



James O. McDonald

MANAGEMENT WITHOUT TEARS

A guide to coping with
everyday organizational
problems

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**A Guide to Coping with
Everyday Organizational Problems**

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To Dale Bryson for the idea

To Mary, my wife, for her help and encouragement

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Some persons taught me more than others, but each taught me something. To single out but a few of my leading teachers, I would surely have to name Lida Usilton, Kenny Revelle, Wally Poston, Frank Corrado, Larry Smith, John Quarles, Joel Mintz, Andy Damen, Alan Kirk, and Olive Weeks. And then there are Tom Yeates, Murray Stein, Dave Ullrich, George Alexander, Lance Vinson, David Comey, Dale Bryson, Carol Foglesong, and Tom Sullivan. Some were my bosses, others worked for me, and still others were colleagues or critics. First and foremost, though, in the give and take that comprises the fascinating world of management, I learned from them.

Through it all, my wife Mary, a great teacher, has always been there to keep me on course when the sailing got rough. Her support has been boundless.

In their own ways, they all made this book possible.

Introduction

When I became a manager for the first time, I was struck by how little I knew about effectively handling people and things. I quickly learned that being a manager was entirely different from being a nonmanagerial employee in the same organization. As I floundered through that early experience, I was surprised at the paucity of practical “how-to” books and training courses for managers. Nowhere did I find that special book of suggestions written by an experienced manager, although I did find many treatises and books written by academicians and management consultants. What I needed at the time, however, was a practical step-by-step guide on how to manage specific situations, written by someone who had struggled through the management hierarchy. I wanted something compact I could refer to when I faced a new problem. Now after years of managerial experience, I decided to write this book to provide the information I sought long ago but couldn’t find.

The secret of being a successful manager is having the ability to get things done. Since managers get things done almost entirely through others, they must develop techniques to make sure that others do, indeed, get things done. A manager must harness the use of his time, so that he can spend most of that time managing, which means planning what needs to be done and implementing his plans through those he manages. This book discloses the managerial methods I used. I refined these methods over the years in actual on-the-job managerial settings, and because the methods worked well for me, I want to share them with you to help make your managerial life more productive and rewarding, wherever you may be on the managerial ladder.

The book sets forth some managerial problems likely to be encountered during the career of a manager. Each problem is followed by at least one suggested solution. Being able to pick the best solution more often than not is what separates a good manager from a so-so one, and, as any seasoned manager knows, there is more than one solution for any problem. The solutions presented in this book worked best for me and for those who trained under me. If they are properly understood and applied, I believe they can work as well for you.

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A Good Word for Good Work

“There is something that is much more scarce, something rarer than ability. It is the ability to recognize ability.”

Robert Half

Problem: The only time Susan got any word back from the boss on the quality of her work was when she did something that wasn't up to par. Then he was quick to let her know about her shortcomings. Although she knew that her work was generally above average and sometimes even superlative, the boss never once praised her performance. She didn't expect a continuing stream of praise, but she did think that occasional recognition for an outstanding job was warranted. After all, she thought, what does it take to get some praise around this place?

Approach: Susan's boss has forgotten that each of us, including him, likes a reward for a job well done. From a dollars and cents standpoint, the best reward is a promotion with a hike in salary, responsibility, and prestige. But no matter how outstanding we may be as employees, promotions come along relatively seldom. Still, a boss can reward an employee with meaningful recognition by simply voicing a compliment when it is merited.

For example, if an employee submits an exceptionally good piece of work, take time out to express your satisfaction. A handwritten note on the file copy or on a buck slip, such as, “Excellent job, Susan—clear, concise, and responsive. Keep it up!” is a real morale builder. So that others understand what you consider an exceptional job, route the note back to the employee through the supervisory chain. That way, you'll give a message to a number of people. You'll demonstrate the type of work standards that you seek. Mostly, though, a personal pat on the back from the boss serves as motivation for future good work.

The value that one former employee of mine attached to such notes was impressed upon me when I met him several years after I changed jobs. He told me that because his present boss never praised him, he would periodically pull out my old notes of

encouragement and read them when he needed to boost his sagging spirits.

This pat-on-the-back type of note need not be restricted only to those employees who turn in outstanding performances. The same technique (“Tom, this is a *great* improvement over your last effort—fewer words, more substance, and on time.”) can be used to encourage an employee who shows improvement over his usual “average” performance.

About the Office Machine Game

"Those who speak most of progress measure it by quantity and not quality."

George Santayana

Problem: On Mac's first inspection tour of the office after he became director, he noticed that the office was crowded with late-model office machines. He noticed, also, that few of the machines were actually in operation. The staff was busy, but the machines were not. Within a week his secretary presented him with a request to purchase several costly office machines. No justification was attached to the purchase request.

Approach: Lesson number one for Mac: Office machines are outdated the day they are purchased. Sales techniques for office machines are analogous to those of automobiles. This results in constant pressure on the manager to buy the new improved models.

The pressure to buy comes from the salespeople who visit your organization regularly, from the purchasing department personnel who develop congenial relationships with the salespeople, and from employees who have learned about the wonderful new machines not yet possessed by your office. Pressures also develop within your own staff to acquire additional models of machines you already possess so that more of the staff will have access to them. Decisions on machine purchases can rank among the most expensive budget decisions that a manager encounters.

If the decision to acquire or not to acquire an office machine is not under your direct control, take steps to get it there. Failing that, involve yourself to the extent that you can. There are numerous questions to be answered before you can make an intelligent decision about the purchase of a machine. Some of these are:

1. What benefits will result from the purchase of the machine?
2. Are these benefits needed in your office?
3. Will your goals be met more readily if the machine is available?
4. Can your budget afford it?

5. What are the maintenance costs?
6. If you acquire this machine, are you setting the stage to acquire others?
7. What experiences have other offices had with the machine? (Disregard the salesperson's pitch and contact the supervisors in those other offices.)
8. How much staff training is required to operate the machine?
9. Is your office space conducive to housing this machine? (Some machines require climate control and special lighting and electrical connections.)
10. Is the machine already obsolete? If not, when will it be? What's on the drawing board to replace it?
11. Is there enough work to fully use the machine?
12. Are similar machines in your office now being fully used?

If you require not only completion of such a checklist, but also verification of the information before you consider purchase of an office machine, you insert a degree of integrity into the purchasing process. If you let the salespeople, the purchasing agents, and the staff know that you are personally interested in this machine acquisition, you influence the quality of information fed to you for making the decision. The influence becomes even greater if you also establish procedures for periodic evaluations of the use, maintenance costs, benefits, training, and validation of prepurchase claims for the machines.

The trap to side-step is that of being persuaded to buy a machine just because it's a new product for which the salesperson claims fantastic performance. Even if his claims are true but don't suit your needs, your checklist will give you a logical basis for deciding against the purchase.

Assisting the New Supervisor

"The brighter you are, the more you have to learn."

Don Herold

Problem: Anita's first week as a supervisor gave her a sinking feeling. She hadn't bargained for the types of problems that arose. She reflected that during the job interview her boss had not clearly outlined the full breadth of her managerial responsibilities. If he had done so, at least she would have known what to expect. One of the things that affected her most was the loneliness of the decision-making process. In making decisions, there seemed to be no one on her staff to whom she could turn for a straight answer. She hesitated to discuss her worries with her boss because she feared he might view them as a sign of weakness.

Approach: Being promoted from a position as staff employee with no supervisory responsibilities to a supervisory position is like going from bachelorhood to marriage. You look the same, but you don't feel the same. Your status has changed. To some, as Anita discovered, instead of being a pleasure, promotion turns out to be an agonizing experience.

Good managers are always on the lookout for other potentially good managers. It's normal to urge an outstanding nonsupervisory employee to fill a vacant managerial spot. However, being an outstanding nonsupervisory employee does not guarantee success as a supervisor. A staff employee is responsible only for her own affairs. She can go as fast as her capabilities, her desires, and, perhaps, her supervisor permit. Administrative worries pertaining to budgets, personnel, data processing, travel, purchasing, and planning are limited or nonexistent for a nonsupervisor.

The supervisor's world is different. The primary mission is to get things done through others. To a new supervisor, the inability to personally see a project through from start to finish becomes dramatically evident from the first day on the job. The new supervisor discovers that being an outstanding engineer or a superb accountant is of little help to handle the problem of a chronically tardy employee, or to insure that next year's budget reflects pro-

jected needs, or to justify the purchase of a new copying machine, or to process a customer's complaint with dispatch. The sudden change in responsibilities can readily result in feelings of helplessness and confusion while the new manager adjusts to this new status.

You can soften the impact of the change for an inexperienced supervisor under your jurisdiction if, during the interview and selection process, for example, you candidly discuss the frustrations, as well as the joys, of the supervisory world. Explain the different requirements of supervisory work, compared with those of the present nonsupervisory job. Explore the standards of performance by which she, as a supervisor, will be judged. Tell her of available supervisory training courses. It is most important to assure her that you will provide all possible help, especially during the first days on the new job. Be elemental and tell her that if she feels lost and uncertain at first, she is experiencing a normal reaction. Make it clear that you want the new manager to succeed and will help her if only because your success is closely allied to hers. Explain that not only do you encourage her to come to you to discuss managerial problems, but you will also hold monthly sessions with her in which the two of you will review her progress.

Establishing this kind of working relationship with the new supervisor before her entry on the job will fortify her with support and confidence that might otherwise be lacking. Any dividends she reaps from your help will be reaped by you, also.

Bridging the Gap

“Leadership is action, not position.”

Donald H. McGannon

Problem: Jeff’s return to the office from his first long vacation since becoming chief of the division was a revelation. The pile of unsigned letters, the unanswered telephone calls, the unapproved documents all waiting for his action made him wonder if he’d ever catch up. After that, he was reluctant to leave the office, even though his position required extended travel from time to time. Most of the items awaiting action by him appeared to be legitimate enough. A number of the unsigned letters had notes from the originators saying, “Please hold for Jeff’s signature,” and several of the telephone messages said “Caller wants to speak to Jeff, only.”

Approach: Does taking a two-week vacation from your busy office conjure up such an agonizing picture of the work that will be waiting upon your return that the vacation seems hardly worth taking? Dreading the return to the pile-up in the office can build up to the point that the benefits of a vacation are destroyed. Who said you have to endure this form of torture? You said so—that’s who—because you did not install a system to circumvent the problem.

It’s your own fault if you return to a work place mired in a backlog. You sow the seeds of the backlog when you fail to develop a system of management continuity in your absence. So, right now, before you face such a backlog again, work out the procedures to control the flow of work in your absence and insist that they be followed whenever you are out of the office, whether for vacation, business, or illness.

As part of your office continuity procedures, develop a chain of command for someone to act in your *full* stead while you are not in the office. *Full* stead means full stead. That idea has to be accepted completely by everyone, including the person acting in your place. That person works on everything that you would work on if you were there: signing correspondence, delegating work, answering calls, making decisions, the whole bit. He holds nothing for your return unless you so instruct. Not only do you feel better when you

return to a clean desk, but you also feel virtuous because when you delegate authority this way, you are developing your subordinates, thereby strengthening the operation of your office. It's a vote of confidence to those left behind. And it's a vote of relief for you.

Bon voyage! Have a good trip.