

Managing the transition from colleague to manager

In the past you were part of the team. You were a friend and a colleague. But you've been promoted and today, for the first time, you're the **boss**. The full reality of this transition dawns on you, and a whole host of unexpected emotions, concerns, and fears surface.

As any seasoned manager will tell you, however you attempt to handle this transition, there will be things you cannot plan for. The first step on the managerial ladder is not without its obstacles and challenges – even more so if you are managing your former colleagues. You want to be respected, you want to be liked and most of all, you want to be *good at your job*. Can you still be 'friends'?

There are several potential personas lurking in the corners of the new manager's subconscious. By telling you about them here, we're hoping you'll keep a firm lid on *all* of them.

'Chosen One'

The *Chosen One* tends to emerge as a result of pride – and fear they won't respect you. Once the *Chosen One* becomes a dominant managerial persona it's difficult to let it go. Instead of allowing yourself time to settle in and *earn* the respect of your team through solid leadership, you might barge in and assume that your title alone is enough to make you a leader. After all people *should* respect you – you're a manager, right?

Actually, it's your *actions* that will define you as a leader.

Common phrases to avoid:

- "Because I said so."
- "Because I'm your manager."
- "Don't question my authority!"

Your team will soon lose respect for you if they are confronted by the *Chosen One*. They will feel distanced from you and are unlikely to take you seriously as their manager. Possibly you won't notice, as you are too busy being important, but before long you won't have any idea what your team is doing – they won't want to tell you – and so you won't be doing your job properly.

It's okay to want to be respected but – at the risk of sounding clichéd – respect has to be earned, which takes time. Being a manager is about the work *you do* on a day-to-day basis, not the title you are given.

'Time Traveller'

The *Time Traveller* often emerges from a desperate desire to be thought of as better than your predecessor. You can lose focus on what needs to be done and instead spend time looking to score points off the previous manager. In particular, in making promises for the future that you can't keep.

Good management is *not* about measuring yourself against others, it *is* about providing your team with the tools they need to do their job well, and supporting them on a day-to-day basis as they do it.

Common phrases to avoid:

- “Don't worry – now I'm in charge we'll get that sorted out.”
- “I'm not like Sarah; I won't side with the organisation over you.”
- “I promise you...”

In the short term this is a crowd pleaser which is why it can be so attractive, and addictive! Some of your team might think you are the best thing since sliced bread. But hold on there. Unfulfilled promises end up causing resentment and are more damaging to your team's morale, than a more realistic “I'll look into it” (as long as you do!). Or even saying “no”.

Be patient and give yourself time to find your feet. Listen to what people want and discuss their needs. But don't over-promise and under-deliver.

'Blabberer'

The *Blabberer* can be a response to feeling you've lost your friends and their comradeship. Now you are a manager, you may be wondering if people will still see the same fun loving person that you were when you were one of them.

The *Blabberer* is a particularly unhelpful persona for someone finding their feet as a manager. It tends to emerge as a strong desire to share the organisations more sensitive information with former

colleagues. A desire to 'keep in' with the team by sharing juicy snippets of information from the boardroom.

Common phrases to avoid:

- "I really shouldn't tell you this but..."
- "You will never guess what I have read!"
- "I was in a meeting earlier when..."

This is sure-fire way to lose the respect not only of your team, but also senior management. As a manager you will inevitably be privy to sensitive, even confidential, information. But remember it is exactly that – confidential.

Your relationship with your former team-mates *will* change when you become a manager – but that's not a bad thing. Being a manager is not about winning a popularity contest, it's about being a trustworthy professional. More than anything a team needs leadership, and it's you that has to provide that leadership.

'Poor Rock Star'

The essence of the *Poor Rock Star's* approach is to let everyone know how tough life is at the top. The reasoning goes that, if you remind your team of your extra responsibilities, how much harder you have it than them, how you'd trade it all in to be one of the team again, they are sure to understand your plight and forgive your mistakes.

Common phrases to avoid:

- "I have so much work to do."
- "You just don't understand."
- "I didn't even want this job."

Poor Rock Stars almost always fail to grasp, that in the same way nobody really cares if a millionaire is tired from flying all over the world to exotic places, your team doesn't care that you have more work to do – that's what you're being paid for. Please just get on with it!

Ducking your responsibilities won't inspire confidence in your abilities. Your team need you to be 100% engaged. Talk to *your* manager if you are not feeling confident, or feeling swamped – it's what they are there for.

'Best Bud'

The *Best Bud* is a dangerous path to go down and can quickly rip apart your team. *Best Buds* love nothing more than the support and friendship of their closest allies from the past.

As a new manager you might want to be sure that your 'best friend' from the team is okay that you are now their boss. So chances are you 'accidentally' make sure everybody knows that they are a little bit more special, a little bit more important, and a little more deserving of responsibility and praise than anyone else.

Common phrases to avoid:

- "Andrew, you're the only one I can rely on."
- "Me and Andrew are just going for a chat to discuss some things."
- "When I'm not here... Andrew's in charge."

The *Best Bud* approach is bound to cause friction between you and your team, and make your Bud's time at work trickier too. People should be judged on their *performance* and not on their *personality*. Positive and negative behaviour needs to be addressed with every team member in appropriate measure. Any assessment of performance should be based on merit and transparent criteria.

It's tough moving from the security of being a team member to the exposed hill of management, and it takes time to adjust. Take that time, and work to avoid these common pitfalls. It's worth it – for both you *and* your team!

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