



## Making the Transition to Management

Perhaps one of the most enjoyable tasks for an effective manager is to be able to make the offer of a management assignment to an employee currently working as an individual contributor. For the manager, it provides him/her with a chance to reward the employee with recognition and status. It also serves as a clear message to the employee that effective performance is acknowledged and that the company is ready, willing, and able to move the employee's career forward.

At Learning Dynamics, we often partner with our clients to assist with the transition process. Too often, we see that the full consideration of all the nuances within the change are not respected. In short, it is not as simple as it seems, and the assimilation process can take much longer than it should or, worse, fail altogether.

Typically, here's what happens:

- An employee demonstrates exceptionally effective work in her/his job and that effort and skill is clearly evident to managers. This performance is consistent, regardless of obstacles or changes with the work process.
- Often, the employee has become the unofficial team leader, and his/her peers rely on the employee – with successful outcomes.
- The employee has received as much formal praise as possible, including raises and non-managerial promotions.
- After enough time has passed to be sure that this high performance is consistent and fully reliable, management makes the decision to offer the employee a supervisory (management) job. Typically, the employee accepts the offer as a logical step in the

career development. Often, she/he has requested the promotion previously.

In many cases, this approach is approximately equal to throwing the employee into the deep end of the swimming pool and watching what happens. The world that the employee left behind (ideally) and the one he/she has entered are very different on a number of levels, and sometimes senior leaders may not be aware of the full impact.

Let's take a look at what managers can do to ease the transition. It starts all the way back when the employee verbalizes the desire to become a supervisor. One manager we know has a great question he asks to help the employee understand what is involved in the transition. He asks:

*“Are you ready to accept a job in which all your praise and rewards will be determined by the behavior and performance of other people?”*

For an individual contributor to realize that new reality is sometimes a real eye opener. Up until now, virtually all their success has been the result of their highly hands-on effort. Leading the charge, getting it done fast and correctly, even finding new innovative ways to get the job done has been the employee's mainstay. Now, looking at it through the supervisor's lens, that all changes. If we can clear away all the other motivations and desires and rely on the simple one that others' behaviors will determine how you will be evaluated, the change is profound.

When we realize what is at stake in this situation, the risk is significant. First of all, we've taken our best worker from doing the work. Second, without the proper training and transitional coaching, we risk his/her failure as a supervisor. That's two losses of valuable resources. While we have seen

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some scenarios where the employee realizes that he/she really isn't comfortable or effective in the new role, they can return to their previous role, but that is less likely. Typically, failure means leaving the company.

## Recommendations

So, what are the steps and techniques that managers can employ to increase the likelihood of a quick and successful transition?

- From the very start, when either the employee approaches the manager with a desire for the supervisor's job, or the company approaches the employee with that offer, the transition should start before the change is official.
- The employee and manager sit down and create a transition pathway. It includes goal setting, new training, new assignments, more feedback, more visibility and an agreed-upon schedule.

- The employee is assigned to a performance coach, sometimes from outside the company.
- If possible, the employee is officially named team leader of her/his department, with a formal announcement and a salary increase.
- Once the full supervisor's job is given to the employee, with formal announcements and another salary bump, the employee continues on the developmental pathway and grows into the new job.

Of course, all of this is based on the high performance the employee demonstrates, because this transition will require him/her to apply that powerful work ethic to a whole new set of challenges and situations.

If we start with the right decisions about the employee, and he/she is fully prepared for the transition, the outcome can very powerful and actually inspirational to others.

