

# 8 Steps to Becoming the Manager your Employees Need

So much attention is paid to whether employees are “engaged” in their jobs or not. But managers at all levels need to periodically ask themselves a similar question: **Are YOU engaged in managing your employees?**

In an effort to “empower” their staffs, too many managers take a completely hands-off approach, leaving employees alone unless they really need help. But this can create a rudderless ship and, as author Bruce Tulgan calls it, an “under-management epidemic.”

The truth is, employees look to their immediate bosses to get what they want and need at work. To become the type of strong manager that your employees need, Tulgan suggests these eight steps in his new book, *It's Okay To Be the Boss*:

## 1. Get in the habit: Manage each day

The only alternative to “management by special occasion” is getting in the habit of managing every day. Start by setting aside one hour every day— before anything goes right, wrong or average. Concentrate on certain employees each day. The goal is to make these one-on-one sessions routine, brief, straight and simple—15 minutes should be all you need.

## 2. Learn to talk to employees like a performance coach

The best way to build rapport with employees is actually by talking about work. The most effective managers have a way of talking that is both authoritative and sympathetic; both demanding and supportive; both disciplined and patient.

This special way of talking looks a lot like performance coaching. Specifically:

- Focus on specific instances of individual performance.
- Describe the employee’s performance honestly and vividly.
- Develop concrete next steps.
- Don’t wait for problems to start before beginning to coach an employee.

## 3. Take it one person at a time

The alternative to “one-size-fits-all management” is to customize your approach to every person. The best way to tune in to individual employees is to continually ask yourself some key questions, such as: “What do I need to talk about with this person? How (and when and where) should I talk with this person?”

## 4. Make accountability real

Employees need to trust that their bosses will establish fair and accurate processes for tracking their actions and tying their behavior to real consequences.

Make sure your employees know they’ll have to explain their actions to you up close and often. Focus on concrete actions within the direct control of the employee. Separate your role as the boss from your *personal* relationships with employees.

## **5. Don't be shy about telling people what to do and how to do it**

How are employees supposed to meet—much less exceed—expectations if nobody tells them in clear, simple terms exactly what's expected of them? Successful managers give concrete directions, goals and deadlines.

- Ask employees to think out loud about how they might approach their assignments.
- Ask basic questions: “Can you do this? What do you need from me?”
- Ask probing questions: “How are you going to do that? What steps will you follow?”
- Ask short, focusing questions: “How long will each step take? What does your checklist look like?”

It is simply a fallacy that rehearsing the wrong ways of doing things is a good way to learn how to do things right. The best way to engage employees in adopting the best work practices is to convert those practices into standard operating procedures. Give employees step-by-step checklists whenever possible. Follow up, follow up and follow up some more.

## **6. Track performance at each step**

Knowledge is power: The more you keep track, the easier it will be to keep track. The greater your reputation for being all over the details, the more people will be likely to share information with you and answer your questions fully and honestly.

Monitor, measure and document performance—good, bad and average—with every employee, every step of the way.

## **7. Do more for some, less for others**

You can't do everything for everybody. But why would you want to?

Be generous and flexible with your time and your direction. Expand your repertoire of rewards and start using every resource you have to drive performance.

Make a point of talking with your best people to find out what they really want or need. Make the quid pro quo explicit and help people earn what they need every step of the way.

## **8. Solve small problems before they turn into big problems**

Without regular daily or weekly conversations, you have no natural venue in which to provide employees with regular evaluation and feedback—good, bad or neutral. As a result, dealing with problems becomes a difficult conversation to be avoided. Most problems grow with time, they don't disappear.

But with regular guidance and feedback, small problems can be solved early. Addressing one small problem after another is what continuous performance improvement actually looks like.

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