

Managing **People** and **Processes**



*Leadership without management
is vision without fulfillment*

Dr. John A. Kline

New books and articles on leadership appear almost daily. The emphasis on effective leadership is commendable, but we must never underestimate the criticality of effective management, for leadership without management is vision without fulfillment.

Leaders may set the direction, but managers get the job done. They do it by managing people and managing processes, which includes everything that happens between the start and end points and all activities performed by all persons involved in those processes.

First-level and mid-level officers, noncommissioned officers, and civilian managers, as well as senior officers and top civilian personnel—all face the dual task of managing people and managing processes. If you are or aspire to be a manager, read on: This article includes seven ways to help you perform that role more effectively.

Demonstrate a Desire to Serve

Federal service—both military and civilian—attracts those who want to serve. The desire to serve causes these people to seek and accept managerial opportunities. As personnel are promoted to levels of higher responsibility, they must retain this desire; not only is it the right thing to do, it also is effective. It engenders trust, satisfaction, and productivity from subordinates. Simply stated, people accomplish more with managers who demonstrate a desire to serve.

But it takes more than just *wanting* to be an effective servant-manager to be one. Those who desire to serve must attend to their own character (who they are) and competence (what they can do). Managers with a true desire to serve will work at developing their skills to do the job; but they also will demonstrate the moral, ethical, and spiritual values necessary to manage effectively.

Eliminate Process Interference Factors

A process interference factor is anything that stands in the way of performing the process or completing the task. Process performance problems are often “rooted in management’s failure to provide the complete spectrum of resources—namely, time, tools, guidance, policies, and facilities.”¹ When a manager discovers a process interference problem, his or her first action should be to supply required resources.

If a manager asks subordinates to complete a one-hour task in 10 minutes, they may have the willingness, skills, and tools to do the task; but they will fail. They will experience process interference because there simply is not enough time to complete the task. If subordinates do not receive adequate training, have the tools necessary to do the job, receive proper guidance, understand the policies, or have the required facilities, they likely will fail—not through their own fault, but because they experience process interference. Managers should not expect their subordinates—no matter how good they are—to be able to succeed without appropriate and necessary resources. Effective managers monitor the process so they can remedy anything that interferes with its completion.

Continually Improve the Process

Successful managers not only eliminate process interference factors, they search for better ways of doing things. They are not content to simply fight fires and manage crises; they improve the process by implementing productive change.

The four-step PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) Cycle (often called the Deming Cycle), which was conceived by Walter Shewhart and popularized by W. Edwards Deming, can be used for the improvement of almost any process.² Here are the steps:

- **PLAN:** Develop a plan to improve the process

- **DO:** Execute the plan on a small scale
- **STUDY:** Confirm or make adjustments to the plan
- **ACT:** Implement the plan or study the adjustments

Implementing process change is often difficult. Managers of change may hear such killer phrases as “We’ve always done it this way,” or “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Combat these attitudes by putting “it” in perspective. Find examples of how we once believed something would never work, but we were wrong. Agree that the old way was good for its time, but give concrete facts and examples of how conditions have changed. Show how the basic assumptions of doing business have changed.

Finally, people need to understand their part in implementing change and how they will fit into the organization after change occurs. This last point is important because those people who help implement change and know their role after the change more likely will be supportive of the change and work to make it happen.³

Where do managers get the ideas for change? While they may generate ideas themselves or get them from reading trade journals or from others who manage similar processes, ideas often come from their own subordinates—the people they manage. Managers can (and should) learn from subordinates.

Know Your People

A few years ago, I read that nearly two-thirds of managers surveyed said that dealing with their people took too much time away from their work. I have news for them—their people are their work!

Successful managers know about the people who work for them. They learn by walking around the workplace, interacting with people, and listening to what others say about them. Here is a way to see how well you really know your people. First, make a list of all the people who report to you; if you have trouble, then that should tell you something. Next, write down important information about each one. Finally, see if you can readily answer the

Seven Ways to Effectively Manage People and Processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a Desire to Serve • Eliminate Process Interference Factors • Continually Improve the Process • Know Your People • Communicate Effectively • Listen to Understand • Be an Encourager

following questions (or similar ones) about each person.

1. How long has the person been in the job?
2. What other positions has the person held?
3. Does the person like his or her current job?
4. How does the person get along with others?
5. Is the person considered to be a team player?
6. How well does the person perform on the job?
7. Does the person have any limiting disabilities?
8. Does the person welcome challenges on the job?
9. What are the person's strengths and weaknesses?
10. How does the person react to criticism and crisis?
11. What are the person's interests away from the job?
12. What are the person's desires, aspirations, and goals?
13. What motivates the person to do his or her best work?
14. Are you providing the person opportunities for growth?
15. Are you using the person's knowledge, skills, and abilities?
16. Does the person think you demonstrate appropriate behavior?
17. Does the person think you encourage and care about your people?
18. Does the person feel he or she can communicate honestly with you?
19. Does the person believe that you listen carefully and nonjudgmentally?
20. Have you let the person know how much you care about him or her?

The first 13 questions have implications for you as a manager. The last 7 questions focus directly on your responsibility as a manager. If you do a good job answering all 20 questions about each person who reports to you, then you know your people pretty well.

Communicate Effectively

In 1938, Chester I. Barnard concluded that communication was the main task of managers.⁴ Studies since that time indicate senior civilian leaders and military commanders place the highest value on effective communication because they know productivity depends upon it.⁵ The primary responsibility for

communication in any organization rests with management, since subordinates take cues on how to communicate from those above them. What can you do to improve communication in your organization?

Keep communication channels open. I just alluded to the responsibility that managers bear for communication downward and within the organization. Managers also must communicate often with their superiors to make certain their individual units support the overall goals of the larger organization. Healthy communication promotes healthy organizations.

Encourage feedback. While you should not encourage indiscriminate feedback in the form of idle talk or personal gripes, do communicate your desire for feedback—both positive and negative—on issues and areas that can help the organization. Then make certain you positively reinforce people rather than punish them for sharing such information. When talking with subordinates, use statements such as “Tell me more about it” or “That’s interesting,” or lead with questions that cannot be answered “yes” or “no” to find out what’s happening in your organization.

Break down barriers to understanding. Three communication problems pose barriers to understanding:

- **Not sharing the same meaning for words.** A person says, “I will be there in 5 minutes.” To him, 5 minutes means “soon—perhaps anytime in the next 15 minutes or so.” To you, 5 minutes means “300 seconds, and not 1 second more.”
- **Misinterpretation of actions.** When someone’s cell phone rings softly and the person leaves the meeting to answer it, others might interpret his behavior as rude or inappropriate when in fact he has been expecting to hear news concerning his brother, who is having open heart surgery that day.
- **Misunderstanding vocal cues.** Listeners must be careful not to make false inferences or draw faulty conclusions about what people mean based on the sound of their voices. Remember, some people

are smooth talkers but poor performers. Others are poor in conversation, but they get the job done. Be careful not to let a person’s voice unduly influence you.

Communicate often with key personnel.

Show genuine interest and concern for them and their concerns by what you say and how you say it. If possible, maintain an open-door policy—both because you want to talk often with key personnel and because it communicates to them that you view them as important. Be natural, genuine, and sincere, always respecting their point of view. Do not become defensive, assume a superior manner, or pretend to be what you’re not. Above all, don’t dominate the conversation. Remember, you need to hear from them.

Listen to Understand

Effective managers listen both to find out what is going on and to understand and show positive regard for those around them. Managers may not stay in their position if they don’t listen well. Chief executive officers and other senior managers declare that poor listening is the number one problem in their organizations; at the same time, they note that good listening is a major determinant of success.⁶ Managers must be able to listen empathically, listen critically, and listen to gain information.

Listening empathically allows the manager to get into the world of another—to see, hear, feel, and understand as that person does. Empathic listening builds trust and respect and communicates that you care about others and what they are saying. Be careful not to interrupt others or become judgmental of what they say. Finally, rather than responding immediately, reflect on what the person just said by summarizing the essence of the message. This practice demonstrates that you were listening, causes you to think again about what was just said, and gives the other person a chance to clarify the message if your summary shows you didn’t understand. Furthermore, the practice keeps you focused on what the other person is saying—rather than on what you plan to say.

Listening critically is necessary for managers who must make important decisions

Bear Bryant on management: “If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, then we did it. If anything goes real good, then you did it.”



and lead others in making decisions that affect the people and the group processes. Managers must know their own strengths and weaknesses as critical listeners, and they also need to understand any biases that may affect their judgment. Finally, managers always must consider the source of the information—for information is no better than its source.

Listening for information is so critical that managers always must be spring-loaded and ready to listen. Many factors affect how well we do or don't hear: our emotional or physical health, environmental factors such as room temperature or outside noise, or stress factors such as weariness or things weighing on our mind. Skilled managers work hard to offset or minimize such factors. They also listen for ideas, not just facts. Concentration exclusively on the facts can cause listeners to miss main ideas. Facts may be interesting in their own right, but the reason facts are given usually is to develop a generalization or support an idea.

Be an Encourager

Competent managers realize the importance of encouragement. People flourish and processes are performed better when managers encourage their subordinates.

Put courage into people by telling them you appreciate them. An author admiring photographs taken by a professional photographer commented, “You must have a great camera,” to which the photographer replied, “You must have a great typewriter.” The author was no doubt trying to encourage the photographer, but his choice of words was not encouraging.

The prefix *en* means *in*. We literally put courage *in* others when we *encourage* them. We take courage *away* when we *discourage* them. Encouraged people have the courage to work hard, try new things, and persevere even in tough situations.

Create good performance through praise.

First, don't save feedback for the annual appraisal; give immediate praise. Second, be specific; just saying “good job” is nice, but not so helpful as telling why you thought someone did a good job. Third, tell people how their action was appropriate and helped the organization and the other people who work there. Finally, encourage them to keep up the good work. Do these things and subordinates will work at letting you catch them doing things right.

Share credit; take blame. This advice is axiomatic, yet under-practiced. Managers who follow it will win the admiration and respect of both superiors and subordinates. The great football coach Bear Bryant said, “If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, then we did it. If anything goes real good, then you did it.” By sharing credit, effective managers demonstrate they have built a strong team; by taking blame, they communicate their willingness to accept the responsibilities of being a manager.

Realize that doing the seven things discussed in this article encourages your subordinates. People are encouraged when they know they are working for a manager who demonstrates a desire to serve the best interests of the organization and its people, works hard to eliminate

process interference, seeks to continually improve the process, makes an effort to know them as individuals, communicates effectively, listens to understand, and encourages others.

Whether you are a manager with a hundred or more people reporting to you or a project manager with a team of three people, follow these seven guidelines and, in time, you will be managing more people and processes. And you will be doing an excellent job!

ENDNOTES

¹Peter A. Land: *Managing to Get the Job Done: How to Make Sure Your Employees Are Ready, Willing, and Able to Succeed*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994, p. 3.

²Andrea Gabor: *The Man Who Discovered Quality: How W. Edwards Deming Brought the Quality Revolution to America*, New York Times Books, 1990; Penguin 1992.

³John A. Kline, “How to Implement Change in Your Organization,” *Armed Forces Comptroller* (Winter 2007), pp. 35-38.

⁴Chester I. Barnard: *The Functions of the Executive*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938.

⁵John A. Kline: “Leaders Communicating Effectively,” in Richard I. Lester and A. Glenn Morton, *Concepts for Air Force Leadership, AU-24, Maxwell AFB*: Air University Press, 2001, pp. 309-314.

⁶John A. Kline: *Listening Effectively: Achieving High Standards in Communication*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall Publishers, 2003, p. 6.