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Lead, Manage, or Get Out of the Way

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Lead, Manage, or Get Out of the Way

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Introduction

When it comes to managing people, you should play chess, not checkers. Know how each piece moves in relation to others, and think several moves ahead. In this session, you'll learn the key skills you need to be a great manager, including recognizing and capitalizing on employees' individuality and coaching them effectively.

After attending this session, you will be able to:

- Identify key skills needed to be a great manager
- Appreciate the need to coach employees according to their unique learning styles and strengths
- Handle employees' failures and coach them up or out of your organization

What makes a good boss?

Most employees want to say they have "the greatest boss in the world," but most do not. Bad bosses are the number-one reason employees leave organizations. There are lots of data and studies about the qualities of great bosses and the differences between managers and leaders.

Unfortunately, veterinary medicine does not create good bosses. What do good bosses do? They discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it. Average managers play checkers; great managers play chess.

In checkers, all the pieces are uniform and move in the same way. You must plan moves, but all the players move at the same pace and on the same path. In chess, each piece moves in a different way, and you can't play unless you know how each piece moves. You won't win unless you put considerable forethought into how the pieces move **IN ADVANCE**.

Are you a leader or a manager? A manager turns one person's talent into performance. Managers succeed only when they can identify and develop the differences in people and challenge each person to excel in his/her own way. Leaders discover what is universal and capitalize on it. They cut through differences and focus on the needs that we all share.

Great managers are quick to capitalize on unique strengths of employees, because:

- It costs much less to work with a person than to have a revolving door.
- It saves a LOT of time, which is a commodity in all hospitals.
- It forces people to create a team; it makes people need one another.
- It introduces a healthy degree of disruption to your practice.

Is disruption a good thing?

Disruption? Why should you disturb the peace? Great managers do it because they can't help it! They are astute about managing the needs of people. What that looks like in real life:

- Shuffle existing hierarchies.
- Shuffle assumptions about who can do what.
- Shuffle existing beliefs about where true expertise lies.

If disruption doesn't come naturally to you, look for the classic symptoms of "no team" as your cue to shake things up. For example:

- You've spent months training and coaching your team to better performance, but you are not seeing results.
- You seem to talk about the same things in all of our meetings.
- The person/persons in charge of the hiring process continue to draw in like-minded people.

So, what do you do? Disturb the peace! And bring in the principles of change management while you do it. Identify each person's unique talents. Embrace eccentricities. Help them use their personal qualities to excel. Emphasize that the culture appreciates differences. Celebrate the uniqueness of each employee. The benefits are that you save time, the team takes ownership for improving their skills, and the team learns to value differences.

How do you bring out the best in people?

To capitalize on people's unique skills, identify their strengths. What do they like the best about their jobs? Which tasks do they look forward to, and which tasks do they avoid? Ask them, "What was the best day you had at work in the last three months?" Listen for activities they find intrinsically satisfying.

Weakness doesn't mean lack of skill. It can be any task that drains your energy or is an activity that when you start it, all you can think about is stopping. Ask, "What is the worst day you have had in the last three months?" For the purpose of this management task, we want to downplay discussions of weakness.

To address weaknesses, offer training to help them overcome shortcomings stemming from lack of skills or knowledge. Find the employee a mentor/partner with complementary talents. Think about the mechanics of your business and reconfigure work arrangements. Don't be afraid to be unconventional.

As we work with "weaknesses," we need to keep in mind the psychology of this language and think about self-awareness versus self-assurance. Do we want employees armed with the knowledge of their limitations, or do we want them to be confident in their abilities? Focus on strengths. In other words, people get more reward from knowing they are doing a job well than from understanding what parts of the job they are weak at.

Some would argue that employees can get too confident. Perhaps. But it is the manager's job to simultaneously communicate the importance of employees' tasks and the real complexity of the obstacles that they will need to overcome to be successful. Your objective is to create a state of mind in the employee—a realistic assessment of the obstacles and difficulties associated with the goal combined with the confidence to take the goal on (optimism).

If they fail: Unless the failure is attributable to factors beyond the employees' control, they must accept that failure was lack of effort on their part (psychological pressure). This obscures self-doubt. "It is not that you are not capable, but perhaps it is because you didn't develop enough skills or you didn't try harder?"

If they fail repeatedly: Give them more training if it is lack of knowledge or skill. If the employee does not respond, it is because s/he does not possess the talent or skill to do the job. Manage around their weakness to neutralize it, but don't keep exposing them to failure. Find them a partner/mentor that is strong where they are weak. Rearrange the employee's work world to render the weakness irrelevant.

Use "triggers." What helps this employee be his/her best? Consider the time of day, if s/he works better at night or during the day, if s/he needs a little or a lot of time with the boss, and other factors.

The most powerful trigger is recognition of effort.

Source of Recognition	Type of Feedback
Peers	Publicly celebrate achievements.
The boss	Tell them privately, but vividly, why they are such valuable team members.
Others with similar experience	Give them professional/technical awards.
Clients	Take photos of them with the "best" clients.

To bring out the best in employees, you also need to coach to their learning style. **Analyzers** require extensive information before accepting a task and hates making mistakes. Coach them by spending ample training time, role playing, giving them time to prepare for challenges.

A **Doer** uses trial and error to enhance skills while grappling with tasks. Assign simple tasks, explain the desired outcome, then get out of the way. Gradually increase the complexity of tasks to be assigned. **Watchers** hone skills by watching other people in action. Have them shadow top performers.

What makes a good versus great manager?

At the heart of a great manager's success is the ability to appreciate individuality. But great managers need other skills as well:

- Hire well.
- Set expectations.

- Instinctively interact with others in a productive fashion.

Great managers “play chess.” They define expectations and outcomes. They encourage individuality. Mediocre managers hope (or assume) that all of their employees will be motivated by the same things and driven by the same goals. They define behaviors and tell employees to work on skills that do not come naturally. They encourage sameness and view their job as transformation rather than development.

Great managers don’t try to change a person’s style. They know their employees will differ in how they think, how they build relationships, how altruistic they are, how patient they can be, how much of an expert they need to be, how prepared they need to be, what challenges them, what drives them, and what their goals are (whew!!).

Differences in traits and talents are like blood types; they cut across superficial variations of race, sex, and age and capture each person’s uniqueness. Like blood types, these traits of people are enduring and resistant to change. Your most precious resource is time. Why waste it pushing a rock up a hill?

Great management is about the RELEASE of talent and skill, not the transformation. It is about constantly tweaking the environment to allow the employees’ unique contributions and styles to develop. Your success as a manager depends almost entirely on your ability to do this. Go out there and be great!

Action Plan

This week, I will:

The outcome for me is:

The outcome for the organization is:

This month, I will:

The outcome for me is:

The outcome for the organization is: