



SAVING ROOKIE MANAGERS FROM THEMSELVES

*(Summary of an article by Carol Walker
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Most organisations promote employees into managerial positions based on their technical competence. Very often, however, these people fail to grasp how their roles have changed – that their jobs are no longer about personal functional achievement but instead about enabling others to achieve.

In practice, many rookie managers attempt to learn by trial and error, but the majority put themselves under unnecessary stress by giving themselves an ever increasing workload. So what can we do about it? As the organisation won't often pay for coaching support, Carol Walker argues that it comes down to help from the boss. Walker argues that there are 5 key challenges for the rookie manager:

- learning to delegate effectively
- getting support from above
- projecting confidence
- focusing on the big picture
- giving constructive feedback

Effective Delegation

Rookie managers take on more and more tasks because they are fearful of losing control, fearful of losing stature by not being identified with high profile jobs or fearful of overburdening staff. The first step is for the line manager to get new managers to understand their new role and how it differs from an individual contributor's, and how developing talented staff is as critical as hitting numerical goals. The second step for the line manager is to advise on how to delegate manageable tasks with clearly defined milestones with regular meetings to ensure that staff feel accountable.

Getting Support From Above

Most new managers see their relationship with their boss as subordinate rather than a partnership. They will wait to be asked for reports, invited to meetings or to be questioned on results. Unfortunately, this puts undue pressure on the boss to keep the flow of communication going. Rookie managers, therefore, are more concerned about not appearing weak or vulnerable and don't seek help or support but instead try to cover up a failing project or relationship. The first step for the line manager is to clarify expectations by exploring the link between the individual's success and the boss's success. The second step for the line manager is to acknowledge that no one has all the answers but

you expect options to be discussed and that the boss's role is to ask and answer questions and offer advice. The third step is to introduce the new manager to other contacts who can provide help.

Projecting Confidence

New managers are often so internally focused that they are unaware of the confidence or image they project. They are so focused on substance that they forget that the form of the message is equally important. Professionalism and optimism can be promoted in many ways. Staff need to learn to trust the manager and so the manager needs to appear consistent and reliable. The line manager can help by walking the new manager through difficult situations or processes, and coach a positive use of language when talking or writing. It is also important that the new manager is not asked to be the mouthpiece of their boss as it doesn't help to be seen simply as a messenger.

Focusing on the Big Picture

New managers have the habit of allowing immediate tasks to overshadow all their activities. They engage in constant fire-fighting. The new manager instinctively runs to the help of any staff member in need. What is better for team spirit than having the boss jump into the trenches and fight the good fight? The problem is that all emergencies are not real emergencies and staff are not being empowered to handle complex challenges. Many new managers believe that a critical part of their role is to be around to manage crises as they arise. They see the concept of thinking about the strategic direction of the business as self-indulgent.

The line manager can help by explaining that strategic thinking is a necessary skill for career advancement, and a necessary skill for thinking about how to increase productivity, sales or reduce costs in the next year. The manager can help by asking questions about market trends, competitor activity, skill development and so on. New managers must be encouraged to think about goals rather than activities.

Giving Constructive Feedback

Rookie managers tend to avoid confrontation and avoid addressing important issues with their staff. When staff members appear to be struggling to meet performance goals, the manager very often sits back, watches, and hopes that things will magically improve by themselves.

The line manager can help by using questions to help uncover areas in which the rookie manager feels less confident. Ask how they are feeling about the performance of individual staff. How do they propose to address the issue, and share some ideas on dealing with the situation.