

You've Been Promoted to Manager! Now Master the Job with These 5 Leadership Traits

By Brian O'Connell

March 23, 2021

Most managers have a healthy sense of confidence and ambition. But those traits alone won't get you far in your first management role if you can't lead employees.

That's why an assessment of five key management traits is key before day one on the job. And it's up to the new manager to make that assessment.

"Brand-new managers should take the time to be measured in their approach," said Rhiannon Gibbs, director at U.K.-based Ad Esse, a management consulting firm. "Often, new managers think they have something to prove, so they jump quickly into their first big initiative with little or no understanding of how things operate in the workplace and what problems need solving."

Managers who leap into a new post headfirst risk losing the trust of their teams.

"To succeed in a management role, new leaders need to take the time to make evidence-based decisions, involve others in their decision-making process and communicate their decisions clearly," Gibbs said.

Fortunately, there are some good role models for new managers to follow when they assume a new leadership post.

"Mary Barra [CEO of General Motors] has led GM through incredibly difficult times for the company and the industry," said Cathleen Snyder, director of human resources at strategic HR Inc. in Cincinnati. "She's had to make some really difficult decisions and lead through difficult times. As a woman in a man's industry, she's not only broken the glass ceiling, but she did it as she gained buy-in. It's about embracing innovation and going places people haven't gone before."

Joo Hun Han, an associate professor in the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, points to John Veihmeyer, a former chairman and CEO of KPMG, as a good example of a visionary leader whom new managers can emulate.

"He believed in the power of meaning and purpose as a source of employee loyalty and engagement," Hun Han said. "He told his employees that 'We can see ourselves as bricklayers or cathedral builders.' "

Five Characteristics of an Effective New Manager

Taking the reins of a team isn't easy for new managers, but it is doable, as leaders like Barra and Veihmeyer have shown. The team leaders who succeed are the ones who can master these manager traits right out of the gate.

Trust. One of the most important traits a new manager can bring to the table is trust.

"A new manager needs to trust the people they hired to be able to manage their workloads and execute on projects," said Jessie Lajoie, people operations lead at Doodle, a Germany-based scheduling technology company. "New managers need to trust their teams to collaborate, project manage, follow up and push each other to go beyond the status quo. The more trust a manager places in a team, the more commitment, motivation and excellence they'll see from the team."

Curiosity. "I always tell new managers to be curious, lead with questions and remain open to other people's ideas," said Christina Apostolou, senior director of business leadership at Avalara, a cloud-based software provider in Seattle. "As a first-time leader, you need to ask as many questions as you can to equip yourself with knowledge of your team, projects and business processes."

It's also extremely important to be accessible. Set aside time to meet people individually so you can learn how to support your employees. "Learning from your employees will also help you identify the talent each team member brings to the group, which will allow you to better understand how to use and develop them."

Ownership. While new bosses don't necessarily have the authority or power of the owner, they should focus on solving a business problem for the organization as if the organization were their own, said Tyler Parris, an executive coach in Bellevue, Wash., and author of *Chief of Staff: The Strategic Partner Who Will Revolutionize Your Organization* (Tyler Parris Coaching, 2015).

Specifically, Parris advised bringing these owner-like traits to the table in a new leadership role:

- *Have a vision for the space you own—what's working, what's not and how to get your team to fulfill that vision.
- *Help others see your "big picture," and include team members in formulating your vision. Enlisting others' perspectives early on can minimize resistance.
- *Aim to achieve that vision without worrying how popular you are in the workplace.

Availability. "I see you, and I'm listening" is a great message to send to your new team.

"When I was an analyst at Intellectual Ventures, our new president and COO, Adriane Brown, stopped by my cubicle unannounced one day," Parris said. "She asked me who I was, what I did for the company and how I added value, and what did I think the company could do better. It was the first time a senior leader in a corporate environment had done that with me, and it not only made me feel like she was making an effort to get to know who everybody was, but that she was actually listening to my thoughts and observations."

Openness. New managers should view feedback as useful data rather than a character evaluation. "Feedback is a valuable tool," said Tammy Perkins, chief people officer at PMI Worldwide in Seattle. "It's a recipe for how to succeed. Use it to your advantage to further your career development."

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