

ARE YOU A GREAT MANAGER? TEST YOURSELF ON THESE 10 PERSONAL SKILLS *by Phillip Perry MA*



Are you a great manager? Easy to ask; tough to answer. Technical skills are only part of the picture. "Champion" managers also possess an array of personal attributes that help transform employees into top performers.

"Great managers first and foremost have people skills," notes Shep Hyken, a St. Louis-based consultant. "Managing on a high level means understanding and motivating employees."

So how good you are at managing those who work for you? Test yourself with this quiz. Rate yourself from one to 10 (the highest level) on each of the 10 questions. Total up: How close to 100 do you get? Now get to work on those areas that need improvement.

1. Do you challenge employees to set new performance goals?
Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

No matter how you judge performance, productivity, or efficiency- you must inspire employees to do better. "The great manager encourages employees to set high goals," says Fred Martels, president of People Solution Strategies, Chesterfield, MO. Each employee should continually establish specific, achievable goals and draw up an action plan for meeting them.

Ask the employees what they need from you, adds Martels: "Ask 'How do you see yourself achieving your goals and how can I help?'"

Finally, follow up with encouragement. "Employees want to be successful but they don't want to be left alone," cautions

Martels. "They want to know you are standing behind them."

2. Do you coach employees to overcome performance issues? Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

Motivated workers are great. But even the most enthusiastic workers encounter performance problems. That's when the great manager starts coaching.

Coaching encourages employees to generate creative solutions to performance problems. Because it emphasizes collaboration rather than confrontation, coaching improves workplace effectiveness while avoiding the costly stress generated by disciplinary sessions.

"The key to great coaching is to avoid being condescending, because that often makes the person feel guilty or defensive," notes Hyken. Identify performance parameters, communicate them to the employee and then give the person the tools to achieve them. "Your goal is to make the person grow," explains Hyken. "Help the employee push and stretch."

3. Do you encourage your employees to contribute new ideas?
Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

Employees who contribute ideas feel invested in the success of your business. And employees who feel part of the race will run the extra mile. "The manager must encourage employees to speak up and then listen to what they have to say," says Martels.

Include employees in decision making by encouraging them to suggest ways to do things better, suggests Martels. "Rather than be the designated problem solver, encourage a team effort. Ask stimulating questions such as: 'Here is our problem. How do we solve it?'"

Don't be too quick to kill ideas that have been tried and discarded before. Instead, let people shape a new direction with challenges such as these: "Tell me more. How would that work? What does everyone else think?" Or "This might work, but recall what happened before when we tried it. How can we make the idea work this time?"

4. Do you take a personal interest in your employees?
Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

Employees aren't just cogs in your machine: They're living human beings. And like you they respond favorably when you recognize that they have a life outside of work. "Little things mean a lot to employees," affirms Leil Lowndes, a NY City-based author of books on communications skills. "Learn their kids' names. Remember their birthdays. Say 'hello' in the hallways."

Get to know your employees' outside interests, she adds. "Asking about their hobbies and vacations will help you make better work assignments." Taking a personal interest in people's lives encourages them to stay with your business and commit to its goals.

5. Do you delegate well?
Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

"Great managers let go and delegate," says Hyken. "Too many times I've seen people without that ability attempt to micro manage every process. Then they get stressed out because they are trying to do everything themselves." That's bad, because

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employees who feel disengaged from events feel helpless and demoralized. And bad attitudes impact the bottom line.

The courage to delegate doesn't come easily. Hyken suggests using this formula: First visualize the result you want the employee to achieve. Then list the steps required to achieve that result, and the skills requisite to each step. Then rate the employee on a "1 to 5" basis on each of these skills. After training the employee to a "5" level for each skill, delegate the work with confidence.

6. Do you communicate your priorities and directions clearly?
Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

You know what you want from your employees. But do they? Employees can't perform well when they don't know what constitutes success. "Usually employees don't really know what's critically important to their managers," says Lowndes. "Employees usually assume their current managers share the values of previous ones. That might not be the case."

Great managers communicate what's important in clear language. Is it accuracy of work? Arriving on time? Being gracious with customers? Whatever your priorities, communicate them.

Finally, when an employee has not met your standards, couch your correction in words that inspire as well as challenge, suggests Lowndes. Begin with a positive statement such as this: "Bill, you usually handle customers so well. However, why did you [state the activity observed]?"

7. Do you resolve conflicts in a productive way?
Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

The great manager turns "bad" conflict into "good" results. "Conflict can be bad when people just scream at each other," says Hyken. "But it can be good when it leads to new solutions for old problems."

When two employees are in conflict, Hyken suggests, counsel each separately. You might start with a statement such as this: "I see this happening in the work place. . ." and "Tell me what you are seeing."

Follow up with a statement designed to assess how the conflict affects the employee: "I feel this way about what is happening. . ." and "Tell me what you are feeling."

Very often conflict is emotional. "If you feel the individual is too upset to talk rationally, suggest that you talk at a later time," says Hyken. This will give the person some time to achieve perspective.

Keep the conversation on an objective basis. Emphasize the consequence of not resolving the conflict in terms of decreased productivity or even job termination.

To a large extent you will do better as a resolver if you are a good negotiator. Find out what each party to the conflict wants, then figure out how the need can be met.

7. Do you behave in a professional way at work? Are you a role model for your employees?

Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

"Personal characteristics and attitudes are important and often overlooked elements in a competency model," says Florence M. Stone, a New York City-based author of management books. "Here we are talking about your ability to be a role model."

Stone gives these examples of professional behavior:

- Dedication to work and willingness to put in long hours.
- Giving credit to employees rather than to oneself.

- Avoiding rumors and excessive socializing at work.
- Communicating in a thoughtful way.
- Arriving at work and meetings on time.

To see how others perceive you, Stone suggests asking your boss a question such as this: "I'd like to be perceived as a real leader. Do you think I have the respect of my team and if not what can I do to obtain it?" Your boss may give you valuable guidance.

8. Do you inspire your employees?

Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

Are you cheerful? Do you project enthusiasm? In other words, do you have a dynamic personality that inspires your employees?

"A great manager must be able to inspire and enable employees to perform at their best," says Ian Jacobsen, a Morgan Hill, Ca., based management consultant.

Enthusiasm begins with a genuine interest in other people, which often manifests as simple friendliness. The manager should never miss a chance to be friendly in behavior and speech. Greet everyone with a 'Good morning!' "Employees will almost always set their whole day by how their managers treat them in the morning," says Jacobsen.

10. Do you listen well?

Never: 1. Seldom: 3. Often: 5. Regularly: 10.

"Great managers are clear communicators," says Mel Kleiman, a Houston-based management consultant. "And communications is a two-way street: We're talking not only about speaking and writing but also listening."

One way to become a better listener is to volunteer for your organization's mentor program, if there is one established. Be mentored by a senior manager and offer to mentor a junior one. Being a mentor teaches you to listen better.

Here are some tips on being a good listener:

- Encourage the employee to open up.
- Summarize and repeat what you hear. This gives the employee an opportunity to correct misapprehension.
- Ask the employee to express feelings about the issue.
- Keep your focus on the employee. Don't start telling your own stories.
- Encourage the employee to generate solutions to problems. Don't give advice.

Score yourself: How did you do on your 10-point test? Now that you have your score, ask your boss to rate you on the same items. Then have a trusted employee do the same. Comparing the different scores should provide some insight into where your performance needs improvement.

All of these management skills feed off each other. You won't be able to delegate well, for example, if you are a poor communicator. And you won't be able to resolve conflicts if you don't listen well.

The common denominator for all of the "great manager" skills is a focus on the employee, notes consultant Martels. "Great managers know the job is not about them, but about how well they can motivate their employees to commit themselves to the success of the business."

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