

# Managing at the appropriate altitude



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Your good work has been noticed. Now you're sitting in your boss' office as he or she and a representative from human resources explain an offer for a supervisory position that they'd like you to consider.

It all seems a bit surreal. You try to focus on their message as your mind races with thoughts of both excitement and anxiety.

Several potential challenges await you with your promotion:

- Learning technical aspects if leading a new or broader area.
- Managing former peers.
- Tactfully coaching employees on areas for growth.
- Gaining awareness of the legalistic considerations of managing people.

Based on my experience, however, perhaps the most significant adjustment is the fundamental change from accomplishing things personally to accomplishing things through others. Let's face it — at least one of your traits that caught management's eye was your ability to get things done.

You've been Super Doer. That's partly what got you the promotion. So the natural tendency is to continue doing what's been successful — just do more of it.

But now you need to become Super Developer. That's easier said than done, especially if you now are managing the area where you cut your teeth. That's because, in the short term, it often will be more efficient to just do something yourself. However, it is almost always more effective to develop others to do it and to grow them in the process.

The math is pretty simple. Let's say you inherit responsibility for a team of 10 average employees. Each has a productivity of 1.0. If you focus on "doing," perhaps you realize a personal productivity twice that of a typical employee (2.0). The sum output for you and your team is 12 (10 x 1.0 + 2.0).

But if you focus your attention on building your team (helping them recognize waste, confidently solve problems, learn new skills) you might double the productivity of each individual. Now the sum out-

put for your team is 20 (10 x 2.0). It's not even close.

But this goes way beyond productivity. By increasing their skills and providing challenging work and appropriate recognition, you'll have a more engaged team as they sense their growth and value increasing. That results in less turnover and greater innovation.

An analogy I like to use is finding the proper altitude to fly. Front line positions require folks to be at ground level in the details, similar to "walking the beans." Front line supervisors typically fly at very low altitudes similar to crop dusters. They are close to the daily action, but influence a much broader area than the employees they supervisor. Depending on the size of the organization, senior executives need to be cruising at a much higher altitude, determining what's going on in grain markets, job markets, monitoring technology changes, and determining the strategy for next year's crops.

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But just as gravity constantly pulls planes toward the ground, most managers (including myself) are constantly pulled to a lower level of activity than is appropriate. We tend to confuse a real crisis (the building is on fire) with a perceived crisis (someone burned popcorn in the microwave again). It takes constant self-awareness, courage, confidence and calmness to keep the plane at the correct

altitude.

A key ongoing decision for every organization is, "Who should be making this decision?"

Following that discussion in your boss' office, guidance for flying at the appropriate altitude for your new position should be included in the transition plan. It's an essential ingredient to ensuring you earn your wings.

## RICK SAYS

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