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## What Is an Effective Manager?

THERE'S A LOT OF TALK about what good management is. When someone tells you they know how to manage or what it takes to manage, ask them, "How do you measure what a good manager is, or does?" If you don't get a crisp answer (like the one I outline below), don't take what they tell you very seriously.

I suspect you've known both good and bad managers. What makes them so? Is it what they do? How they think? Their personality? What they feel? Where they went to school?

Think about this for a minute: *How do you know someone is a good manager? What is the definition of a good manager?*

When we ask these questions at our Effective Manager Conferences, we get all kinds of answers, such as the following:

- Their people like them.
- They communicate a lot.
- They're smart.
- They CARE.
- They listen well.
- They are respected.

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These are good efforts, but they're still incorrect.

Suppose a manager reported to you who did or embodied all of the above, and for the past three years, *he had never achieved a single objective that the organization had set for him*. Would you describe him as a good manager? Of course you wouldn't.

### **Your First Responsibility as a Manager Is to Achieve Results**

This may be the most important concept related to being a manager. Your first responsibility is NOT to your team of directs. It's NOT to your people. You should NOT worry about them first.

Your first responsibility is to deliver whatever results your organization expects from you. Whether you're a sales manager, and you have to "meet your numbers," or you're an accounting manager, and you have to "prepare the quarterlies," or you're a project manager, and you have to "deliver, on time, on budget, in scope," the thing that really matters is that you do what your company expects you to do.

For many managers, this creates a problem. You probably can't name your top five key results that you owe your organization this year. You most likely can't tick off on your fingers, *with ease*, the key things for which you're responsible. You may be able to say, "My boss wants me to focus in these areas," but that's not enough. You can't quantify what is expected of you.

About the only way to really feel good about what your responsibilities are is to have quantified goals, in numbers and percentages: "Higher than 92 percent call quality each week"; "Achieve 1.6 MM in sales"; "Maintain gross margins above 38 percent"; "Reduce shipping losses by 2.7 percent cumulatively year over year." (If not having these kinds of goals frustrates or worries you, perhaps you think that everyone else *has* clear goals. But don't worry. They probably don't either.)

The problem with not having clearly delineated responsibilities is that you can't make intelligent choices about where to focus. You begin to feel that "everything is important." You begin to "try to get everything done." Of course, you can't, and you probably know that already, because you're working long hours and never get everything done. You're not alone.

If you can't list your goals almost off the top of your head, make a note somewhere to go to your boss in the near future. Ask her: "What results do you expect of me?" "What are the measures you're going to compare me against?" "What are the objective standards?" "What subjective things do you look at to round out your evaluation of me?" (If you want to know more details about how to have this conversation, go to *There's a Cast for That*<sup>TM</sup>.)

Take notes, and go back to your desk and figure out what actions you're going to take in order to deliver those results.

A lot of managers fear this conversation. The thinking goes, "If there are no measures, they can't use them against me." But that type of thinking is shortsighted. There are always measures. If you don't know what they are, they may be being used against you. Your boss is privately and subjectively evaluating you. That's not what the marketplace does to your company, so it oughtn't be done to you.

Okay, so results come first. Managers who produce great results have more successful careers than those who produce average results. But even reading this statement probably bothers you a little, because you've likely met at least one manager who gets great results and does well *whom you despise*. There are managers who put results so far ahead of everything else that they justify all sorts of behaviors to achieve those results. There are even industries—Wall Street comes to mind—that are more likely to tolerate this kind of behavior from managers. When the ends justify the means for managers, bad things happen to the workers who report to them.

A focus *only* on results far too often leads to abuse of workers. The worldwide labor movement—unions—in fact traces its beginnings to

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soon after the beginning of . . . management. Managers were told, “Just get results,” and they did so, at the expense of the health and safety of their employees. So, fairly soon, the workers joined forces.

### **Your Second Responsibility as a Manager Is to Retain Your People**

Effectively managed modern organizations now measure *retention* in addition to results when they are evaluating a manager. It’s intended to be a brake against an unrelenting results focus. They want to ensure that a manager’s team members don’t leave the organization.

Replacing employees is expensive. When someone leaves, there’s the lost work that had been planned for, the cost of interviewing in both money and time, the likely higher salary that will be paid in the event of replacement, the time and expense of training the new employee, and the cost of less productivity by the new employee until that person can match the quality and quantity of work of the person who has left.

For today’s manager, it’s not enough to get results.

### **The Definition of an Effective Manager Is One Who Gets Results and Keeps Her People**

In the best companies in the world, when executives get together to review the talent of their managers, the results and retention of managers are always at the heart of the discussion. When there’s a discussion about who is best, who deserves a promotion, and who is “ready now” or going to be “ready next,” these two metrics come up over and over again: *How well did this manager do her job, as shown in her results? Did she retain her people?*

If you want to be an effective manager and if you want to maximize your job security (and, I would argue, your professional satisfaction), you’ve got to achieve these two metrics. You’ve got to

know how your organization (for results, it's usually your boss) measures them, and you've got to choose to spend your time on things that achieve them.

What are the things that you can DO that are most likely to achieve them?