



What Makes a Successful Manager? Managers Reveal Their Secrets

We asked managers to tell us what makes them successful, and we wanted to share what they had to say with you. Here are their secrets to success:

I'm a manager in a \$20 billion dollar company. I manage a plant with about 80 contractors and an inventory of about \$50 million dollars.

What I feel has made me successful is my ability to communicate well. With so much going on, and so many people depending on so many other people and processes, it's very important that everyone not only understands their role, but the greater picture as well. I try to communicate the vision well and give my employees and the contractors enough autonomy to make decisions on their own that are in line with the end goal.

My communication skills have drastically increased since meeting my wife and starting to live my life in Spanish. Being bilingual has made me very aware of words, grammar, and the various meanings of what we say as well as how important it is for people to fully understand concepts and ideas. There is actually a lot of research with regards to bilingualism and communication, as well as executive function (which is the decision-making center of the brain).

This is why I feel I am and have been a successful manager for 8 years now. I run a blog on bilingualism and language learning that educates the public on these important benefits as well as the obvious benefits of business being international/etc.

Jeffrey Nelson

Four main things make me a good manager:

First, I listen and then listen some more. I try to remember the 80/20 rule: listen 80 percent of the time and speak the remaining 20 percent. You can't be an effective manager if you can't listen to issues, praises, ideas and or updates. Second, I use a personality assessment tool, DiSC, to get a better understanding of who my team members are at their core so we can all better understand each other. Understanding is the key to communication and communication is everything. Third, I ask a lot of questions. Many managers like to lay down the law without asking for feedback. It's as if



they think asking questions diminishes their authority. It's an ego thing. Asking questions shows my team I care and gives me insights that I may not have had. Last, I spend time with my team. I don't shut myself off in a corner office. I want to interact with my team so we're a cohesive unit.

Andy Bailey is a serial entrepreneur. He's currently CEO and Founder of Petracoach (petracoach.com), a Nashville-based entrepreneurial coaching firm. He also is part owner of Music City Flats, a Nashville restaurant and wine bar. He got the entrepreneurial bug while still in college when he started a wireless company that he grew into a multi-million-dollar company. He attributes his successes to effective management.

The ability to intently listen to my employees and then ask the right questions to spark more conversation. I believe my role as a manager is to help my employees find the solutions on their own, not tell them what to do.

Rob Simons is the president and CEO of Toolbox Studios, Inc. (<http://toolboxstudios.com/>), a frequently awarded branding and marketing firm in San Antonio, Texas. He launched the company 18 years ago after selling his first company, Pixelworks, Inc., an interactive design firm. Simons is also an investor and mentor in Texas-based startups Rebecca Creek Distillery and Z Tequila and coaches entrepreneurs at Petracoach.

I was lucky enough to work for a few great managers.

Something I noticed, though, is that over time managers became busier and busier. It never seemed to get easier.

When the managers I worked for got busy it always seemed they lost time to do the little things. Skipping scheduled meetings, not offering thanks or say "good job" became common occurrences.

I saw how that affected myself and others so I make it a point to always try to be timely, consistent and reliable while offering a compliment when it's warranted.

I probably don't do those things enough, but it's what I try to do and it seems my co-workers appreciate it.



Dayne Shuda

I have a few simple guidelines that I follow which I have found to be very effective. Each of these ideas is reinforced by one another and lead to more engaged, loyal, and productive employees and better teamwork.

1. Trust your employees - You hired them to do the job better than you would yourself. Therefore, let them do it.
2. Offer encouragement and praise - Praise is the least costly, yet one of the most powerful motivators and it is amazing how few managers are willing to share it with their employees. Ego's get in the way I think for too many managers
3. Be transparent - You don't need to share every piece of information with employees but you should never mislead them. Always be honest and clear. Transparency will encourage the employees to be honest in how they do their jobs and hit helps them feel part of the team, rather than an outsider
4. Set clear goals and measure them - I could care less about "face time". I want my employees to be focused on completing their goals and meeting objectives. Doing this and measuring the goals, encourages employees to become self-starters and require less oversight/hand holding. Work with them on establishing the high-level goals and encourage them to figure out how to get there, and offer assistance as needed to meet those goals
5. Have high expectations - most people will rise to the occasion when others expect them to do so. We've seen this with education (e.g. the KIPP schools) and it is true with work as well
6. Hire quickly / fire quickly - regardless of someone's resume, LinkedIn profile or personal network, you don't really know how they are going to perform until they start working for you. I prefer to bring people on without an excessively long interview process. However, when they start and you give them the tools needed to succeed you need to evaluate the fit in the role and organization. If there significant warning signs that this won't work out, make adjustments quickly and if those don't change the course of the employee, let them go because the last thing you want is to waste their time or yours by having a sub-par resource on the team.



Michael Freeman

"Managing employees" is a bit of a misnomer. I have found that employees manage themselves very well if given the proper tools and expectations. With my guidance, I've always let my employees set their goals and expectations and defined them so they are measurable. Then I give them the tools to measure them with. In every case where these things are clearly defined, my employees have blown away the expectations and goals and it improved morale significantly.

For this to work, the following must be in place:

1. The goal must be clearly understood by all parties.
2. Progress towards the goal must be measurable on a daily or weekly basis.
3. The employee must be able to measure their own progress.
4. The employee must have total buy-in on the goal (usually from setting it themselves)
5. There must be a reward for achieving the goal(s).

If the employee has to wait until their annual review to find out if they are meeting expectations then you are setting up a very non-productive work environment. If you have to tell the employee each week if they are meeting expectations, then, again, it will be hard for the employee to be productive.

On top of all this, it is important to engage with your employees and let them voice any concerns or ideas they have. If you do have to deliver criticism (and all of the above is in place) it won't come as a surprise and they will be more amenable to hearing it.

Skip Lahti, President/CEO of The Fair Credit Group

I happen to be a business owner and I as such have had to manage many different types of



individuals over the last 20 years. To make things a bit more difficult I have managed mainly men. This becomes such a fine line that you almost can't see that line at all. If one is too demonstrative then you are immediately tagged: Bitch. If you are too lax then you are not strong enough to "do the job". What I have found works the best no matter who it is you are working with you must show respect and communicate. People (believe it or not) do not have crystal balls and most of us need to be asked or told how to do things. I am always offering to help and I have no issues asking my team (whoever they maybe) if anyone wants or needs anything. Remember when one manages you NEED your team so doing anything to harm that relationship is just plain dumb.

Now with that said there are those situations that may call for one to be more assertive. Well, business is business. PERIOD! And if there is a deadline then that needs to be met. However, it should be remembered that sometimes things are just out of our control and what doesn't get done today will get done tomorrow.

The Taskmistress, LLC

I manage my staff with two important concepts: 1. My staff do not work for me, instead, I work for them. It is their job to complete their tasks. It is my job to clear the barriers from them completing the. 2. I make the time to understand what motivates each of them individually. I have them each fill out a questionnaire that lists 10 typical motivators and they are to number them from 1 - 10, in the order that most important to them.

Bill Corbett

Author | Speaker | Producer

Author, *From the Soapbox to the Stage: How to Use Your Passion to Start a Speaking Business*

I am a criminal defense attorney in Columbus, Ohio. I am a founder and managing partner of Luftman, Heck & Associates. I started the firm in 2003 right after finishing law school and began managing employees within my first year of business.

I believe there are a few things that managers can do to be successful and they are rules I follow in managing my law firm. First, treat all employees with respect. Never speak down to an employee, whatever position they hold within your company. Make every employee feel that they are part of a



team and that their contributions matter and are integral to the success of the company, this is especially true in a small business.

If there are disagreements, deal with them quickly and in a professional manner where all parties are allowed to voice their opinion. Resolving the issue immediately instead of hoping it will go away is very important. Your employees may not necessarily agree with the resolution, but should respect that their opinion mattered and was heard.

Ben Luftman

I am the PR Director for iAcquire, a digital marketing agency. When a team member fails or makes an error, a successful manager is one that asks themselves, "What did I do wrong as a manager to position my employee for failure?" Setting up a mentorship over a dictatorship is key. Establishing clear expectations and a growth plan is key as well.

Allison Freeland

There are almost too many books, journals and schools of thought on leadership qualities necessary for management success. And we have found that most identify the following key generic qualities of successful managers: motivational, understands profit/loss, sees the "big" picture, makes the right business decisions for their team, self-directed and leads by example.

While we have found the plethora of generic traits to be valuable informational tools, discovering what truly makes a management leader successful is based on the industry. What may make a great manager in a bank may not make a great manager in an investment firm.

As a digital marketing agency with more than 15 years in business, we have identified the following key attributes necessary for management success in the marketing world:

- Understand that the client base changes; therefore, always be capable of identifying opportunities on the horizon
- Able to identify what the client needs before they request it and lining out their team to execute these deliverables



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- Capable of making decisions on the fly because the pace is so fast
 - Put in the time necessary to make a difference for their clients, consistently learn and take on new challenges, because they truly are passionate about seeing a marketing result come to life.
 - Able to line out their teams with work processes that eliminate waste and inefficiencies
 - Support and guide their teams. Marketing is about inspiring people to care and delivering the message that what they are doing really does matter decreases creative burn out.
 - Able to drive revenue. On the client service side, this means they are capable of pitching, developing persuasive strategies, connecting with clients. While on the creative side, it means they are able to develop campaigns or digital interactive tactics that create a result with limited guidance.

A manager's job is create opportunities and do the best they can to assure they take care of their team. Managers come in all shapes and sizes, but in the marketing world the true key to success is willingness to work hard and drive results for clients.

Christine Kleha, Managing Partner and Chief Operations Officer at esd

I've always been a very independent person, so it took me a very long time to get used to the concept of delegating work to others. But now that I've positioned myself as a manager and not a co-worker or friend, I've been able to get great work out of our employees and that has freed time for me and given me the ability to achieve excellence in managing our company.

Todd West, General Manager, First Aid Global, LLC

The essential skill for being a successful manager is the ability to motivate your staff to meet tough new goals. To do this you have to communicate with the staff clearly and concisely and, particularly, with passion. You have to use this skill in both face-to-face meetings and when using the new communications technologies. You really need this skill when the goal is difficult to reach



and/or the task team includes people who don't report to you.

A really good manager can hold a meeting with a diverse group of people, present a challenge to them and have them leave the meeting committed to meeting that challenge.

Bill Rosenthal, CEO of Communispond

This is an interesting question, because beyond bottom line and employee retention, how does a manager get judged/graded? Even more tricky is how does a manager grade him or herself?

Beyond the basic requirements of management- organization, analytical skills, fairness, open communication, what sets the successful apart is finding a product or service to sell that you are intrinsically passionate about. I love food and wine and good service...winding up in hospitality was a natural sector for me to thrive in because I love what I offer my guests. And I call them that, these aren't my customers, they are my guests. Being in love with what you do is exciting to your staff, because they will feed off your energy and adopt the atmosphere you carry, as long as the previously mentioned basics are met!

John Cifelli

I have been a successful manager for twenty years. Actually, although I have been a manager for two decades I haven't always been successful. In my early days as a manager I focused on counting widgets. As a claims manager I simply read reports and figured out whether or not my employees 'met standards'. My managers thought I was successful. My employees probably thought I was an as*****. I am successful now because I recognize that most employees want to do a good job. I bring my 'A' job to communicating and to motivating my employees how to give and to improve on their best. And, I don't just talk the talk, I walk the walk. My employees know that I will respond to their personal and professional concerns promptly.

Nigel Thomas, MPH, CHES

To be a good manager, you must avoid micro-managing. At Lenstore, we place high-value on



employee growth, and we achieve this by encouraging initiative and independent thinking. Through asking questions and helping an employee discover an answer for themselves - rather than just telling them what to do - a manager develops their skills and keeps them engaged. Although it might take longer, it will be more beneficial for both the employee and the company.

- Communication is essential in management. Interaction with colleagues involves understanding their current projects, helping them prioritize their work and building strong relationships. Through careful communication, a good manager should motivate, inspire and become a source of information for their colleagues.

Jon Davies, Marketing Manager at Lenstore

I'm the Co-Founder and Director of Koyal Wholesale, the world's largest wedding and event supplies company (KoyalWholesale.com), with over 50,000 products shipping to 100+ countries worldwide. I have managed teams of between 6-10 people within our business development and marketing functions.

What fundamentally makes me a successful manager is both my commitment to furthering my own education and experience in a managerial capacity, along with further the education and objectives of my team members. In doing so, Koyal has experienced double digit growth in sales and staff since 2009, becoming the leading online destination for wedding and event planners, corporate planners and resorts worldwide.

Shreyans Parekh, Koyal Wholesale

Being a successful manager means producing positive results. My ability to listen is one of the most important skills I apply in my job in being a successful manager. When talking with my team and upper-management, I take the approach of listening in to what their needs are so that I can provide them with the necessary tools to succeed. At times, this means listening beyond words, by also reading body language, tone, understanding workload and any other signs that may help me determine a best course of action. In order to enable a team to perform their jobs at their best, a successful manager must be able to capture these signs and respond to them accordingly. If either your team or management do not feel you 'listen' and respond to their needs, you are not doing an



effective job at all.

Liz Schmidt, Marketing Coordinator at Plush Swimwear