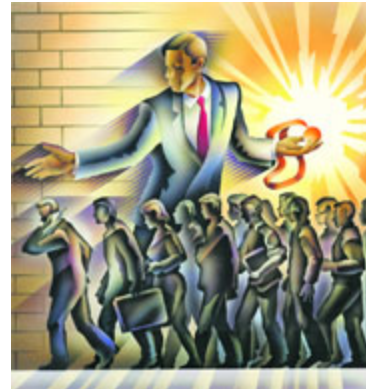


## Leading the path effectively

*It will no longer suffice to put in your best efforts only towards work; it is equally or rather more important, to concentrate on the people who get the job done. **Renuka Vembu** writes on the changing role and growing importance of being an effective manager*

Just as the 'human capital' is assuming greater significance across industries, people managing them are undergoing extreme pressure in an attempt to be all pervasive effective managers. And the good news is that Indian managers have been evaluated better than their western counterparts by their subordinates. This finding can be attributed to a host of factors like good educational foundation, strong family support, rich culture, grounded ethics and values, etc. S J Raj, Senior VP, HR, Newgen Software, explained, "Indian managers possess a 'nurturing orientation' towards their subordinates in addition to task-orientation. In India, familial relationships and values are deeply imbibed in people. Similarly, our historical past and values make dependency and abdication of power a positively perceived phenomenon. Thus, people in subordinate roles become more supportive to their managers." The nurturing task manager creates a climate of purposiveness and maintains a high level of productivity. But he also bestows love, care and affection for the well-being of his subordinates and is committed to their personal growth. Decision-making, instead of being centralized or directive, becomes participative reducing the barriers of communication. The personal character of the relationship, with a father-like role for the manager appears to be the most outstanding feature learnt from family and Indian culture, by the manager.



Chetan Shah, MD, Synogy India, echoed a similar thought, "We have a lot of opportunities to develop managerial skills right from childhood. It forms a part of our culture, the values being inculcated in the formative years like optimum utilization of resources and managing things while staying in joint families." He added that in the Indian corporate world, people still have the concept of 'earning the position' rather than getting it by virtue of a qualification. So even large corporates expect top school graduates to start at the bottom of the pyramid and rise up based on merit and performance. This gives an individual an excellent platform to develop as an effective manager. The exposure to working with people from varied backgrounds and cultures also helps Indian managers in becoming more effective.

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<p>- <b>Chetan Shah</b> MD, Synogy India</p>		<p>- <b>Satyapal Gangwar</b> Head, Program Management, MPS Technologies</p>	

## Key attributes

A manager has to be a multi-skilled person, who can do multi-tasking at various levels. A slew of characteristics, extending far beyond the professional demands, need to be ingrained in and amply exhibited by a manager. Satyapal Gangwar, Head, Program Management, MPS Technologies, stated, "An excellent communicator, result-oriented, focusing on strengths of team members, setting challenging targets and striving towards getting it completed, encouraging learning in spite of the mistakes, showing empathy, are some of the traits of an effective manager. At MPS, one of the most important traits is to acknowledge and appreciate team members and stand committed in their goals. We also believe in fairness and transparency and managers are expected to demonstrate it in their evaluations and appraisals of their team members all the time."

The other most important distinction that a manager needs to make is placing a challenging task yet being reasonable under the given circumstances. Soumitra Agarwal, Marketing Director, NetApp India, said, "Effectiveness of management depends on how a manager perceives his team. It is essential for a manager to understand what the workforce is capable of so as to optimize its efficiency through innovative management practices. A manager should be, above all, a good listener. People in a team, at all levels, have operational problems which need to be addressed. A manager should, under optimal circumstances, be able to recognize and address these issues. In most cases, such problems can appear to be minor glitches in the process—which is also a reason why these are generally overlooked—but in the long run, they lead to becoming substantial issues. Thus, a key component of effective management is managing different personalities. A manager must also be able to grasp the entire gamut of operations being carried out on a day-to-day basis, so as to have a better understanding of where things stand, and what direction do they need to be taken in for the task to be completed."

Also, putting forth one's views convincingly without imposing it is yet another quality of an effective manager. A long-term focus, without restricting oneself to the short-term priorities will take the manager and the team ahead. Deepak Deshpande, VP, HR, NetMagic, added, "Crisis management and dealing with ambiguity is a great quality of a leader. Managers with exceptional soft skills are always preferred and grow faster in their careers. Skills such as multi-tasking, listening, coaching and mentoring skills are very critical. As global organizations become more flat and matrix structures a norm, influencing skills are becoming vital. One needs to be also culturally sensitive. The competencies for a given position come first. Ability to partner relationships is a key factor in the success of a manager."

Shah had a different perspective to present, "A manager's job is almost entirely about the ability to influence other people's emotions—to create energy, excitement, enthusiasm, passion and engagement. The key requirement for the job is not the knowledge of what to do but the ability to get others to do it, to participate willingly and enthusiastically. The job of a manager is to help the people in his group achieve more than they would if left on their own."

Not just superficially leading the team but truly being with them at all times is the ultimate recognition of an effective manager. Raj asserted, "A good manager is one who does things and creates impact only through his people. He makes all efforts to understand his people, their aspirations and motivations and then unlock their

potential through the understanding that he has developed. By showing people the impact that their output has on the organization, he wedds employee needs to organizational objectives, thereby creating a positive impact on the productivity as well as employee satisfaction of his team."



### Impact of good managers

Leading by example is the most impactful way to influence and carry the team along with you. Showing how to do a task rather than merely saying it is the trump card of any successful and respected manager for employees to emulate. Initiating confidence in the team and playing a supportive role boosts the morale of the workforce, and helps them take the additional step required to step up the podium. Agarwal said, "An integral part of good management is a thorough understanding of the situation, the needs of it and above all, patience in difficult situations. A manager can positively impact his team by displaying the ability to delegate at the same time be in control of the activities and be the first to point out any deviations from the plans. A part of this involves setting realistic deadlines on tasks and assisting the team on activities by helping and providing the right resources."

### Leading by example

It is necessary for a manager to lead by example, as it is ultimately he who sets the standard for the team. Addressing the needs of the team is a way of providing direction and an opportunity to the team members to observe, understand and implement the best management practices. A good manager, who is capable of managing not just the tasks assigned to the team, but also addresses the needs of the team members in providing such services, is a good teacher for the team. Accurate understanding of the situation at hand and the corresponding correct decisions taken by the manager provide very good examples to the rest of the teams. Unless a manager can effectively demonstrate that he is on top of things and capable of executing the work, he will not be able to fully get a 'buy-in' from the team." According to Deshpande, "The only golden rule is 'walk the talk'. A manager should be first competent in his function or domain, only then can he command the respect of his troops."

Indrakumar, Manager, HR, NTrust Infotech, said, "The manager can lead his team by example by rolling-up his sleeves to show that when a job needs to be done everyone at every level needs to chip in and participate. He can do his part and make sure that what needs to get done gets done. It could even be on a daily basis like demonstrating his integrity to the team members. Team will look up to the

manager only if he fulfills the commitments, even if it is something as basic as showing up for a scheduled meeting on time.” Raj added that when an effective manager gives advice to team members, they do it by talking out of their experience. This is also substantiated by their actions, which are visible to all. In this way, employees consider their manager a credible source of all information—it also makes them put their trust in him, and connect well.”

### **Nurturing a budding manager**

No individual is a ready material for any job role. The spark when noticed has to be captured and given direction according to the position that needs to be filled. Decision-making capability, team spirit, delegation of authority, handling of responsibility, clarity of thought, crisis handling ability, being abreast with the latest know-how, updating one’s knowledge areas by undertaking certificate courses and appropriate training, and attending conferences and seminars, are some of the potential areas that need to be tapped and built on to make a good manager for the future.

Deshpande asserted, “A good leader takes risks and inspires others to follow their ideas. With effective training and mentoring, great leaders can be nurtured to reach their potential. But the vision to recognize opportunity and the charisma to drive others to attain it are innate abilities. The raw material has to be there from the start.” Indrakumar added, “Robust HR processes like good recruitment process, potential and 360 degree appraisal, competency mapping and development centres, need-based training, job rotation etc., will help in identifying and developing the budding managers.”

Raj felt that few approaches can be used in combination to develop a budding manager into an effective manager. Firstly, a mentor can be appointed to guide the budding manager to make a smooth transition and become effective. The mentor often “guides by example”—thereby helping the budding manager to benefit from his rich repository of experience. Secondly, he should be given adequate training to hone and develop skills that are critical to become an effective manager. Such training would be to develop “people” skills that make an ordinary manager effective. However, apart from all external help that can be given to a budding manager, real effectiveness can only be achieved through experience and thereby developing wisdom. Thus, the most important way to “cultivate” an effective manager is to provide him enriching experiences that will help him develop.

### **Middle management crisis**

While the lower cadre people do not give a massive blow to the company when they change jobs, there is always a contingency planning for the top management. The concern area is however, the dearth in good middle management level people, who form the most crucial link. Shah viewed, “Middle management is the most critical level as the person has to maintain a balance between the concern areas of his juniors as well as the demands from the seniors. The person should have good analytical and negotiating skills to keep the things rolling, and be versatile to manage such a profile with ease and efficiency.”

At MPS, they address this concern by hiring people from outside as well as grooming from within. While hiring from outside helps in bringing a different kind of energy

and skill sets that help in creating best practices, grooming from within acts as a good retention tool for above average employees and creates a sense of competition amongst other employees to excel.

Agarwal mentioned, "Perhaps the one reason why the middle management is generally not very well developed is because companies are not investing enough time and resources in identifying proper managerial candidates. Very often, in the pressure of the magnitude of tasks being carried out, more attention is paid to the tasks than the people carrying it out. This is what leads to workplace stress and subsequently an inconducive work environment. To avoid this, proper management practices have to be put in place for smooth functioning of day-to-day activities. A well segregated work structure is the first step to efficient management, and it is critical for managers at all levels to understand that."

In response to whether a middle management crisis actually existed, Deshpande stated, "Yes and no. Yes because at one level, this is about passion. Those who love being in technology often do not want to make the crossover as they see no value-add in other departments. Organizations have recognized that technical and functional skills on a job cannot be equated with managerial skills to lead a team. And no, because, organizations have proven models to develop and nurture leaders and a managerial pool. Today, we have fast track leadership models, learning centers focusing on leadership development programs. Hiring for attitudes could be the starting step to developing a good managerial pool."

Raj pointed out that the growth in the Indian economy has led to an increase in opportunities across all sectors. This has primarily impacted the middle management layer. People at these levels get opportunities to move to new avenues, even though they are not adequately trained, or do not possess enough expertise on their current domain. However, they are better than freshers, so can be molded to deliver according to the new job, and they are not expensive as compared to people with more experience. This demand has created a pull force, which results in depletion of the middle management layer across the sectors. Therefore, the shortage faced at this level, is more a matter of under-developed competencies rather than unavailability. "By identifying the key performers and developing detailed succession plans for each, organization needs to invest in their long-term development. By continuous investment for the first few years, such a talent pool can be developed," added Raj.

### **Managerial training programs**

Training forms the indispensable part of any job profile; to keep oneself up-to-date with the latest developments and to constantly upgrade skills to meet the needs of the immediate and external environment. A dedicated planned effort towards training to be catered as per the specialized needs of a particular job function forms the indispensable need. Deshpande said, "Managerial capability is an individualistic trait. Managerial or leadership development is a process, not just an awareness building exercise. It is true that learning facilitated in workshops are sometimes not linked to the realities of the work context. Hence training design and customization is imperative. There is no one-size-fit-all solution for all organizations or even departments. Although some of the basics of managerial qualities are common, different niche areas need to be stressed for different types of work assignments."

Shah concluded by saying, "Managerial training helps the employees to face the challenges of handling teams as well as carrying out the business confidently as they make use of these skills at work. This enables them to get a wider insight into day-to-day operations and the routine work gets interesting. They are prepared to face the challenges with appropriate solutions. Honing managerial skills is a journey and not a destination. Also such trainings are not a panacea for creating effective managers but the application of the learning in real life makes the difference." Organizations evidently need to create a process of continuously monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of such programs rather than expecting results overnight.