

THE MEANINGFUL MANAGER

HOW TO MANAGE WHAT MATTERS

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APPENDIX I

How to Increase Meaningful Management across Your Organization

In my experience, managers do not have the impact that they could and should in most organizations. Your managers should be elevating the performance, security, and growth of your team members substantially. From a simple financial perspective, your managers should be creating value at least to match what you invest in them. This breaks even on your investment (if they exceed the cost of capital). Otherwise, your organization might be better off without managers!

Does every manager in your organization make a meaningful impact and create the level of value that they need to? Unfortunately, this is unlikely. Are any of your managers having a negative impact on the performance, security, and growth of

their people and your organization? In other words, would any of your people be better off without their manager? I hope not.

Here are a few of the common problems in many organizations and solutions that could help managers be as impactful as possible:

PROBLEM: Lack of clear expectations. If you ask one hundred managers what it means to be a manager, you will receive one hundred different answers. Very few organizations define what it means to be a manager or leader within their organization, and many blend playing and coaching. Since many managers only have one or two direct reports, they need to make a substantial impact as individual contributors as well.

SOLUTION: Create clear agreements for what it means to be a manager in your organization. Keep it simple—performance, security, and growth. Ensure that people understand what's required before they apply to be a manager, and have simple policies for them to follow. Resist the urge to have twenty-five management and leadership competencies. The 80/20 rule applies. Create agreements based on desired outcomes that allow freedom and flexibility. Make sure there are clear differences across titles like manager, senior manager, director, VP, and so on. Ensure consistency in the different departments across your organization. Revise and update your agreements based on your organization's needs. Provide recommended resources for people related to each agreement, such as this book. There are excellent, inexpensive resources for all relevant skills and agreements.

PROBLEM: Lack of measurement. Because expectations for managers are unclear, performance agreements aren't created, and performance isn't managed.

SOLUTION: Measure manager performance against your clear agreements. How are they increasing the impact of their people? How are they impacting your organization?

PROBLEM: Lack of data and feedback. Most managers and leaders receive feedback on their performance only once per year, and the data and feedback aren't always aligned to a clear set of agreements.

SOLUTION: Proactively gather and share feedback about their performance. Just like everyone else, managers are masterpieces and works in progress. Managers need regular feedback on their performance so they can evolve and improve. Comprehensively look at data related to their performance and their team's performance. Use a mix of quality, quantity, complexity, and influence measures as part of your review process.

Managers should proactively search for ways to improve. Help them by using tech and ceremonies where people provide feedback on what's going well and what can be improved. Use engagement surveys and review processes that focus on performance, security, and growth, and ensure people can provide anonymous feedback in case there's a psychological safety issue.

PROBLEM: Lack of accountability. Because manager performance isn't measured, managers aren't held accountable for shortfalls and oversights.

SOLUTION: Hold your managers accountable using your clear agreements and measurements. Sometimes you may need to place a manager on a performance improvement plan because they aren't fulfilling their management duties. For example, managers must be able to hold their people accountable for high performance, and they must actively participate in conflict resolution instead of hiding from conflict.

PROBLEM: Lack of initiative and learning. The last thing that most people want to do is receive a promotion and then admit that they have no idea what it means to manage people.

SOLUTION: Make it okay to ask for help and support. Have your CEO or another senior leader talk with your managers about how no one has all the answers. Make it easy and normal for managers to ask their managers, a peer, or a people/HR team member for help and support. Give new managers a manager buddy to help bring them up to speed. People management can be hard and lonely, especially as a first-time manager afraid to ask for help.

PROBLEM: Lack of training. Most managers receive little to no training. Even when training is provided, it's often not reinforced, incorporated into their "real work," or aligned against clear agreements for managers.

SOLUTION: Provide a comprehensive manager training program. Make it clear that there are new agreements for people managers. Organizations should have two employee experience calendars: one aligned with the annual calendar and the other aligned to individual start dates. Schedule monthly manager education sessions for all of your managers to reinforce critical, timely topics. Provide additional onboarding experiences for new managers, and onboard internal promotions as if they are new to your organization. Train everyone in your organization (not just managers) on fundamental skills like giving and receiving feedback in an ongoing way.

PROBLEM: Lack of partnerships with people and HR teams. Most managers don't know why, how, and when to partner with people and HR teams.

SOLUTION: Proactively build relationships between your managers and your people/HR team. Make it simple and normal to partner with people and HR teammates. Have people and HR contacts for every manager, and make it obvious which people and HR contacts help with different topics.

PROBLEM: Lack of motivation. Many people only become people managers because it's the only way to be promoted. They don't actually want to manage people, but they want to be a director or VP someday.

SOLUTION: Create a dual-track approach to promotions so people can be promoted to leadership positions without becoming people managers. This keeps people from

taking on people management responsibilities they don't actually want just to get the title they want. I worked at IBM for a number of years, and this was something that IBM did exceedingly well. You could be promoted to the equivalent of an SVP without any people management responsibilities. People could go back and forth between management and nonmanagement roles. There were clear agreements for what was necessary to be promoted to an executive role as an individual contributor. It was challenging and not based on tenure in role. Create something similar in your organization. Also, help people understand what it takes to be a meaningful manager before they become one, with a manager preview program.

PROBLEM: Lack of technology. Most organizations default to only training managers rather than providing technology as well.

SOLUTION: Provide your managers with the right technology for people management. Help them create, align, and prioritize goals and have better one-on-ones with their people. Make sure they can gather feedback on what's going well and what can be improved so they can make better decisions. Help them collaborate with their team and across teams. Support them with technology as you ask them to support the performance, security, and growth of their people.

Help managers understand evidence-based best practices for their highest leverage activities. Goals, one-on-ones, feedback, decision-making, and collaboration encompass the vast majority of a manager's impact. Make them comfortable

with gathering feedback and continuously improving. Ensure they've mastered these fundamentals, and provide additional education and coaching when they do.

If this sounds like a significant investment, it is. However, you can start with this book, clear manager agreements, and build from there.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Smith, PhD, is a cognitive psychologist, inventor, and speaker who believes that compassion, persistence, and experimentation are the keys to solving any problem. Through live workshops, on-demand learning, and coaching, Jeff has empowered well over ten thousand people to deepen their skills in leadership, people management, giving and receiving feedback, deep listening, and learning.

Jeff, his partner, and their adorable, previously stray dogs are grateful to live among the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern USA.