heck out of the way and let them do their work.

2. Time-to-Trust: It All Starts with Trust

Without trust, there is no collaboration or creation, just grudging compliance. The faster you move to a state of trust with your group members, the faster good things happen.

3. Trust plus Accountability=Where the Magic Happens

Values are important for leaders and teams, but if you have to start with two, focus on trust and accountability. Trust gains support. Accountability sets the standard for everything else.

4. Focus on Detoxing the Immediate Environment

No matter how challenging the workplace environment is, it doesn't excuse you from



creating a bubble of competence and success. You don't control the larger organization, so focus your environment-creating efforts on your immediate team. Create a pocket of goodness, free from fear and focused on the work of creating great outcomes.

5. Leading is Science and Art: Master the Physics of Integrative Thinking

Most dilemmas reduce to a set of unattractive decision-choices. Instead of defaulting to binary choices, integrative thinkers harness the tension between the options to identify alternative opportunities and approaches.

6. Avoid Myopia by Changing the Optics

There's so much going on in our world today, that chances are the change(s) threatening our firm's existence or offering opportunities for revitalization are happening far beyond our industry. Cultivate scanning and forecasting skills.

7. When Communicating, Flex and Don't Force

It's a diverse, multi-cultural world and it's our job as leaders to adapt our communication and managerial approaches to team

members and not the other way around. Meet and engage with them on their terms.

8. More Science: Creating Great Teams is a Chemistry Experiment

Fostering high performance demands rigorous attention to the ingredients, temperature, and temperament of the group. Start with a clear and compelling purpose; limit the group size to low single-digits, and provide active coaching and watch and support closely and you have a fighting chance at making magic.

9. Influence, Not Title is the True Measure of Your Power

Real power is measured by the ability to affect choices and changes. Titles are a poor proxy for real power. Instead, your ability to choose a path, bring the right resources to bear, and to drive results with others all describe your level of influence.

10. Sometimes you Have to Paint the Wall

Enabling the emergence of creativity across your group is opinion, job one.



Without creativity and action, there is no change or growth. (An example that resonated: after Chobani Yogurt founder, Hamdi Ulukaya, purchased a defunct factory from Kraft, he wasn't certain what to have his small group of employees do first. So, he bought some paint and had them paint a wall.

Instead of doing nothing, they did something.

After that, they figured out how to redefine a market.) Instead of doing nothing, pick up a brush. You never know what you'll create.

31



ABOUT ART PETTY

Art Petty is a former software industry senior executive and a popular leadership and management author, executive coach and speaker.

32

Art's practical and powerful business guidance is reflected in his multiple books and popular Management Excellence and Leadership Caffeine blog posts.

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