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CorpLearning.com
CorpLearning@CorpLearning.com
1.800.203.6734



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Four Critical Things New Supervisors and Managers Need to Know

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D | Corporate Learning Institute

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Becoming a new manager catches many unaware of the new expectations for their role. Recent data suggests that up to *60% of frontline managers fail* within the first two years in their role. *26% felt they were not ready for the role*, and *58% reported receiving no management training at all* (HRCI, 2013).

How can we begin to address the needs of new managers and supervisors?

This article offers useful information about how to help new managers and supervisors make an effective transition to their new roles.

According to Harvard Business Review, (HBR, July, 2008), new managers and supervisors face new challenges that fall under three main areas:

1. Balancing multiple demands from new constituents
2. Influencing and persuading others
3. Delegating wisely

To these I add, "**Seeing the big picture**", because no one can get to new place without truly seeing themselves in context with the big picture.

1. Seeing the big picture

In my practice of coaching hundreds of new hires, I have found that most are in need of seeing how their new role fits into the bigger picture. It's almost like a skydiver parachuting into a location without benefit of seeing a map.

It is critical for new managers to understand how their role aligns to their company's vision of the future. Like reading a map, new managers need to fully understand the lay of the land, to understand their positional location on it, and how they can be most effective in helping achieve success.

I have seen companies offer carefully articulated success strategies only to watch new managers fail to fully understand the big picture or worse, not assert themselves to understand the strategy and its implications for them.

Coaching Tip: If you are a new manager or supervisor, it is imperative that you learn about and understand your company's success strategy and how your role plays an important part of achieving that strategy.

2. Balancing multiple demands from new constituents

New managers and supervisors find themselves suddenly beholden to numerous people, from up and down the stakeholder chain, as well as sideways across the organization in other functional areas. I have seen these with nearly every new manager as they struggle to understand how to prioritize their workflow.

Failure to develop business savvy here is costly – make the wrong person mad, and you could jeopardize your career. Here are three common sense findings to help new managers prioritize their work request:

- Who will you need on your side, to cooperate on future work?
- Who, if you don't help them, will pose a significant threat to helping you in the future?
- Who is in need of your help? How can your assistance be seen as a way for you to ask for help at a later time?

3. Influencing and persuading others

Prioritizing work requests also requires negotiations skills. I coach new managers to assert themselves when receiving incoming work. I have found that it can be useful for new managers to “push back” in a respectful way to new work requests.

I ask new managers to communicate their willingness to be useful, and at the same time, be honest about their real time availability. New managers ask about assignment deadlines in a neutral voice, and suggest options if needed to the delivery date. These options can include delivering part of the request on time, with more to be delivered on a more realistic timeline.

Coaching Tip: New managers will experience tension as they hold their ground on some deliverables. It takes time to teach whom to respond to, when and why.

4. Delegating wisely

New managers are prone to needing to please others – that can mean that they take on too much work themselves. I have seen new managers unsure of when to delegate, how much, and to whom. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to helping new managers delegate more effectively. But one way to improve delegation is to consider the following:

- ✓ Is the work urgent and important enough or difficult enough that the manager should complete it without delegating? If not, then delegate it to the best candidate based on two criteria:
 - Ability to do the work, and
 - Willingness to do the work.

Coaching Tip: Delegating situationally involves the following suggested approaches:

- Direct those who are unwilling/unable
- Coach those who are willing but not quite able
- Collaborate with those who are able but not as willing
- Release work to those who are both ready and able to take it on

Learning to be a new manager takes time. I see many new managers begin to get a foothold in their new roles at 6-8 months. Until then, managers can expect to experience the normal learning curve of trial-and-error learning.

For Further Reading:

HBR Blog Network, July 2008, [Blogs.HBr.org/2008/07/helping-new-managers-to-succeed-1/](https://blogs.hbr.org/2008/07/helping-new-managers-to-succeed-1/)

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