

Handbook for
First-Time
Managers

***Managing
Effectively***



Joseph & Susan Berk

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Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.
New York

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published in 1998 by Sterling Publishing Company, Inc.

387 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016

Originally published under the title *Managing Effectively:*

A Handbook for the First-Time Manager

© 1991 by Joseph and Susan Berk

Distributed in Canada by Sterling Publishing

% Canadian Manda Group, One Atlantic Avenue, Suite 105

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6K 3E7

Distributed in Great Britain and Europe by Cassell PLC

Wellington House, 125 Strand, London WC2R 0BB, England

Distributed in Australia by Capricorn Link (Australia) Pty Ltd.

P.O. Box 6651, Baulkham Hills, Business Centre, NSW 2153, Australia

Manufactured in the United States of America

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Sterling ISBN 0-8069-0678-2

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Martin Berk.

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike most management guides, this book focuses on the needs of new managers. Perhaps more significantly, both authors are working managers. The material presented in this book is not theoretical, nor is it based exclusively on the management hypotheses espoused in MBA programs (even though both authors hold MBAs). Rather, the concepts here come from three sources—management readings, observations of new managers in a variety of settings, and, predominantly, our own experiences.

Management is simultaneously an art and a science. The scientific aspects of the management discipline are fairly straightforward, and anyone with a reasonable degree of intelligence can learn the mechanics. We present these mechanics throughout the book, but we don't stop there. You can't be successful as a manager if you are equipped only with the rules and procedures of the managerial business. You have to be adept at the artistic side of the managerial discipline. This is the part that requires an appreciation of the essence of the manager's job: understanding what it is you are responsible for doing, determining the best way to do it, recruiting and cultivating the right people, and helping these people to realize their full potential.

This book is organized into four sections. We start out with the most basic management functions, and then move into more advanced concepts. The section on staffing and supervising, for example, offers guidance on how to develop your staff. The next section, on career building, explores several concepts that helped us to advance into and up through the management ranks. The final section discusses more global tasks, and examines how to conduct effective meetings, solve problems, and manage change, conflict, and risk.

Throughout this book, the emphasis is on the skills needed by new managers. We've been there. We know the uniqueness of the challenges one faces when attempting to make a successful transition from doing the work to managing it. No book can claim to offer a recipe for avoiding the mistakes that are an inevitable part of learning the management business, but we believe the suggestions offered in the following pages can greatly ease the transition.

Part I

BASIC FUNCTIONS

Chapter 1

PLANNING

Eileen Barzda paced the floor nervously. Eileen managed the communications group in a medium-sized apparel manufacturing company. The company's new line of fall clothing was about to be unveiled at a show Eileen had been working on for several weeks. Although the company held such conferences every year, Eileen had only recently been promoted to her current assignment, and it was the first time she had the responsibility for arranging the affair. Procurement representatives from every major retailer were seated in the crowd, and the show was about to begin.

Eileen's mind raced over the events of the last few days. She had spent many hours determining what the show should include, and what needed to be accomplished in order to bring it off in a professional manner. The show was an important one. If the buyers were not impressed, the fall line would not do well. Eileen was nervous not only because the show was important, but because it was also her first major project as a manager.

All of the refreshments had arrived on time and were attractively displayed where Eileen had designated. All the chairs were in place, and the modelling platform was set up. Eileen had checked the loudspeakers earlier, and everything worked properly. All of the models were changing into their outfits. One had called in sick earlier in the day, but Eileen had two backups lined up, and one arrived to take the vacant spot in plenty of time.

Eileen's mind ran through everything one more time. She was satisfied. All was ready. She walked onto the platform confidently, and began the introduction. The music started, and the first model walked out. Eileen described the outfit, the audience applauded, and the show proceeded flawlessly. Afterwards, the buyers enjoyed themselves at the refreshment counter. Several of them complimented Eileen, and told the other managers that the company could look forward to a very successful season. Many placed significant orders before they left. At the end of the show, after the last buyer had left, Mr. Jacobsen approached and complimented Eileen. Mr. Jacobsen owned the company, and his words carried a lot of weight.

"Very well done, Eileen. That was probably the best show we've ever had," he said.

"Thank you," Eileen replied.

"No, the thanks go to you," Jacobsen replied. "A lot of people will keep their jobs because of your success today. You must have spent a lot of time planning this."

"Yes, I did," Eileen said.

"Well, it showed. We need more of that around here."

With that, Jacobsen shook Eileen's hand, and turned to Eileen's boss. "You take care of her," he said. "She's one we want to keep."

Perhaps the best way to begin a book on management techniques for new managers is with a discussion on planning. Our experience shows that no other management skill is as important as the ability to plan. Our observations also show that it is an area ignored by many first-level managers, but actively practiced by middle managers, upper level managers, and successful business owners. We believe there's a message in this observation, and it's that unless the ability to plan is developed and mastered, progression beyond the first level of management is unlikely. Our experience further shows that failure is almost always tied to a lack of adequate planning. In other words, project and group failures are frequently the direct result of poor or non-existent planning. Just what is planning?

In this chapter, the focus will be on the planning skills needed for first-level management. The focus of first-level management is primarily on technical, project, and interpersonal issues (Figure 1-1). Strategic planning (i.e., charting future business areas and strategies) is a business necessity, but is not usually practiced nor required by new managers, and for that reason, won't be covered here.

To understand the need for sound planning practices at the first level of management, think about past business crises you've been involved with. Each crisis probably created a sense of urgency throughout the organization, with many people responding or being assigned to help fix the problem. When we've encountered such crises, a great deal of confusion and uncertainty surrounded the effort, particularly with respect to who was supposed to do what and by when in order to resolve the crisis. In such situations, few people seem to have a clear idea how to get from Point A (the crisis) to Point B (resolution of the crisis). In most cases not only is the path from Point A to Point B confused, but frequently Point B is also a subject of considerable mystery.

Taking the analysis a step further leads to a key question: What caused the crisis in the first place? Was it a dramatic change in the business environment, or was it simply caused by someone not meet-

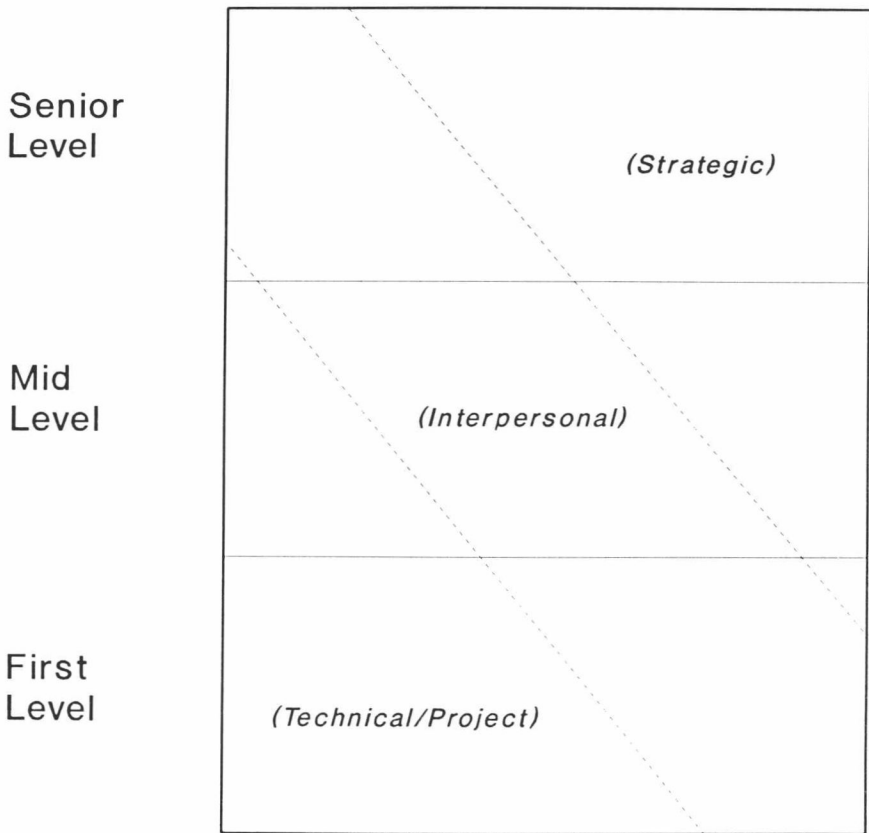


Figure 1-1. Management roles and practices. First-level management focuses on technical, project, and interpersonal issues.

ing a key commitment on time? And if it was the latter, did the person failing to meet the commitment know what he was supposed to do? In our experience, most crises are created by someone failing to meet a commitment either because of poor planning on their part, or because they were unaware of the requirement.

Eliminating these situations through the use of an approach that defines how to accomplish the objective is the purpose and essence of planning. Planning defines Point B, and describes how to get there. Our experience (as well as that of most other managers) shows that four steps are inherent to this process:

1. Identify the objective.
2. Identify all intermediate steps and resources necessary to allow a logical progression towards the objective.

3. Determine the sequence in which these steps must be performed.
4. Assign the appropriate people in order to assure task completion.

We've successfully used three planning methods to do this: the backwards planning method, the PERT method (PERT is an acronym for program evaluation and review technique), and the Gantt chart technique (named after H. L. Gantt, an industrial engineer whose planning methods achieved wide exposure during World War I). We feel (as do many managers) that the backwards planning and PERT methods offer distinct advantages over the Gantt chart method. Gantt charting is widely used, however, and for that reason will also be addressed later in this chapter.

THE BACKWARDS PLANNING METHOD

The backwards planning method is a conceptually simple technique developed and used extensively by the military. Backwards planning is ideal for planning simpler projects. The method starts with the desired result, or the objective, of the plan. The concept is to then back up in a sequential manner from the objective, identifying each required prior action (that's why it's called backwards planning). As each preceding task is identified, the time required to achieve it is estimated. The process continues, working backwards from each task, until all tasks are identified. Determining the starting date is then simple, as it merely requires adding the times required for each task.

This concept can be illustrated with a simple example. Suppose today is Tuesday, and your boss asks you to give a presentation in one week on the status of one of your projects. The boss has asked you to use viewgraphs, and to have hard copies of the presentation available for distribution after the presentation. The assignment sounds fairly simple, and one week to prepare seems more than adequate. The backwards planning method will be used to define what's necessary in order to be ready.

The first thing to identify is the objective. In this case, it's a project status review to be presented one week from today. Working backwards from this objective will be described here and shown in Figure 1-2. The first question is: What event should occur immediately prior to the presentation? A smooth presentation will require at least one or two rehearsals. If the presentation is targeted for thirty minutes, allowing three hours for the rehearsals seems reasonable. That means the presentation and the rehearsals will probably require one full day.