



The Well-Practiced Manager

Professional Development
Resource for
Boston College Managers
and Supervisors

September 2009

From The Director

Greetings!

The beautiful fall weather is here – along with a faster pace for most of us as students energize the atmosphere and lift our spirits.

This issue of *The Well-Practiced Manager* is about managing people and the work they do. I believe that we boost our management skills when we step back and do some thinking and planning before moving into action. Because managers get work done through others, our decisions and actions have an impact on those we manage. We are also accountable for the productivity and effectiveness of our team as a whole.

Effective management is an ongoing balancing act that requires good judgment. You are not alone. There are resources around you (your colleagues; your own manager; Human Resources; Employee Development) ready to help you, support you, encourage you, and spark your thinking.

Bernie O'Kane

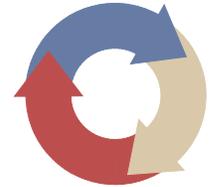
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Managing People and Managing Workflow



The Most Important Part of Your Job

You are a manager – you manage people and productivity for your team. Managing people and workflow is *the most important part of your job* and is likely to be the most complex and difficult part of it. Books have been written, courses have been taught, lectures given, and studies undertaken – all meant to help us be more effective managers.

Invent As You Go

Despite all the information available about effective management, it is impractical to look for a definitive list of qualities, skills, abilities, and practices that will ensure success in every situation. Regardless of our years of experience or our glowing track record we will encounter puzzling or challenging situations that require a unique approach or solution. It is up to you to find a fresh way to handle new problems by using your full intelligence, creativity, intuition, and communication skills. You invent as you go.

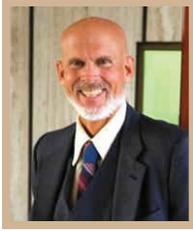
Change Happens

Just when you think you have everything in place and operating like a dream, someone gives notice that they are leaving for another job. Or, you learn that a new major responsibility has been added to your group – or taken away. Or, someone you thought you knew well surprises you or disappoints you. Shifts, changes, and new challenges can either upset the rhythm of your team or set you on a path seeking a bright new approach.

Stories Help Us Learn

We have put together a few examples of the compromises, choices, and outcomes that managers face every day as they strive to reach success – or, strive to achieve an acceptable alternative to the ideal. One of these stories may resemble a situation you are struggling with right now.





Change Happens

John Takes Bold Action

John announced at a team meeting that he has developed a new process for everyone to use in their day-to-day work. *John did not involve those who do the work in determining improvements to the process. Is this a problem? Not necessarily...*

- John needed a quick fix for a process that was not working well.
- He determined that the members of his team did not have the ability to design a new process that meets his criteria.
- John took bold action on a problem that needs to be addressed. He may face some resentment from members of his team and the new process will almost certainly have to be tweaked or revised, but he moved the work forward on schedule.
- John will assume responsibility for training his staff on how to use the new process and how to measure its effectiveness.

Mary Accepts the Inevitable

Mary just learned that Richie is leaving in three weeks for another job elsewhere in the university. *Mary took a long, deep breath and congratulated Richie. Should she have tried to persuade him not to leave? No, because it's far too late for that.*

- Mary asked Richie to review his job description for accuracy and she immediately set in motion the paperwork for the job to be filled.
- Mary sent an announcement to her team, asked for their cooperation to smooth the transition, and invited anyone who was interested in knowing more about the newly-opened position to come and talk with her.
- Mary and Richie put their heads together to discuss how to get his work done over the next three weeks and to plan how to best fill the gap until a new hire is in place.
- Mary accepted the situation with grace and skill – and no complaints.

Alan Has an Important Insight

Alan was disappointed that Rebecca didn't do a good job on the project he delegated to her. *Alan resisted the impulse to call Rebecca into his office and criticize her work.*

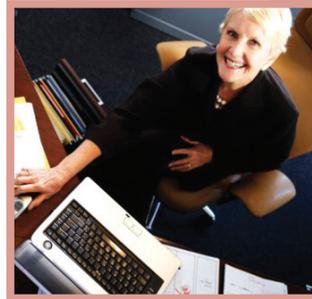
- Alan reviewed the project status updates that Rebecca had sent him.
- He recollected their conversations about the project and looked for clues and turning points.
- Alan realized he had not given Rebecca enough feedback and guidance. He thought Rebecca would know what he wanted without him being explicit about his expectations.
- Alan used this learning experience to bolster his communication skills with Rebecca and with others on his staff. He is now much more direct and clear about project requirements – and he puts his expectations in writing.
- Alan's insight has helped him to be a better manager of people and projects.

Angela Slows Up

Angela hastily called a staff meeting to distribute bits and pieces of a complex task that "absolutely must be done" by the end of the week.

Angela is a high-energy person who works best when she has a heavy workload and a looming deadline.

- At the meeting, Angela was surprised by her staff's disinterest in taking on this work. She opened a dialogue with them.
- One member of her staff said she had previously requested time off for the rest of the week. Another said she was struggling with the effects of a cold and wanted to go home early.
- Angela learned that her last-minute requests were getting them down; they felt she should be a better planner. None of them were energized by critical deadlines – they were discouraged by them.



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Resource Note:

Employee Development programs planned this fall include:

- *How to be an Effective Coach at Work* (10/8/09)
- *Effective Delegation: Sharing the Workload* (10/21/09)
- *Boost Your Personal Productivity* (10/22/09)
- *Managing Through Change* (11/9/09)

For complete details and registration, go to: www.bc.edu/ed

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- For the rest of the week Angela set aside some of her own work and stayed late each night to complete the tasks she had hoped her staff would willingly take on.
- Angela sought out some time management help for herself. She resolved to pace herself and be more open to input from others.
- Angela is beginning to appreciate that people are motivated by different things.

Clark Stays on Course

Clark spent precious time with each of his four direct reports in one-on-one meetings to explain to them a new departmental policy he had developed. *Clark believed this new policy would be well received. He was mistaken.*

- The comments Clark heard included: “Why do we need this new policy?” and “What’s really behind this - what’s going on here?” and “Why do we have to change the way we do things?”
- Surprised by the responses, Clark held a staff meeting to openly discuss why the policy was necessary, describe the changes it would cause, and the explain the benefits it would bring. He encouraged his staff to share their concerns at that meeting.
- Clark met again one-on-one with each staff person to make sure individual questions were answered. He asked each person, “Can I count on you to uphold this new policy?”
- Clark understood that managing people often means managing conflicts. He stayed on course despite the turbulence.

Barbara Adjusts Her Style

Barbara is a new manager. She has lots of ideas for changes and improvements she wants to implement right away in her department. *Barbara knows it’s important to get buy-in from her staff, but she doesn’t know how...*

- Barbara establishes weekly staff meetings and at the kick-off meeting, she tells her staff about her ideas, hoping they will be delighted with them and ready to move into action.
- One long-term staff member says, “We’ve been there; we’ve done that; it’s not going to happen.” Others in the room are silent and stone-faced. There is no further input given.
- After the meeting, Barbara calls a trusted colleague, anxiously describes what happened and asks for some suggestions about how to proceed.
- The very next day, Barbara resets her time clock and starts anew, appreciating and acknowledging team traditions, experiences, and styles. Over the next six months, she builds trust, demonstrates her leadership, learns where her leverage is and begins to slowly make changes in step with members of her team.
- Barbara adjusted her style in order to get buy-in, engagement, and involvement.



In Summary:

- **There are situations that require you to be flexible and situations that require you to be firm and steadfast. Taking the time to step back, think, and plan is the best way to develop an effective strategy.**
- **You are managing people. People have individual histories, emotions, preferences, dreams, fears, etc. Don’t expect any kind of uniformity.**
- **You are the model that your team watches. Set a high standard for your own professionalism. Take long, deep breaths when you are tempted to react in haste, step back, think and plan an effective response.**

