

Crucial Management Skills

Research from around the globe with companies of all sizes have provided us with information on building skills in 12 of the most crucial managerial skills areas, regardless of industry or company size.

Read our thought provoking and skill building report - and then begin to implement these new skills for yourself and the other managers and leaders in your organization.

Competencies covered in this report include:

- Appraising People and Performance
- Disciplining and Counseling Employees
- Listening and Organizing
- Setting Goals and Standards
- Thinking Clearly and Analytically
- Giving Clear Information to Employees
- Getting Unbiased Information
- Identifying and Solving Problems
- Making Decisions and Weighing Risks
- Planning and Scheduling Work
- Training, Coaching, and Delegating
- Time Management and Prioritizing

1. Appraising People and Performance

To be effective an effective on-the-job manager, all of your employees need to know what they are expected to achieve. Performance management includes the process of identifying employees' goals, merging them with the organization's goals, and setting performance standards. It is a time to make certain that they understand what is required and are developing the skills and knowledge they need to be high performers.

Managing performance means keeping employees focused on the right goals and helping them accomplish their job successfully. Both managers and employees share in this responsibility.

According to a recent study, 52 per cent of workers want their supervisors to state performance goals more clearly. Nearly 40 per cent want the issue of their performance on the job more closely tied to both their development plans and their compensation outcomes.

- You focus your employee on the important performance areas that impact your departmental or organizational goals.
- You develop performance goals and standards that are measurable and meaningful, and communicate these to the employee. This way, he or she will know what you are appraising performance against later in the year.
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Goals and Standards:

A goal is a statement of a specific result that is to be achieved in a stated time frame. A standard refers to ongoing performance criteria. Standards are quantitatively or qualitatively expressed (for instance, production rates, safety standards, attendance, etc.).

Monitoring performance is an ongoing phase, extending throughout the performance period. Managers should communicate regularly with employees on how well they are performing. This will prevent "surprises" during the appraisal meeting.

In uncertain economic times several major companies have turned to a process that has been unfavorably dubbed "Rank and Yank". This method has performance appraisal tied to performance standards, creating bands of employees and repercussions for employees who don't show improvement. One example cited on Performance Appraisal.com states

"...Sun Microsystems ranks its 43,000 employees into three groups. The top 20 per cent are rated as "superior", the next 70 per cent as "standard". At the bottom is a 10 per cent band of "underperformers". The underperformers are told frankly that they must improve and are provided with one-on-one coaches. CEO Scott McNealy is famous for telling his executives that the bottom 10 per cent must be "loved to death". Underperformers who fail to improve are offered a 'prompt exit' package. If they decline it, they face a bleak future in which further incidents of poor performance could lead to dismissal. Love has its limits, after all."

In order to avoid confusion and to maximize your workforce managers should provide constant feedback to employees on their performance, not only at appraisal time. In the same way you would give feedback to a sales clerk on how well they are serving you, or giving feedback on your child's behavior, you should let an employee know the impact of an action.

In some cases appraisers may allow the rating they give to one characteristic to excessively influence their ratings on all subsequent factors. The appraiser who decides that the employee is good in one important aspect and gives him or her similarly high markings for all other aspects is demonstrating the 'halo' effect. Alternatively one serious fault can sometimes lead an appraiser to reduce markings in other areas (the 'horns' effect).

This problem can be resolved if the appraiser judges all employees on a single factor or trait before going on to the next factor. In this way it is possible to consider all employees relative to a standard or to each other on each factor.

Other pitfalls include:

- Rating too hard or too easy, compared to other raters.
- A tendency to choose the middle rating, rather than distinguish between performance levels.

- During the appraisal, you might find some aspects of performance that do not meet your expectations. It is important to analyze the performance to determine the cause of the performance problem. Then, discuss it with the employee and come to an agreement on how it can be corrected.

Problem analysis begins by defining the problem. This step involves reviewing the employee's performance and developing a specific picture of any performance discrepancies. In other words, define how well the employee is doing, versus how well he or she should be doing.

Identify the indicators of the performance problem. These are things you would like to change in order to improve performance. Good performance indicators are specific, objective, and measurable. For example, clients are not receiving their product on time, clients are receiving the wrong product or productivity numbers are down 6%.

- Begin the meeting by welcoming the employee and putting him or her at ease.
- Encourage the employee to take part in the discussion. Ask the employee for his or her opinion of his or her performance. Listen without interrupting and ask questions for clarification.
- Give your view of the employee's performance and start out on a positive note. Then, discuss opportunities for performance improvement and growth.
- Conclude the meeting by summarizing your discussion.
- Work with the employee to develop a plan for any next steps discussed in the meeting. Next steps might include training programs, actions he or she must take, or resources needed to correct a performance problem.

2. Disciplining and Counseling

Counseling and eventually disciplining employees is considered to be the most difficult managerial skill to master. Most new managers take their post with thoughts of managing performance, not issues and actions perceived as negative. Those who feel properly prepared but under-trained quickly realize how discomfoting it can be to perform these duties once another human being is sitting on the other side of their desk. Effective counseling is not simply telling the employee what to do to change his or her behavior. Rather, it is putting the responsibility and accountability for problem solving in the hands of the employee—with the supervisor offering guidance and support. Done well, counseling can often prevent the need for taking further disciplinary action.

When faced with the task of counseling or disciplining an employee, most of us tend to lapse into criticizing or giving advice. Both of these roles are parent-to-child in nature. They do little to help the employee deal with the problem.

What's wrong with giving advice? Employees come to us for it. They expect it. And we usually have more experience to draw from. Why shouldn't we help them? The answer is that we should help them, but giving advice is often not the best way to help someone. Here's why:

- The responsibility for success rests with the manager who gave the advice. At the first sign of difficulty, the employee will be thinking, *"What bad advice. I was foolish to listen to my boss. It's easy for him to tell me how to do it... his situation is very different from mine."* Thus, we can become the "bad guy" for having tried to help.
- Where there is no investment of time and energy in thinking through a plan of action, there is little or no commitment in following it and making it work. A plan that is suggested by the boss and has not been developed jointly is much less likely to be carried out successfully.
- If the advice you give happens to work, the employee will be that much more dependent on you next time a similar problem or situation arises. You'll be on call again to give advice and come to the rescue. And that's not what managing effectively is all about.

Instead of giving advice, ask questions that lead employees to think things through for themselves. People learn best, not by being told, but by experiencing the consequences of their own thoughts and actions.

Questions can...

- Be used to probe for facts and feelings
- Help people to discover things for themselves
- Be used to show empathy and understanding
- Keep the focus of attention where it belongs: on the other person whom you are counseling or disciplining

The Difference Between Counseling and Coaching

Counseling and Coaching are similar in that they are both avenues focused on improvement and growth. There are stark differences, though in the ways that both methods go about helping the employee to achieve their improvement and growth..

Counseling

Counseling is seen as a more personal, 'whole person' process in which the manager seeks to understand why problems may exist, and assists the employee in creating standards and goals for achievement. It is extremely important to document all employee counseling, whether attached to discipline or not. Verbal counseling may occur when an issue is deemed less serious, though proper documentation of the event should still be achieved. Written counseling occurs when more detrimental outcomes may occur. Copies of all written warnings should be distributed as follows: one copy to the employee, one copy to the University's Department of Human Resources for inclusion in the employee's file, and one copy maintained in departmental files under lock and key.

Coaching

Coaching is very action oriented. The focus is on development of somebody's skills and knowledge through one-to-one involvement. Coaching is usually conducted by a more senior and experienced colleague. It involves planned activities that have measurable outcomes and is designed to facilitate learning by providing guidance and support as well as instruction.

Counseling comes before disciplining. When employees have a performance problem or issue, first counsel them so they can take steps to solve the problem. Discipline comes if counseling fails to correct the problem. Effective counseling requires the manager to listen to and support the employee and to encourage the employee to take ownership of the problem and responsibility for resolving it.

“Give a man a fish, and he can eat for a day. But teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime.”

If you tell employees what to do, you have not put the responsibility for the problem or solution into the hands of the employee. The employee will not feel as committed to solving the problem, nor will the solution necessarily be the best one for the employee. Teaching employees “how to fish” will cause them to think for themselves, engage in troubleshooting and problem solving, and work out solutions to their problems.

- Disciplinary action should be viewed as a last resort. It should be followed only after you have tried your best to help the employee change and when improvement has not occurred within a reasonable amount of time.
- Involve *your* manager in the process, keeping him or her apprised of the situation, soliciting his or her advice and approval.
- Document notes about your counseling sessions, including what was discussed and agreed upon and the employee's performance.
- If disciplinary measures are needed, inform the employee of the process.

3. Listening & Organizing

Yes, listening is a skill. Good listening skills in managers can improve worker productivity and satisfaction. The challenge is how to become a good listener, and train employees to be competent listeners as well. Although much research in listening has taken place over the last few years, little of that research addresses workplace listening directly and much is based on false assumptions: that listening is a unitary concept, that listening is a cognitive rather than behavioral skill, and that listening is a linear act. Although the average person spends almost half the working day listening to others, most of us have never been taught how to listen. It is not surprising that studies show that we retain, on average, only 25% of what we hear.

For many reasons, supervisors often don't stop to listen carefully to their employees. Employees may react by feeling frustrated, rejected, or misunderstood. Poor listening can convey an attitude that you don't care, which can lead to poor morale and performance problems. Effective listening is important not only for "getting" the information, but because of the impact that communicating has on your relationship with your employees.

Listening effectively to your employees . . .

- Makes them feel valued
- Helps establish a positive relationship with you, build trust, and confidence
- Ensures your understanding of the employee's perspective and feelings
- Ensures that both you and your employees get the information needed to do the job

Characteristics of Good Listeners

What makes a "good listener"? Effective listeners focus their attention on the speaker, ask questions, watch for cues about how the other person might be feeling, and make sure they understand what the other person is saying. Effective listeners, for example,

- *Ask relevant questions that "draw out" the person*
- *Check to make sure they understand what the person is saying*
- *Recognize how the person feels*
- *Maintain eye contact*
- *Do not interrupt*
- *Nod, say things like "uh-huh" or "I see" to show that they are listening*

Most people can think about four times faster than they can speak. Good listeners continually organize and analyze the information they are receiving to understand what they are hearing.

Follow these six guidelines for listening analytically:

1. Determine Intent: Determine what the speaker wants you to do, know, or think. Is the person asking for your help or for information? Is he or she giving you information or trying to shape your opinion? This gives you a "framework" for listening.

2. Outline the Point: Focus on the main points, key words and phrases. Form a “mental outline” as you listen to help you organize the information and retain it better.

3. Listen Between the Lines: Tone of voice, how fast or loud someone is talking, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and other body language are all cues that can tell you how the speaker is feeling—frustrated, confused, fearful, proud, excited, disappointed, and so on. Understanding the speaker’s feelings is important because they often convey the “real” message behind the words. A person may be saying one thing, but his or her nonverbal cues may be telling you something else. And when you know how someone is feeling, you can respond to them more effectively. You create a sense of trust and openness with the person. Listen for how things are being said. Watch for nonverbal cues for messages that are implied, but not necessarily stated.

4. Use Critical Thinking Skills: Ask yourself whether the information you are hearing is factual, or if it is someone’s opinion being portrayed as a fact. Try not to be swayed by loaded statements or “hot button” words.

5. Recognize & Reduce Barriers: Your ability to listen can be diminished by emotional, physical, and language barriers. For example: getting upset by what is said, having too many interruptions or distractions, being confused because of language differences. Some barriers are easier than others to eliminate, for example, you can close the door if it’s noisy or limit the number of interruptions. Other barriers will require a more conscious effort to overcome.

6. Listen Actively: *Active listening means that you*

- **Probe** to get more information
- **Steer** the conversation, as needed, to keep it on track
- **Summarize** during and at the end of the conversation to check your understanding of what is being said.

Further, you ready yourself to listen and show your interest in the speaker by doing such things as maintaining eye contact, facing the speaker, nodding, etc.

For many reasons, supervisors often don’t stop to listen carefully to their employees. Employees may have the same range of reactions as demonstrated by this exercise (e.g., they stop talking, get frustrated, feel angry).

Poor listening can convey an attitude that you don’t care, which can lead to poor morale and performance problems.

Effective listening is important not only for “getting” the information, but because of the impact that communicating has on your relationship with others.

“A good performance appraisal should deal with a number of issues. One is the job itself. Are there new duties or responsibilities that the employee is performing that should be added to the job description? Are there things listed that are no longer important and should be modified or dropped? Employees want to know how they are doing: where they are strong and how they can use these strengths to greater advantage. Similarly, where are they weak? Where will they have more opportunity for growth or development in the future? The appraisal should end with a plan of action so that both the employee and the manager know their respective responsibilities to follow up.”

4. Setting Goals and Standards

Organizations both public and private are created to fulfill a purpose or mission. Ultimately, it is up to managers, supervisors, and employees to produce the goods, services, or results to accomplish the organization's mission. It is by setting goals and standards that individuals in the organization are able to do this. With the help of this information you will develop goals and standards for your work area and learn how—and why—to involve your employees in the goal-setting process.

Researchers and practitioners have identified mission statements as the most common form of communication to express an organization's purpose, vision, and values. Mission statements are thought to be an essential component of forward-looking organizations. In fact, research suggests that the lack of a mission statement may indicate organizational ineffectiveness.

A mission statement is a general statement that describes the overall intent of an organization. Mission statements are, by nature, rather broad. However a good mission statement has several or all of these elements:

- Clearly states the nature of the organization's cause
- Defines the area of concentration
- Identifies the market served
- Describes the organization's direction

Mission statements can look vastly different, but they all have the same purpose: to help the organization define its goals. **Goals are specific, measurable results or outcomes the organization wants to achieve.** Goals answer the question, "What do we expect the outcome of our actions to be?"

Goals provide a target for performance. They serve to motivate everyone in the organization toward success. Well-defined goals can help you and your employees ...

- Identify the work to focus on
- Set priorities and make decisions
- Identify resources needed to accomplish the work
- Determine how well employees are succeeding
- Ensure that all employees are contributing to the success of the company

Sources of Goals

Goals can arise from three broad areas:

- From the **ongoing work** of the organization...

These goals must be achieved on a routine basis to ensure that the organization is successful. Ongoing goals are related to the daily functioning of the business. For instance, productivity goals and service goals represent ongoing work.

- From **problems...**

Problem-solving goals are aimed at solving a problem that is getting in the way of effective performance. For instance, increasing the accuracy rate, reducing the number of on-the-job accidents, eliminating product deficiencies, fixing glitches in a production process, improving interdepartmental relationships are some examples.

- From **opportunities ...**

Organizations must continually seek out new opportunities for becoming better, more efficient. Opportunity goals might be thought of as “stretch goals”—goals that challenge the organization to improve its products or services.

Examples of these goals include designing a more efficient production process, creating new products and services, developing better marketing strategies, and taking advantage of new technology.

Key Points about Goals

Setting goals is not about “doing things right” but rather “doing the right thing.” To that end, it’s important to limit the number of goals you develop—typically from 3 to 5 goals.

Goals should focus everyone’s efforts on the most important areas for the organization or work unit.

Goals must be connected to the “bigger picture” so that they are meaningful and challenging.

Goals should not be developed in a vacuum; you must involve others in the process. Get their perspectives, expertise, ideas, and suggestions. Broaden the data you have about what your goal areas should be. Talk with others to get more input before you finalize your goals.

You can involve others in the goal-setting process at three points:

- **Before...** to get input for targeting your goals.
- **During...** to run your ideas by others and get additional input and suggestions.
- **After...** to review your goals with those who will contribute to accomplishing them or who can provide support.

Employee Resistance to Goal Setting (more)

Here is a list of typical reasons why employees—and organizations as a whole—may resist goal setting and why goal-setting efforts succeed in some organizations and fail in others.

Review this list, and check those items that could potentially pose barriers in your workplace. For each one you check, ask yourself:

- **What evidence do I have that this is a barrier?**
- **To what degree is this within my control as a supervisor or manager?**
- **What measures can I take to reduce this barrier in my workplace?**

5. Thinking Clearly and Analytically

Every day, managers are faced with information others give them, decisions others have made, and conclusions others have drawn. The ability to think clearly and analytically in these situations is essential for managers. A manager who thinks clearly and analytically can separate fact from assumption, knows when to verify assumptions, and draws logical conclusions based on the evidence. Learn these concepts and tools to start thinking logically and clearly so as to effectively analyze a situation and information before deciding what actions to take.

The two hemispheres of the brain, right and left, are responsible for different types of thought and functions. The right side is generally associated with creative thinking, while the left side is generally associated with analytical thinking. We call on both types of thinking every day.

Although we use both types of thinking, we tend to favor one type over the other. Look at the characteristics listed below. What do you prefer, left brain or right brain thinking?

Left-Brain Characteristics Traits Include:

Factual	Ordered
Logical	Mathematical
Detailed	Sequential

Approach to Problems and Situations:

Fact-based, analytic, and step-by-step

Personal Motto:

“Plan your work. Work your plan.”

Gives and Receives Information Through:

Principles	Categories
Formulas	Flowcharts
Conclusions	Sequential order

Right-Brain Characteristics Traits Include:

Flexible	Empathic	Imaginative
Talkative	Artistic	Synthesizing
Emotional	Holistic	

Approach to Problems and Situations:

Seeking out insight, images, concepts, patterns, sounds, and movement, all to be synthesized into an intuitive sense of the whole.

Personal Motto:

“Not everything that counts can be counted.”

Gives and Receives Information Through:

Atmosphere setting
Interactive
Personal sharing

Practice Mental Flexibility

Avoid thinking rigidly, or thinking about things in the same way as you always have. Make an effort to see things for what they are, not for what you expect them to be. Look at things from many different perspectives. Don't let your strong personal opinions close your mind to new ideas.

Promote Good Group Thinking

Groups of people generate more ideas, have more perspectives, and have more experience to bring to a situation than a single person. Working through problems, discussing alternatives, making decisions, planning for action all benefit from working with a group. Encourage this type of group thinking. Guide groups through the process of analytical thinking without coming to a premature closure.

Take Time to Think

Sometimes we respond too quickly and then regret not taking the time to think things through. When under pressure, you might not think as clearly as usual. Pause and think before reacting. Scan the situation, determine who is involved, decide on your objective, identify your options, and then respond.

Generate Options

The more able you are to clearly identify useful options for a given situation, the better your chance for achieving your objectives.

Make It a Habit

Practice your analytical thinking skills in all different types of situations: When you watch the news, read the newspaper or magazine, or listen to a speaker. Listen for facts and assumptions and challenge the assumptions. Put aside your emotions and your personal opinions and ask yourself if there could be other conclusions.

- People with a left-brain preference are often described as factual, ordered, logical, rational, mathematical, detailed, and sequential.
- People with a left-brain preference favor activities in which they can use analysis, facts, their experience, and testing. They like to follow rules and meet deadlines.
- A left-brain approach to problems and situations is fact-based, analytical, and step-by-step. It favors words, numbers, and facts presented in a logical sequence.
- A personal motto of left-brain thinkers is *"Plan your work. Work your plan."*
- People with a left-brain thinking preference like to give and receive information through principles, categories, formulas, flowcharts, conclusions, and sequential order.
 - People with a right-brain preference are often described as flexible, artistic, talkative, holistic, emotional, imaginative, empathetic, and synthesizing.
 - People with a right-brain preference favor activities in which they can use insight, intuition, images, and patterns. They like to explore possibilities and be flexible.
 - A right-brain approach to problems and situations would include seeking out insight, images, concepts, patterns, sounds, and movements, all to be synthesized into an integrated sense of the whole.
 - A personal motto of right-brain thinkers is *"Not everything that counts can be counted."*
 - People with a right-brain thinking preference like to give and receive information through atmosphere setting, interacting, and personal sharing.

6. Giving Clear Information

The average manager spends 30 to 40% of a typical workday giving information to others—in face-to-face interactions, in writing, via the telephone, or through e-mail and other electronic media. Despite this emphasis on “information giving,” however, communication “breakdowns” continue to be one of the greatest sources of problems in today’s business environment.

Most managers have never been trained in how to explain things clearly, simply, and effectively. Yet the command of the spoken and written word plays an extremely important part in being successful. Those who have developed their ability to convey ideas are more effective in achieving their objectives.

Whenever you give information to someone—or they to you—the message can be evaluated against three elements: **Aim**, **Bias**, and **Climate**.

AIM refers to the focus of your message. Whenever you communicate, you have a purpose, perhaps specific objectives, in mind. Aim is the extent to which you are sticking to that purpose and achieving those objectives.

Keep these points in mind to make sure your Aim is clear and you achieve your communication objectives:

- **Target the conversation...**

Before the interaction, determine your purpose. Think about what you want to accomplish, your purpose or objectives, ahead of time.

- **Load brain before firing mouth...**

Think before you speak. Will what you have to say help you achieve your purpose and objectives?

- **Hit the target without wasting ammunition...**

Say what you have to say briefly and clearly. Also, keep the conversation on track. Avoid digressing, and when others do so, tactfully bring the conversation back on track.

- **Be flexible...**

Remember that the other person has an aim for communicating, too. While you want to accomplish your objectives, be flexible during the interaction. The interchange will usually be successful to the degree that both parties are able to meet their objectives.

BIAS refers to the degree of influence—high or low, positive or negative—that you are exerting. It can be thought of as the extent to which we put our own opinion in the message. The Bias we introduce can cause the other person to give us the answer they think we want to hear (e.g., “You’ll have that report to me first thing tomorrow, *won’t you?*” or “I know you won’t have any problems doing this task.”)

- **Bias can be introduced both verbally and nonverbally...**

We can Bias others with the words we choose using emotionally charged language, we can also show bias physically with our body language and associations.

- **Bias can effect the person’s response or shape what they are feeling...**

Bias can be an important and desirable dimension in our interactions. Sometimes a high degree of bias is appropriate, but other times a low degree of bias is more appropriate.

● **The degree of Bias depends on our Aim...**

Whether a high or low degree of Bias is appropriate depends, of course, on your Aim. Consider how the Aim of a police officer versus a defense attorney might differ.

CLIMATE refers to the atmosphere you create based on how you are communicating. Are you creating an open and trusting environment, inviting two-way communication and working toward a “win-win” outcome? Or are you creating an atmosphere marked by suspicion and distrust, closing off communication from others?

● **Climate is an attitude...**

Climate might be best described as an attitude. Your interactions will more likely be successful if you can create a Climate of mutual respect and trust.

● **Actions speak louder than words...**

While there is power in what is said or written, we also communicate powerful messages in how we *behave*. If you truly are trying to set and maintain a Climate of open dialogue, you must be sincere and be seen as sincere in doing so. Remember—actions speak louder than words.

7. Getting Unbiased Information

The decisions we make, goals we set, problems we solve, and actions we take are based on the information we have of the situation. Often, we gather our information from people around us, our employees, customers, management. Thus, it is essential that we learn to plan our communication, probe for information, and react to information in a manner that encourages the sharing of ideas and elicits clear, unbiased, useful information.

In order to be aware of your degree of bias, and to create a positive climate, there are some planning steps you can take *before* your interaction. First, assess the situation. Second, decide what your objectives should be. Third, determine a game plan or strategy for achieving your objectives.

Assess the Situation

What do you know about the person or people with whom you will be communicating? How will they react to the questions you will be asking and the information you will be seeking? What will their needs and concerns be?

Decide on Objectives

What are you trying to accomplish in the interaction? What information do you want? What do you want the other person to do as a result of the interaction? How will you know that you've met your objective?

Develop a Plan

What information do you want to get? What is the best way to get the information and in what sequence might you proceed? What kinds of questions should you ask? How will you begin and end the interaction?

Acquiring Information:

To get someone to share information or ideas with you, create an open, comfortable environment in which the person is willing to talk. You might also need to probe to get the information you need. Do this by asking questions: closed and open-ended; and by using encouraging behavior.

Closed Questions

Closed questions are direct questions. They are aimed at getting one- and two-word answers. This type of question works well to narrow the information and to get specific information.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions require more than just one word answers. They are useful in getting people to share information and ideas. They generate discussion and help you understand more about the situation. They often begin with "What," "How," or "Why."

Encouraging Behavior

Encouraging behaviors are things we do or say to encourage the person to open up. They are small verbal and non-verbal responses that can encourage or discourage the sharing of information.

Reacting to Information and Ideas

There are four skills associated with reacting to another person's point of view:

- Agreeing
- Rejecting outright
- Constructive disagreement
- Building on ideas

Agreeing

- If you like someone's ideas, say so. But make sure you state both "*what*" you like and "*why*" you like it. By communicating the value the idea has for you (why you like it), you give the person additional reinforcement for offering the idea.

Rejecting Outright

- It's important that you reject an idea constructively so that you increase the chances that the person will feel inclined to offer future ideas. Make sure the person knows both what your position is and why.

Constructive Disagreement

Three steps can help you disagree in a way that communicates that you want the person to continue sharing ideas. They are...

- State the merit in the idea
- Express your concerns
- Explore ideas for retaining the merit and eliminating your concerns

Building on Ideas

If your reaction is to use the idea to stimulate your thinking about another idea, we call this situation *building on the idea*. Building on ideas is essentially the process of adding value to or enhancing someone's ideas. Building doesn't mean just offering up a new idea of your own on the subject.

- Identify additional benefits of the idea
- Find other applications of the idea
- Find a more effective way to implement the idea

8. Identifying and Solving Problems

What percentage of your time at work is spent solving problems? What percentage of the problems you thought you had solved came back and you had to deal with them again?

Learning this skill will allow you to spend less time dealing with repeat problems and more time on other important responsibilities.

Here are some activities you can use to help identify and solve problems.

Brainstorming: A powerful technique for generating any list of ideas in a group.

When To Use It: Any time you want to generate a lot of information in a short period of time.

How To Use It: You may want to set a time limit for the process. You'll need a chart. Explain brainstorming ground rules: no one asks questions, discusses or evaluates the ideas until the brainstorming is complete. Emphasize the creative free flow of ideas and piggy-backing on others' ideas.

Building Individual Support: Communication with other people to gain their commitment.

When To Use It: You want to gain support for the solution, inform, or get input from others.

How To Use It: Identify what you need from each person involved, Assign responsibilities for communicating with each person. Communicate your ideas to gain input, support, and commitment and then evaluate the results.

Consensus: A group arriving at a decision each member can accept and support.

When To Use It: You want to assure every member's "buy-in" to solving the problem.

How To Use It: Determine the urgency of the decision, consensus decisions take time. Explore what's important to each person and why is it important. Discuss alternatives, probe for consensus at each break and step. Affirm commitment.

Cost-Benefit Analysis: An analysis that compares the cost and potential benefits in financial terms of two or more possible solutions.

When To Use It: When you've arrived at a small number of possible solutions.

How To Use It: Generate a list of cost elements associated with each solution. Generate a list of potential benefits & dollar values associated with each solution. Estimate the dollar value of each potential benefit. For each solution, compare cost to benefit totals by using a ratio. The most common ratio is: Benefits / Costs Compare the ratios of all the solutions.

Criteria Matrix: You establish criteria for selection from several choices and compare.

When To Use It: When you have a root cause or causes on which to concentrate.

How To Use It: Start with a small number of potential and identify criteria for selecting choices. Agree on a rating scale for each criterion (0-5, Best to Worst, etc.) Chart the criteria across the top of a grid and write the options on the left-hand side. Calculate each person's *average rating* for each option or count up yes/no, +/-, etc.

Gantt Chart: Helps sort priorities/deadlines according to the earliest due date or length of task.

When To Use It: You want to monitor the implementation of an action plan or show priority.

How To Use It: List all project tasks down the left side of your chart and a timeline across the top, mark when the project should start. Draw a line to the deadline. You may have several lines marketing short, or long term deadlines.

Presentation: A method of formal communication, usually made to groups.

When To Use It: Gaining the support and “buy in” of those impacted by the solution, idea sharing

1. **How To Use It:** Decide on the purpose of your presentation. Target your content and style to your audience. Plan the content and delivery. Remember the “three-tell” method: (1) tell them what you’re going to tell them, (2) tell them, and (3) tell them what you’ve told them. Evaluate the results.

9. Making Decisions, Weighing Risks

Unlike problem solving, which is concerned with causes of past events, decision making is concerned with future events and the minimizing of risk associated with them.

Our lives are filled with decisions. Every day, you make hundreds of decisions. Some are almost automatic, such as deciding to close the door after you. Some involve no risk at all, such as the decision of whether to wear your tweed overcoat or your leather jacket. At work, our day is filled with decisions that affect our ability to reach organizational objectives... and that reflect on our ability to manage. Most of these decisions can be made in a matter of seconds.

Every decision comes with its own criteria to be weighed, the consequences are complex, and thousands of dollars are at stake. Evaluating and assigning weights to every factor that goes into a decision, thereby increasing the probability that your decisions will produce the results you are looking for (i.e., the outcomes that led you to make a decision in the first place).

Problem Solving	Problem solving is the process of correcting a situation that is keeping us from achieving something we want (e.g., a goal or objective, a norm or standard of desired performance). The focus here is on finding the cause of deviation or blockage and then taking corrective action that will restore things to normal. Thus, problem solvers speak largely in the past tense.
Decision Making	Decision making is the process of assembling and evaluating information relating to each of several alternatives so as to select the one most likely to achieve our objective. The focus here is on taking action in new and often unfamiliar areas that will create a situation that may never have existed before. Thus, decision makers speak largely in the future tense.

Having distinguished between the two, let's now identify a number of similarities. Both processes must begin with a description of the situation and a definition of the objectives (standards, goals, conditions) that must be met. Both of them involve research and the quest for supportive data. Both of them involve the identification of alternatives ("What if...?"). And both require a high degree of analytical skill, patience, and an awareness of one's own values and personal biases.

Limits...

Limits are necessary qualifications an option must have. If you are a family of five deciding on the purchase of a new home and looking at different options, getting one with 3 bedrooms would be a limit. Getting financing that does not exceed \$900 a month might be another limit if this is the maximum you can afford. Limits are essentials... requirements that must be met. Limits say, in effect, "I won't even consider an option that doesn't meet these limits."

Desirables...

Desirables are qualities or preferences you would like to have if you could get them. They may not all be present in all options, but by weighing their relative importance to you and then rating each option on the degree to which each desirable is present, you can select the option that best meets your desirables.

Let's go back to that 3-bedroom home you're buying as an example. Style is a desirable... you prefer Colonial or Early American. Landscaping is another desirable, as is central air conditioning (unless you live in Phoenix or San Antonio, in which case you might want to make it a limit rather than a desirable!).

Options...

Options are choices or selections... the number of alternatives you will consider. Usually this number falls between two and six, whether it's homes, cars, job candidates, advertising agencies, printers estimating on a job, or whatever.

Risks...

Risks are the unknown, unseen dangers or pitfalls that we should check for **after** we have selected our best option and **before** we have announced or carried out our decision. Once you've selected that 3-bedroom home, you'll want to check it for risks before buying it. Suppose there are termites in the foundation... better call the exterminator to check it out. Suppose there are liens or legal encumbrances (lawsuits, back taxes due, etc.). Better do a little search and have a lawyer check it out.

Why not check the risks before making a selection? Because it's expensive and time-consuming. Also, the probability is usually higher that your first option will "pass muster." If not, you move on to your second option. Also, checking risk creates expectations and will therefore lead to disappointed parties if you check out more than one option (your best one) for risks.

Decision-Making Methods

Individual Decision

In this method, an individual makes a decision with no input from others. It is a fast method but it does not tap into others' knowledge, experience, or creativity. Nor does it build acceptance or "buy in" of the decision by others. This method works well in times of emergency or when time is a factor. It is also suitable if the decision maker has all the information needed or if the issue is minor.

Consultation

Here, an individual makes a decision with input from others. This allows for a broader source of information but still does not build acceptance or "buy in" of the decision by others. This method works well when there is enough time to consult others or when the issue requires input from experts.

Consensus

Consensus is a group decision-making method. It requires a team, or group of people, to discuss an issue and make a decision that is acceptable to all participants. This is different than voting where there is a win-lose situation. A consensus decision is one that all members can support, even though it may not have been their first choice.

This method taps into the knowledge and experience of all participants, and builds strong acceptance and "buy in." This method works well when time is not a factor, the issue is important, and successful implementation of the decision requires "buy in."

10. Planning and Scheduling Work

There are many reasons why managers avoid planning. Whether you manage repetitive activities or one-time projects, your success in meeting your goals depends heavily on your ability to plan and schedule work. In today's fast moving world, the work we do is changing more and more rapidly. Planning skills are becoming even more critical to successful performance. In fact, planning and scheduling skills have been called "survival skills" for managers and team leaders.

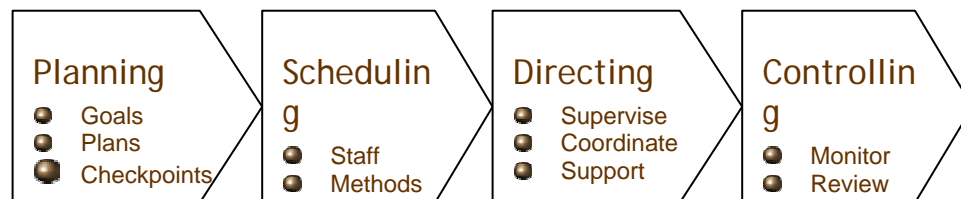
Often, managers are asked to "do more with less." This means accomplishing the work faster, with the fewest people and materials, and of course, using the smallest expenditure of funds. Planning your work requires you to line up your productive resources and information so that you achieve your goals with the least expenditure of resources.

The Need for Planning

In many organizations today, planning has become more difficult due to the speed with which information and market conditions change. Managers not only need planning skills, but need to be flexible in response to changing conditions. As a manager, you need to recognize and accept the fact that planning is never quite as straightforward and static as you hope it will be. You must see planning as an iterative process in which you continually refine the plan throughout the project or assignment.

Benefits of Good Planning

The management process has been traditionally depicted by these four stages: planning, scheduling, directing, and controlling.



Planning... The act of managing begins with a clear definition of the purpose or goals of projects or assignments. It includes planning the steps, activities, and resources needed to accomplish them, and setting up checkpoints and processes to make sure the plan will be carried out efficiently and correctly.

Scheduling... Once the plan has been created, a manager can schedule the work—who will do what and when, how much authority and responsibility they will have, what methods and materials will be used, how the budget will be allocated, and so forth.

Directing... This stage of the cycle involves the actual "doing" of work, producing the

output. The manager supervises the work, clarifies assignments, supports his or her people, coordinates the resources, solves problems, provides on the job training, etc.

Controlling... The manager monitors progress at critical checkpoints (which were established during planning). He or she inspects for quality, reviews the results, and appraises employee performance, making adjustments as needed to keep performance on target.

Elements of Effective Planning and Scheduling

Regardless of the format or specific content of a plan, effective plans share these elements.

Goal... Good planning begins with defining the end results of the work or project. Defining a specific end goal helps you determine the resources you'll need as well as the method of doing the work.

Steps... Identifying the steps, activities, or tasks needed to reach the goal.

Schedule... Determining a schedule or timeframes for completing all the parts of the project, including interim dates.

Checkpoints... Setting checkpoints along the way to ensure that progress toward the goal is being made and to make adjustments in the plan as needed.

Resource Assignment... Determining which employees will be responsible for carrying out each step in the plan, as well as identifying other key resources such as materials and equipment, technology and information, technical and administrative support, and money.

Involving Others in the Planning Process

- Involving others in the planning process is critical to successful planning.
- Managers should get input from those who will carry out the work.
- It is a good idea to involve those who can lend their insight and expertise

11. Training, Coaching, and Delegating

In a survey of senior managers at General Electric, 90% reported that the most important factor contributing to their development was the informal training and coaching they received from their own manager. There is no question that supervisors bear special responsibility for training and developing their employees. Supervisors accomplish this primarily through on-the-job or informal training, coaching, and delegation of work to their employees.

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Training . . .

Teaching employees how to do a job or task.

Coaching . . .

Encouraging and shaping employee performance.

Delegating . . .

Transferring a portion of your authority and responsibility to an employee, while retaining accountability.

The more organized and thoughtful your training effort, the more likely it will be successful. ROPES is a simple, practical process to use when training your employees on the job. Follow each step in the process below. The training example used is for teaching an employee to create an electronic slide presentation.

Once employees gain competence, coaching is appropriate for shaping their performance and moving them toward proficiency. In the Coaching track, the supervisor must be available to provide support when needed, and tailor the support to the individual's needs. This will help the employee build the confidence needed to perform without supervision.

The three key coaching activities are:

- #1. Clarifying Expectations
- #2. Monitoring Progress and Providing Assistance
- #3. Giving Feedback

Monitoring Progress and Providing Assistance

Once you have communicated the assignment effectively, the employee should begin to work independently. Your job as a supervisor is to monitor the employee's progress on the task(s) and provide assistance as needed.

Giving Feedback Feedback is information about behavior that allows employees to know how they are doing in relation to what is expected. Feedback is essential in changing behavior—or maintaining it. Feedback is used during the coaching process to help shape the employee's performance toward meeting job objectives. Without feedback, employees do not get the information they need to make correct conclusions about their performance. The problem with ignoring behavior—good or bad—is that it may or may not continue. Employees may set their own feedback mechanisms and performance standards—which may be at odds with what you desire as the supervisor. Supervisors are therefore responsible for providing adequate, appropriate, and regular feedback to employees.

Criteria for Effective Feedback

Regardless of whether feedback is positive or corrective, effective feedback has several criteria. Effective feedback is . . .

- **Planned** Plan what you will say and how you will say it.
- **Focused on Behavior** ... not on personality. People can change their behavior, but not their personality.
- **Specific** Be as specific as possible so the employee knows exactly what to correct or continue to do.
- **Timely** Give the feedback as close to the performance as possible so that it is meaningful and so that the employee has a chance to correct the situation if needed.
- **Balanced** Balance corrective feedback with positive feedback. It can be discouraging to employees if you just focus on what is wrong with their performance.
- **Private** People generally feel proud when they are praised and embarrassed when they are corrected. Therefore, it is usually appropriate to give corrective feedback in private.

Delegating to Employees

Follow these 8 steps for delegating

- Step 1. Define the assignment** Define the assignment in terms of specific results to be achieved.
- Step 2. Find the right person** Select a capable person, matching the demands of the job to individual skills and talents.
- Step 3. Agree on results** Make sure you both agree on the results expected and the general plan.
- Step 4. Assign responsibility and authority** Maintain accountability but transfer both the responsibility and the authority for the work to the delegatee.
- Step 5. Provide the resources** Consider all of the various resources you need to provide for the delegate including money and training.
- Step 6. Determine criteria for success** Be clear about how you will evaluate the delegatee's success in completing the assignment.
- Step 7. Establish checkpoints** Don't wait until the completion of the delegated job to check on the work. Set a timetable.
- Step 8. Reward success** Consider how you will reward the achievements of your delegate as well as planning for a negative outcome.

12. Time Management and Prioritizing

Just as managers are an organization's most critical resource, so is time the most critical resource of managers. There never seems to be enough of it. Moreover, unlike other resources, time can't be stretched or compressed, stored or held in reserve, or put aside for a rainy day. Time must be used as it comes, minute by minute.

Effective managers know the value of their time and the precious worth of every minute. During the day they repeatedly take inventory of their time: "What have I accomplished? What are my priorities? What is the best use of my time right now? Should someone else be doing what I'm working on? Am I doing things that shouldn't be done at all? Can I work smarter and get the job done in less time?"

Managing your time means spending your time on doing what is most important.

The key to effective time management is spending most of your time on activities that will make a difference; activities that...

- Will achieve significant results
- Will contribute to the growth and survival of the organization or department
- Are linked to the organization's mission, goals, and strategic objectives

What is important to your organization? And what is your role as a contributor within the organization? Answering these questions will help you focus your energies and efforts as you decide where to spend the bulk of your time.

By focusing your time in these key areas, you ensure that you're spending your time on what's important.

Goals

Once you have defined and clarified in your mind what is important, then you can translate these areas into goals—specific statements about *what* you want to accomplish and *by when*.

- Clearly state a single result to be achieved
- Be realistically achievable given the time and resources available

Most of us know how to do our jobs. Where we often need help is in deciding which of the many demands we should respond to—to decide what to do first, what can wait, what things can be done by others if we delegate to them, and what things probably should not be done at all.

Planning, prioritizing, and organizing your work creates a framework to help you accomplish what's important; that is, your key responsibilities and your goals. By setting priorities, you can concentrate your energy and effort on work that has the greatest productive output rather than allow your time to be consumed by non-essential things.

There are many tools—both paper-based and electronic—to help you plan, prioritize, and organize your work on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or even yearly basis. The activities and tasks you identify will stem from your goals. Here are a few examples of those tools:

Monthly Work Schedule

Identify the key goals, tasks, or activities you need to accomplish each month and by when. You can record them as a two-column list of tasks and due dates, or as a Gantt chart (shown below).

Your monthly work schedule should be fairly fixed; barring unusual events or crises, you should stick to it.

Weekly Work Plan

As with monthly planning, your goals are the basis for identifying what you need to do each week. Day by day, identify what you plan to accomplish and when. Leave yourself some flexibility in your weekly plan so that you can respond to situations that may arise.

Keep in mind that your weekly plan will also need to incorporate activities that others expect of you (e.g., attending meetings) as well as other routine responsibilities (e.g., completing weekly reports). The next step is to prioritize these activities—for example, by assigning each item as high, medium, or low priority or by numbering the priorities (e.g., 1, 2, 3). Once you have prioritized your work activities, schedule appointments and meetings where appropriate.

Here are some tips for planning your weekly schedule:

Focus on high-priority activities by setting aside time for them. These time periods generally stay constant from week to week.

Allow for flexibility in your weekly planning. Don't fill in every moment of every day.

Block off time for routine or administrative items (e.g., returning phone calls, answering e-mails, reading reports).

Set boundaries by saying “no” to others who may take away from your time.

Daily “To Do” Plan

Once you have planned your week, you can plan, prioritize, and organize your time on a daily basis. Here are some tips for daily planning:

Build in flexibility to your daily plan since it is more subject to change based on the day's events—again, don't fill every minute of the day.

Highlight, circle, or mark with an asterisk the most important priority. This way, even if you don't accomplish anything else in the day, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you did what was most important.

Separate time-sensitive items from those that can be done at any time of the day.

Bracket certain times of the day for routine or administrative items (e.g., making or returning phone calls, reading).

Setting Priorities

Taking the time to plan and prioritize work activities is another critical element in gaining control of your time. Often the most difficult part of time management is setting priorities. In a fast-paced work environment, it can be difficult to determine which activities take priority over others.

Defining what is important to the organization and to you in your role as a contributor is one thing that will help determine priorities.

To help you prioritize, consider these criteria or factors:

- Payoff in results—spend your time on those activities with the biggest payoff
- Time constraints or due dates—prioritize based on your (and others’) time constraints
- Needs of supervisor/team members and promises you may have made
- Importance to job performance—the more significant work should have greater priority
- Best time to do the work

We also need to learn how to handle “pop up” requirements—those unplanned, priority work activities that have to be worked into our schedules.

For more information on these important competencies or other vital business needs please contact us directly.