

Core skills for new managers

How to help rising stars wear a closet full of hats **Interviewed by Paul R. Harvey**

Senior leaders struggle to provide new managers with the operating framework they need to make sense of the world they face when stepping up from subject matter expert and individual contributor to the realm of management and leadership.

“The challenge for new managers is to be able to work effectively in differing contexts that sometimes occur in the same day, for different lengths of time, with different priorities or risks attached,” says Richard Egan, senior consulting partner, The Ken Blanchard Companies®. “The result is that new managers, with good intentions at heart, do what comes naturally or imitate the leadership style observed in other leaders.”

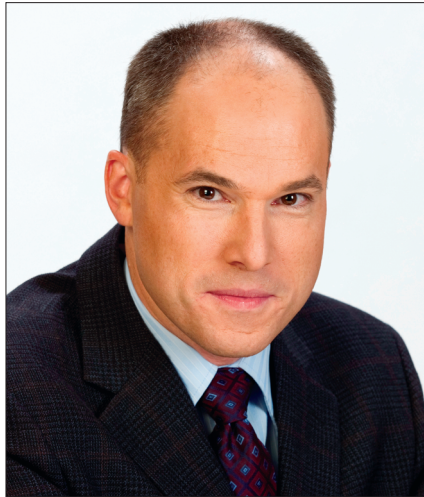
Smart Business learned more from Egan about three key contexts faced by new managers and described in the book, “Achieve Leadership Genius,” by Drea Zigarmi, Susan Fowler and Dick Lyles. Egan explained why new managers must understand that who, what, where and when you manage and lead should determine how you manage and lead.

What challenges are faced by SMEs moving into management?

An individual worker or team member focuses primarily on his or her job at hand. That job is usually one in which he or she has received extensive training and is a proven subject matter expert. These workers also are passionate about their chosen field. On becoming a new manager, they often find themselves in fast-paced, changing circumstances — or changing contexts — in which they are required not only to continue to manage themselves effectively but to also manage others and lead.

What happens to new managers in the leading self context?

Self leadership is about having the skill and the mindset to accept responsibility and take the initiative for succeeding in your work-related role. The self context is the one in which new managers are most familiar as they have been excelling as individual contributors before their promotion. However, the challenge now is to use and apply the skills of being a self leader to the new role of manager and leader. These skills include



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aligning their personal mission, creating a personal performance plan that includes clarity of ‘key responsibility areas’ and goals, identification of needs for direction and support, and effective management of time and energy so performance and satisfaction are maximized. Self leaders also seek out a mentor relationship to help navigate the path forward. One common challenge for the new manager in the self context is to juggle new management and leadership responsibilities while continuing to make individual contributions as a subject matter expert.

When must new managers first handle more complex interactions?

This occurs in the one-to-one context. It’s more complex as it involves interacting with others who may be similar to or different from the new manager in terms of personality, skills, needs and motivations. A new manager may be required to perform various roles depending upon the needs of others and the immediate situation. The roles could include supervisor, teacher, coach, mentor or friend. Key skills in this context include: the ability to clarify roles, priorities and performance standards of others; impart knowledge

and develop skills of others; manage the performance of and give feedback to others; and have challenging conversations with others when performance or behavior is not on track. A typical challenge the new manager faces in this context is to work effectively with others who were former peers, colleagues and friends. Moving from being one of the ‘gang’ to being the leader is sometimes a tricky transition that requires thought, intent and skill.

What is the most difficult context for new managers?

The team context is exponentially more complex. Here, the new manager is asked to galvanize a number of individuals all potentially with different personalities, skills, needs and motivations to achieve a common purpose. The focus is collective and the new manager has to work on maximizing two group constructs — team productivity and morale. A variety of roles may need to be performed including those of trainer, facilitator, mediator and cheerleader. Key skills include the ability to provide a team with structure such as purpose, tactics, norms, methods of communication, and the ability to manage group dynamics and manage effective meetings — both face-to-face and virtual. A common challenge new managers face in the team context is to lead cross-functional teams. This requires the manager to negotiate resource allocation from different departments, manage the performance of individuals on the team who report to a different function manager and develop the team as a whole when members’ allegiances may lie with their individual functions.

How can new managers increase their chances for success?

For new managers, developing effectiveness in the self, one-to-one and team contexts is the priority. If they can first diagnose the current context in which they are operating and then have a number of relevant skills to deploy, they will increase their chances of managing and leading effectively. <<

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