

Messenger

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Overcoming Common Managerial Mistakes, Part 6

We have finally come to the end of our journey through common managerial mistakes. I don't know about you, but I've had my toes stepped on a few times during this series! I've found myself cringing as I write, realizing I've done (or am currently doing) some of the very things that I'm encouraging you not to do. Join me as we finish learning how to be better managers.

Mistake #19 - Not Paying Attention to Employee Gripes and Complaints

Nothing infuriates a person faster than the feeling that no one is listening to him. People want to feel important and want to know that if they have a concern or problem, management will listen to what they have to say and not just blow them off. In turn, if you take the time to listen to your employees, they will listen to you as well.

When you listen, give your undivided attention. Don't try to work at the same time. If the timing of

the conversation is bad, set up another time that works for both of you. Ask probing questions to find out all the details. Not only will this make sure you understand everything, but it will also keep you focused on the conversation. Once he's finished his

side of the story, ask what he would like to see done. Oftentimes, this is very unexpected. You might find that he just wanted someone to listen to him. Or you may find that he's put a lot of thought into it and has come up with a fantastic resolution.



Mistake #20 - Failure to Keep Your People Informed

No one likes to continually be in the dark about what is happening around them. If a decision management makes is going to directly affect the employees, let them know what's going on. As long as it's not confidential, tell them the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* information. Keeping people informed will also stop a lot of rumors. Idle gossip around the office often leads to outrageous rumors. An "I wonder if this will happen" quickly turns into "This *is* happening". Providing timely updates and information will give people peace of mind, especially during times of change and a questionable economy.

You should not only keep employees informed about the company, but also about their personal performance. Everyone wonders from time to time what their supervisor thinks of the work being done. Don't make them guess. You don't hesitate to constructively give criticism. The same should be true with praise. Let them know when they've done a good job. That will keep them working harder for you in the future. I know I love hearing from my

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Treat employees with honesty and respect. Don't dictate to them if they are not going to have their ideas enacted. Explain the reasons that underlie a decision or policy.

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bosses that they think I'm doing a good job. My guess is that you do too!

Mistake #21 - Failing to Treat Your Subordinates as Individuals

When you have a large department, it's easy to stop thinking of the employees as individuals and just treat them as a number. As our society is becoming more electronic, little face-to-face interaction is ever needed. This is not something you want to happen in an organization. When employees start feeling like just another body and not a real person, their productivity level will begin to decline.

Make it your priority to know the first and last name of every person in your department, if not the entire organization. Not only know their name, but also how to pronounce it. There's nothing worse than getting on to someone and then calling him by the wrong name or saying his name incorrectly. Want to earn extra brownie points? Know the names of spouses and children.

Go out of your way to find opportunities to praise your employees. Nothing makes you feel better than knowing you're doing a good job and knowing that someone else has noticed it as well. What's even better is getting that praise in front of other people.



Show respect for the knowledge and skills of your employees. Chances are there is an employee who actually knows more than you on a given subject, whether it is the details of a big presentation or the way a machine is operated. Tell them how much you appreciate their expertise.

Mistakes #22 - Refusing to Train an Assistant to Take Your Place

I would say the goal of most people is to eventually be promoted. This is a fantastic goal. It's one which requires you to work hard at your job. However,

as you move up through the company, do you take the time to train people to take your place? Just doing a phenomenal job in your position may not be enough. If you don't take the time to train the person behind you, you may become indispensable. But wait a second! Isn't it good to be indispensable? Well, not always. If you become too indispensable, with no one trained to take your job, you may get passed over for a promotion. It's possible that if you leave your department, it would essentially fall apart since no one else can do your job.

Before you can find the right assistant, you must make the decision to train an assistant. While this may sound simple, it may require a shift of mind. Most people feel like they are the best person to get a job done. They don't like to give up power and responsibility. However, you must be willing to do just that if you're going to have an assistant.

Another aspect to consider is the personality of the assistant. While you might be tempted to find someone who is the mirror image of you, that may cause sparks to fly. It's best to find someone who complements you. Find someone whose strengths are your weaknesses and whose weaknesses are your strength. You will balance each other out.

When it comes time to begin delegating responsibilities to the person you've chosen, remember these things.

1. Give a complete picture of the job--let her know what is expected. Give all the necessary information. Let her know where her authority

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The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away.
Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960)
Politician

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begins and ends. Also, communicate to everyone else in the department that she has authority and should go to her if a situation arises.

2. Let him know what you're doing--make sure that he's in the loop of all the decisions and plans that you make. Don't hide the problems from him. Even give some of the problems to him to solve. Let him be a part of everything.

3. Add responsibility gradually--don't throw everything on her shoulders at once. As she feels comfortable with the job, keep adding responsibilities. Allowing her to adjust before each task is added will help her to grow in her abilities without becoming overwhelmed.

4. Don't hold the reins too tight--once you have given him his responsibilities and duties, let him do his job without constantly hovering. While it's tempting to keep continual tabs on his work, especially at the beginning, give him the freedom to make mistakes. This helps the learning process. He'll grow to be a better manager if he has to figure things out for himself.

5. Give her the authority she needs to carry out her responsibility--encourage her to only bring the really big problems to you. When she does, have her bring some possible solutions as well. You can guide and direct the decision, but let her have the final say.

Being a manager is not an easy job. It requires experience, training, and communication skills. I hope that this series has been helpful to you. I know that it opened my eyes on mistakes I make as a manager. It also made me aware of others that I haven't encountered yet and can now hopefully avoid.

Adapted from *The 22 Biggest Mistakes Managers Make and How to Correct Them* by James K. Van Fleet



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The Mathis Group, Inc

Dr. Keith Mathis

106 Lakeview Woods

Eureka, MO 63025

800-224-3731

636/938-5292 voice/fax

keith@themathisgroup.com

www.themathisgroup.com

www.pmexpertlive.com

www.trainthegov.com

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