

# **BEYOND LUCK**

Practical Steps to Navigate the  
Path from Manager to Leader

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# BEYOND LUCK:

## Practical Steps to Navigate the Path from Manager to Leader

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# How not to Read this Un-Book

This book is designed to provide you with short, explicit ideas and tools to help you become a better manager, executive or business owner/executive. It is also designed to allow you to read as briefly as you may need to or to delve deeply into a particular area of interest.

In its makeup, however, this is not a traditional book. It is more like a printed version of a web site, a collection of relatively short segments grouped by content and cross-referenced to help you explore additional relevant material. Most of the articles are about 800 words long and most of us read about 250 to 500 words per minute with 50 percent comprehension (so if you really want to nail the information, you need to read it at least twice or more). Many of the articles offer practical “how to do it” advice. I doubt that anyone will ever read this book from cover to cover.

## **It has five units of material on:**

1. Management Practices
2. Management Principles
3. Leadership and Executive Behavior
4. Motivation and Morale, Jobs and Job Loss
5. Personal and development

Each article has a **pullout** that summarizes the basic purpose of the article to help you assess its usefulness to you. At the end of each article is a **Go To list** that takes you to related material. So, start with any topic, like “Troubled and Troublesome Employees” (1.13), read it and follow the “go to” for more related material.

## **Who should use this book:**

**Manager with a particular people problem or in need of some ideas to become more effective:** You can quickly identify explicit tools to use in most situations and then read further to understand the basic principles underlying these tools.

**New manager or a manager interested in further developing skills:** You can use these articles to develop a clear picture of what management is as well as learn some practical tools to become more effective as a manager.

**Entrepreneur/owner:** There are many ideas and tools that can help

you get through the initial startup and help you to manage the challenge of scaling your business.

**CEO or CEO/owner of a small or mid-size business or organization (< 5000 employees):** You will find material that is appropriate to your role.

**People-development manager:** You can use this book to design, by choosing the articles and their sequence, a relatively good management-development program. It also contains some ideas about how to build the training program so that it is more effective than the usual talking at people type of training.

**Person (manager or no) interested in improving your day-to-day performance in the workplace:** There is material within that shows you how people succeed and fail and tools for doing the former. Begin by reviewing the titles of the Development Index.

In short, anyone in a managerial role in almost any type of organization will find practical ideas and tools that will help to improve performance.

### **How to start**

I suggest you **begin with An Overview to Management and Leadership** to understand my philosophy and to understand the process of becoming a better manager or leader.

Then start with the five units and go to what interests you. If you have an “itch to scratch” and find a title, check the **pullout** and follow your itch. Every article has about three **go to** leads to supporting material.

Go to the **Topics Index** if there is some concept or practice of interest, such as group management, employee engagement or setting up a quality process, and choose an article to start. Browse the Topics Index and you may find some ideas here that you had not thought of as management.

If you are interested in practical ideas to improve your functioning or to coach others in the workplace, go to the **Development Index**.

If you have a particular people problem, go to the **Problem-Solving Index** and find the issue you are interested in there. Begin with the articles cited and then use the **go to** citations at the end of each article to read deeper or more widely about this or related issues.

Should you wish to go deeper into the subject, the **HBR Index** is an annotated bibliography of what I consider the best articles on management, leadership and organizations from the *Harvard Business Review*. These articles are much longer and are available online at <http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org> for a nominal cost. The list has been tested with small groups of executives in a multi-year leadership-development process that uses this list as the basic reading material.

# Management

*“The fundamental task of management is to make people capable of joint performance by giving them common goals, common values, the right structure and the ongoing training and development they need to perform and to respond to change.”*

- Peter Drucker

Perhaps the simplest definition of management is **getting people to do things for you**. Another short and explicit definition is **getting work done through people**. Both of these definitions make it clear that management is about people and that to become an effective manager you must reflect on this fact, believe it and practice it.

My favorite is that **management is a principle-driven art**. This definition makes explicit that management is driven by principles and that excellent management is principled. There is evidence that principle-driven behavior is more flexible, consistent and effective than many of the “by guess and by gosh” practices that I encounter as a consultant. It is also important to appreciate that effective management practices are guided by a healthy dose of common sense and that sometimes common sense is in short supply.

Excellent management is hard work. There is not a “silver bullet” that will solve all of your problems. You must have a repertory of skills supported by an understanding of basic principles.

Obviously, management requires that managers have tools and techniques to use in their day-to-day work lives. Let me caution that every tool and technique in this book can be and has been used by thoughtless managers to create havoc and uncertainty, abuse people in the workplace and aggrandize the power of the manager.

Management is a learned skill. The principles of management are explicit whereas the practice of management is experiential. Management is learned through action, assessing the results of the action, reflecting on how to improve and acting again. Becoming a manager is an iterative process of trial and error guided by principles and techniques.

I am often asked if anyone can become an effective manager. The answer is no. Many people do not have the values, beliefs, interpersonal skills, courage and persistence to become effective managers. For an excellent overview of the transition into a manager role, see *Becoming the Boss* in the HBR Index.

# Leadership

*“Managers do things right, leaders do the right thing.”*

- Peter Drucker

If you Google the above quote, you will get more than 500 hits. If you repeat this process with leadership, you will get more than 1.5 million hits — have a good read.

If management is a principle-driven art, leadership is much more ambiguous. The literature on leadership strongly indicates that the most compelling characteristic of leadership is the absence of any shared characteristics. Leaders appear to have a deep intuitive understanding of who they are and use this knowledge to maximize their performance. Interestingly, most leaders have a single or series of life crises, often referred to as crucibles, that have acted as a catalyst to initiate and energize this personal transformation.

There is a great deal of material in this un-book about leadership. Start with the first five articles in Unit 3 for an overview of some of the more important thinking on leadership, while 3.5 reviews what is known about the development of this essential character that is difficult to define but easy to recognize. Then, consider the eight articles (3.6-13) on Drucker's effective executive characteristics. After that, go to Unit 2 on principles, and pay particular attention to 2.1, 2.8 and 2.9. It is impossible to review leadership without an in-depth consideration of integrity and ethics (see 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12). Conclude this readings series with the five articles on executive wisdom (3.14-18).

# Unit 1:

## Management Practices

To become an effective manager, it is necessary to understand the basic principles that shape management practice. However, this alone is not sufficient. It is also necessary to have in your manager repertory a set of concrete practices that you can apply in your role as manager. These practices, together with the principles, give you the basis to develop and refine your management skill.

Much of management is a combination of thoughtful planning and timely execution. Execution provides immediate feedback on the results of your actions and analyzing, and reflecting on this information is a tool to improve your management skills. You cannot become an outstanding manager by studying this book, but you can become an outstanding manager by applying the practices and principles in this book, considering the results of these practices and continuing to refine your skills.

The intent of the first two chapters is to juxtapose practices and principles. I have placed practices first because generally managers want to get to the “what to do” part as quickly as possible. You can go the topics in Unit 1 to find advice, sometimes very explicit, on “How to...” and then consult the underlying principles in Unit 2 that provide the foundation to support your practice.

Unit 1 is generally organized as a progression of practices, from very basic and necessary skills, such as how to give feedback, to more complex skills, such as how to carry out an effective performance review. Start with a topic you are interested in and then use the “Go To” at the end of each segment to guide you to related or supporting topics.

This chapter has three parts:

Nine segments that give explicit advice on how to do the most fundamental management skills. They are organized in a logical, developmental sequence.

- 1. The Basics of an Effective Management Style**
- 2. One-on-One Feedback is Vital for Your Employees**
- 3. Improving Your Communications through Active Listening**
- 4. KISSing and Chunking: A Magical Method for Better Communications**
- 5. Candor is a Valuable Trait in Successful Leaders**

- 6. Coaching to Improve Performance**
- 7. To Improve Productivity, Try Saying Thank You**
- 8. Managing Better Meetings**
- 9. Beware: Change Imposed is Change Opposed**

Four segments that introduce more advanced practices that require the basic skills of the first section and are focused on one-on-one practices.

- 10. Making Performance Appraisal Work**
- 11. Bottom-up and 360° Feedback**
- 12. Employee Attitude Change: Fishing and Zapping**
- 13. Managing Troubled and Troublesome Employees**

Four segments that introduce more sophisticated practices. If you are interested in making change, pay particular attention to the internal customer segment.

- 14. Using Skip-Level Meetings to Sense the Organization**
- 15. Optimizing Your In-House Training Programs**
- 16. Why Most Employee-Recognition Programs don't Work**
- 17. Driving Quality Improvements with the Internal Customer Model**

## The Basics of an Effective Management Style

It is clear from research and experience that some management practices are winners whereas other are losers. Many of us have had the opportunity to work for the “manager from hell,” and such a person’s dysfunctional characteristics are well understood. Examining these is a valuable exercise in reviewing and further enhancing our own management styles.

There are three core characteristics that contribute significantly to the poor performance of any person in the workplace, and this is particularly so for managers who use these practices. Poor managers tend to be:

**Secretive.** Secrecy is a canker that eats the soul out of organizations. It breeds distrust, fear and paranoia. Secrecy as a management practice gives rise to the view among employees that the organization practices “mushroom management” — I must be a mushroom, because people keep me in the dark and feed me BS.

We know the grapevine is a sensitive measure of the emotional tone of the organization and that effective managers are always sensing the state of the grapevine. A secretive organization has a very negative grapevine. Such a grapevine will be filled with vicious gossip, innuendo and unkind speculation about people and the company.

**Punitive.** I once worked with a person whose basic philosophy of dealing with people seemed to be “never let a cheap shot pass.” Such a person is very difficult to work with and has a powerfully negative effect on our self-confidence.

A secretary interviewed during an organizational assessment would awaken feeling ill every Monday morning and occasionally she would even throw up. I had no idea what was causing this problem until I met her boss. He was one of those ultra-critical persons who communicated to people that every piece of work they did was inadequate. Such a person just grinds people down until there is nothing left of them. If you work for such a person, not only does your self-esteem decline but you also begin to question the worth of everything you do.

**Unpredictable.** It is possible to develop strategies to cope with secretive

or punitive management styles. However, the most destructive management style in the workplace is unpredictability. Regardless of the personal and professional strategies we develop to cope with inconsistency, it is impossible to learn the rules of behavior because they are always changing.

In interviews with employees, they often report that the hardest type of manager to work for is one where each morning you have to assess “What mood is s/he in today?” Human beings are creatures of habit and as such we need consistency in both our personal and professional lives. Unpredictable behaviors render people helpless because they cannot develop ways to gain control over their environments.

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## Unfortunately, many of us have had the dubious opportunity to work for the ‘manager from hell.’

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In developing an effective management style, it is important to formulate a basic principle for communication. One that I encourage managers to consider is: “The better informed people are, the better they function.” Practicing such an open communications style sends a powerful positive message to your people about your level of respect for them and indirectly invites their input into issues and decisions.

It is difficult to build people up by tearing them down with criticism. Is there such a thing as constructive criticism? Many employees think not. Learning how to coach, counsel, train and mentor people is an essential skill for effective, respected managers. Yet most employees note that the only time they hear from the boss is when it’s bad news. For starters, consider the coaching strategy from the best-selling management book titled *Zapp: the Lightning of Empowerment*. Use this coaching tool and you will rapidly develop a reputation as an effective manager.

Monitoring our own behavior is the key to maintaining consistency or predictability in the workplace. One of the most effective tools for doing this is the say/do ratio: I will do what I say I will do when I say I will do it. Do not over-promise and under-deliver. People are very sensitive to the say/do ratio and do not respect or trust people with low ratios. To keep yours as high as possible it is important to track your behavior. You can do

this with telephone logs, appointment calendars, notebooks of things to do, to-do lists, Post-it notes, PDAs and other tools for self-communication.

Over years of working in organizations, I have compiled a list of managerial practices that employees find disrespectful and incompetent. Consider using this list as a private self-test. Answering yes to any one of these suggests you need to do some thoughtful reflection regarding your management style.

- Sarcasm (Latin root – “tearing flesh”)
- Not listening, ignoring
- Sniping (talking about someone when you should be talking to them)
- Punishing or writing policies for “all” for one person’s misbehavior
- Breaking confidence
- Asking for input when the decision has been made or on trivial decisions
- Not explaining why
- Writing a policy to solve a problem
- Coming to meetings late
- Multi-tasking or side-talking during a meeting
- E-mail offenses too many to enumerate

Research shows that the immediate supervisor has the greatest impact on employee attitudes and performance. Consistently showing respect for your people is a sure winner for managers. Always remember as manager it is far more important that your people respect you than like you.



**Go To:**

**One-on-One Feedback is Vital for Your Employees (1.2)**

**Respectful Behavior (2.4)**

**Improving Your Professional and Personal Productivity (5.1)**

## One-on-One Feedback is Vital for Your Employees

In the past decade, the Gallup organization has begun to carry out extensive surveys of the American workplace. Their “Q12” survey is probably the best-designed and most statistically sound assessment of employee satisfaction in use. These 12 questions can give a comprehensive picture of employee attitudes across a wide range of work environments. In fact, *Fortune* magazine uses this survey to build its “100 Best Places to Work” annual issue.

A consistent and compelling finding of the Gallup surveys is that around 70 percent of employees say they rarely get feedback from their immediate supervisors. I am impressed that this finding has remained essentially unchanged since I began consulting two decades ago. This, in spite of countless seminars that preach that feedback improves performance. Ken Blanchard became a nationally known management guru by writing a book, *The One-Minute Manager*, that can be reduced to a sentence: Give your employees timely, accurate feedback about their performance and make sure most of it is positive.

An effective feedback process has five major elements:

**Choose the time and place with care.** Most employees prefer private one-on-one interactions, be they positive or negative. Never give negative feedback in front of peers or in public; this is a major morale killer. Always set people at ease by telling them the purpose of the conversation.

**Describe as succinctly as you can the behavior, situation or event; make it clear to people what you are talking about.** Vagueness is a trust killer. Make sure you are prepared and be economical and focused in your comments. Blah, blah, blah usually leads to confusion and miscommunication. Just because you are the boss does not mean that you can talk at people on and on; this will probably be seen as disrespectful.

**When giving feedback to improve performance, perhaps the major omission by managers is a failure to concretely connect the event in question to its results.** People need to understand that what they do or don't do has effects in the workplace and a characteristic of poor performers is

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‘I can live for two weeks  
on a good compliment.’

- MARK TWAIN

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“I don’t get this.”

**Probably the most important element is the tone you use in carrying out the conversation.** It’s a general rule in human interaction that in most cases emotion trumps reason. Thus, it is essential that the interaction not be perceived as being punitive. Managers who are best at feedback appear low key, even casual in their approach, they see it as an everyday occurrence and they maintain a consistently neutral or positive emotional tone. Doing so precludes a defensive reaction and encourages response. When there is a negative response, such managers do not allow themselves to be engaged in that manner and can usually cool down the interaction by showing interest and asking probing questions. It is never productive to get into verbal fisticuffs with an employee.

**The final ingredient of good feedback is the understanding that you are trying to build an effective working relationship with the person.** Tom Rath in his charming little book titled *How Full Is Your Bucket?* notes that positive interactions build the trusting relationships that are essential to the productive interaction of people within organizations. The essential principle in this management practice is that respectful behavior builds trust.

Unfortunately, evidence exists that reading this article is not very likely to change behavior. Although the above process appears elementary, its skilled practice requires a good deal of tacit knowledge that can only be learned through experience.

If you want to improve the feedback skills of your managers, consider the following simple but effective approach. Bring a small number (seven is ideal and 12 is too many) of them together for a series of weekly skill-building meetings. Introduce the principles and have the participants practice with each other in scenarios they create based on their experience.

Break them into triads and make sure they get a lot of feedback on their performance and that the group does an overall debriefing of the process. Then have them identify their direct reports into high, average and low performers. Ask them to identify two or three average performers and provide feedback to them at least twice during the week. At the next meeting debrief and coach them, gradually adding all their employees to the mix, saving the low performers for last, as these will be more difficult.

A process like this not only uses the key principles but also actively engages each manager with her people, provides coaching and gradually builds a mutual support group. There are many details, but these ingredients define the core process. The striking outcome is that about the third or fourth week the managers begin to report improved performance with the people who have received feedback as well as higher comfort levels, especially with the more difficult people. Surprise, surprise.



**Go To:**

**KISSing and Chunking: A Magical Method for Better Communications (1.4)**

**Candor Is a Valuable Trait in Successful Leaders (1.5)**

**Action-Oriented Style (2.6)**

## Improving Your Communications through Active Listening

There is hardly anything a person can do that is so respectful and complimentary to another than to seriously and sincerely listen. Yet on a day-to-day basis in the workplace and elsewhere, there is very little evidence of people practicing good listening skills. Consider how often we are either not heard or misunderstood in both our private and work lives. Why?

There seem to be several reasons for poor listening. First, Americans always seem to be in a hurry and the “hurry-up syndrome” precludes taking the time, however brief, to listen to people. Second, most of us have a quite natural tendency to be thinking of our response when others are speaking. This interferes with good listening and we often miss critical elements, make an inappropriate response and inadvertently offend others. How then can we improve our listening skills?

By practicing a simple procedure called “active listening.” Although there are many facets to active listening, the essential ingredient is to restate or summarize what the other person has said. This forces us to attend to the content of the message. Such restatements often begin with phrases such as “I understand you to say...” or “Do you mean...” The effect is to slow down the conversation and this markedly improves understanding. This tool can be enhanced by the simple strategy of making eye contact when people are speaking to you. Try the following steps to better listening:

- Show your interest in what the other person has to say.
  - Make eye contact, pay attention
  - Communicate with body language that you’re listening (nodding, etc.)
- Ask questions to clarify what you have heard.
- Let the other person know that you understand.
  - Briefly summarize the other person’s main points.

Use this tool and you will markedly reduce the tendency of conversations to be people talking at each other. The benefits of effective listening are fourfold.

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## There is hardly anything a person can do that is so respectful and complimentary to another than to seriously and sincerely listen.

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1. Receive more information.
2. Show your respect for the views of others.
3. Earn the respect and confidence of others.
4. Save time.

Listening can also be an effective conflict-management tool. When someone initiates a conflict (think of an upset customer or co-worker), they are usually “hot.” By skillfully using the above practices, you can begin to cool off the situation and develop an understanding of the person’s concerns. Then problem solving can begin. Use the following process to improve listening:

Divide into groups of three and rotate through the three roles:

- Speaker — the person telling a story.
- Listener — the person using the above principles.
- Observer — third party observing and analyzing the interaction.

Work individually to outline a two to five minute story about something at work. The “speaker” then tells the story to the “listener.” The “listener” should actively practice the above principles. The observer will watch and listen carefully and make notes. When you are finished, the observer will discuss the interaction with the other two participants using the three bullets to analyze the listening skills.

Then rotate the roles until all three of you have been in each role. When you have finished, discuss all the interactions and be prepared to report your analyses to the full group.



### **Go To:**

KISSing and Chunking: A Magical Method for Better Communications (1.4)

Respectful Behavior (2.4)

Coping with Difficult Situations (5.5)