# A
# THIN
# RED LINE

A Practical Introduction to
People Management

**TOOLS,
TECHNIQUES,
PRACTICAL
SITUATIONS,
BEST PRACTICES**

by Krishnamurthy T V

# A Thin Red Line

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# Introduction

So you wondering again about why you picked this book up.

There are so many management books in the market already and this one just seems to make up the numbers. Right and yet Wrong. Yes, there are many many management books in the market, that deal with various topics concerning management. But No, there are not that many management books that tackle the hard topic of people management, that too about managing a team doing Knowledge centric work, about getting started about this job, about how to learn the ropes in a practical sort of manner. Experience is a great teacher, yet all things need not be learnt only by making mistakes. Sometimes a bit of help in getting a difficult task started goes a long way in completing it well or at least making good progress with it. And people management is quite full of difficult tasks where even when you do the right things you may not see the right results.

With that dampener out of the way, what exactly does this book offer ?

To keep it simple this book is a collection of practical tips on People Management. Many of them learnt from good managers either observed in action or those read from in good books. The tips have been organized in different categories and different areas, to make it more accessible and more useful.

If you are from a technical background or have been involved with doing technical work, but this is the first time you are to be responsible for getting work done by a team , this book should give you a head-start in the task, especially if this is your first people management job. You may not agree with the ideas in the book, but even if they get you to think about how you will tackle some

of the tough tasks at hand, then I would consider my aims to be fulfilled.

If you are already a practicing manager then you would have mostly found your own ways of handling the issues mentioned in this book. With luck you may come across something new or different. Or you may also find something that gets you thinking about why you deal with some situations in a particular way – which may have gotten you to 'your management style'. Do give due consideration to what I have put down here and get back if you find something interesting or even insinuating. I am all ears.

# Getting Started

So you have become a manager. While the new cubicle (plush, spacious, by the sun lit aisle with a great view) and a reserved parking spot may make you feel very good, very soon you would start thinking about how you can get cracking on the job. While many of the hints laid here may seem to be very basic or common-sense, it doesn't hurt to have them put down here. Just in case they get overlooked. As someone wisely commented – *"Common sense doesn't seem to be so common after all"*. Do browse through and if you find all of them all familiar do push along to the subsequent chapters.

## Confirm the Basics

So you are a manager. It would be good if you know answers to the following questions

*Do you know what your official title is?*

*Do you know the structure of your organization? At the least, who is your manager and who is your manager's manager?*

*Do you know what your team is to be called?*

*Do you know the basic function that your team is to fulfil including what are its outputs, what are its inputs and which teams will need to be interfaced in those directions?*

*Do you know who is the HR contact for (you and) your team?*

That would be good enough to get the ball rolling. It would be nice to know the org chart, see how many levels deep you are seated and see how your team's function fits with the overall organization.

It would also be good to get your position confirmed by writing in the offer letter if you are joining an organization in this role, Or if you have gone through a in-job promotion do get the HR letter confirming the same. It serves two main purposes – one: you know for sure that you are becoming a manager, two: it helps to show someone else too, just in case you need to. Of course it is a nice thing to see someone officially confirm you and pronounce you as a Manager!

The Human Resources (HR) team of course helps you with hiring, training, supporting and in some unfortunate cases, firing your team members. And getting a good working relationship with the HR contact would help you very well in down the line. The better your relations with HR, the easier is it to get things done without much fuss. We would see more on this later.

# Clarify your Role

Now that you know the basics and are quite sure that you are a manager (the letter is there of course) you can get cracking at the next major item which is with your role.

Do confirm with your hiring manager or your line manager what exactly are the tasks that you need to do and when. For example a sample list of tasks for a "line oriented" position could be as follows. Do note that almost all topics are dealt with in more detail in later chapters, but it does not hurt to get to know them in one full list.

# A typical list of tasks

Your organization could also differ in selecting a more unique list than what follows, but the following is a *typical* list of tasks.

1. Formation and maintenance of your Team:

Under this group you could deal with following

1. Hire team members
 2. Closely review team member's performance during work
 3. Closely work with team member do to personal development and career planning.
 4. Plan for relieving the team member from the company for any of the following reasons: Diciplinary action, Non performance, Personal issues, Mutually agreed career move
1. Work planning and Task allocation

Depending upon your organization style you may be required to allocate team members from your team pool to different project / task pools as needed.

As part of this you would also have to plan for competency buildup or training for team members depending upon their work.

1. Appraisals and Annual Performance reviews

This would form the most important and most difficult (as perceived) of the tasks that a line manager has to do, namely to review the performance output of a team member and rate it in a company given rating scale. The reason for the difficulty could be due to the nature of the task itself, differences over perceived work output and importance between you and the team member and also issues about how this would affect the pay packet of the team member. All valid concerns of course and all need to be dealt with sufficient fairness so that team member continues to stay motivated and delivers the work output (and also hopefully does not start griping about how his manager mistreats him in rumour mills around the coffee place.. : )]

In addition to the above in you may also be asked to do some Project Management or sub-project management (tasks related to some sub areas may be need to be managed as part of a bigger project) depending upon the way your organization is styled.

In some cases Managers may also be asked to take part in team

tasks as co-team members so that some part of the time they do management and other parts work as part of the team.

In any case getting the clarifications on your role should be the foremost thing you do. This would also help to layout your training needs to find out what are the tasks to be done and how you have to get them done (tools to be used, processes to be followed etc).

# Understand the HR policies, processes and Salary structure

In most companies the HR policy would be a well defined document good enough to lay out the various rules and regulations governing all aspects of employee welfare. Understanding these policies is paramount, not just to get to understand the rules and regulations as they apply to you, but also for you to be able to explain, clarify and help your team members with any doubts or issues as they may arise. Though the HR contact may be there, the first stop for all policy interpretations for your team will be yourself.

Do also make sure you get a hang of the HR processes associated with all the following functions

- Hiring of personnel

- Allocation of work

- Objective settings

- Objective assessments

- Performance appraisals

- Personnel improvement programs

- Firing of personnel

Most of these functions would have various forms, procedures associated with them, more often than not requiring multiple levels

of approvals, with tools designed to work with the same. Learning them well will help you get the job done correct quickly the first time.

In most companies, salaries are structured in much the same way for all employees, regardless of their grade and role. Do get to understand how your team members salaries stack up as compared to yourselves, about the components of the salary and what impacts which portions. Again this would help you clarify issues as and when they may arise and also help confirm to your team member that he or she is getting paid as assured. Also it would be your job to help the HR setup salary for any new team member.and also be able to explain his or her salary structure.

# Find your Mentor(s) (or Buddy)

Some organizations have this wonderful policy of assigning mentors to new joinees as part of the process of induction. In some cases this role may be called a Buddy too. Whatever be the name of the role, this is such a nice step in itself; it helps the new joinee have a single stop for information about the day to day aspects of getting into a new organization and maybe a new role too. Ofcourse much depends upon how qualified and experienced the mentor is how willing he or she is to sharing useful time with the new joinee. A helpful attitude from the mentor/buddy will go a long way in making the new person's entry into an organization or role as painless as possible.

As a new manager if you get such a mentor/buddy assigned to you it would be great. If not do not get stumped but try to look around for people who can play the role for you, even if not officially, but in a practical manner. Your manager for eg. could be a person to play this role. Also it helps if you have some other managers in the same level who could be going through the same learning curve, nothing like *birds of the same managerial feather flocking together.*

If nothing else works, you can always badger your HR contact or unit head to agree to give you trainings on the topics you require at the times that you feel will be useful. However, more often than not these trainings tend to come after you have groped around in the dark and somehow gotten the tasks done the first time. Even in these cases you can reflect back upon the experience with the new knowledge gained to better understand how you could have gotten something done easier, faster or happier.

In case you do get your Mentor Buddy do get some things clear about

- when you can approach them with doubts
- whether they require formal meeting invites or prefer informal approaches
- whether they would prefer some kind of formal tracking of the Mentor Buddy activities

and how you get feedback about your progress (formalness, timing, frequency, depth of feedback)

Do make sure you give feedback to the Mentor Buddy too. It works better in a two way street.

# Getting your Team

So, you are a line manager and you have got your job responsibilities clarified. Everything is set. Right ? Except for one minor detail – no make that major; do you know your team? After all what is a line manager without a team? Probably like an elephant without a trunk.

Anyways, in this chapter we will look at the some of the ways in which you can build your team. In some cases you may be taking over a functioning team and the challenges are different in such cases. We will see more of this in the subsequent sections.

## Building your Team

So you are to be building your own team. While building anything new is an exciting activity in itself, building or forming a team is one of the most fulfilling activities that you would do as a line manager. It is one where you can see the fruits of your labour with a job done well when you can see good quality output coming from your team months and years down the line, and trust me when I say it is one of the best feelings that you would experience as a Line Manager.

So just to summarize why building a team may be a good option

- you can increase the team size gradually over time
- you can plan better for the competence buildup, ie. Train the intiial few well using external trainings / travel and then get them to train the rest of the team as it builds up

- you will not be under pressure to get enough work for all team members and hence you can avoid the case of very little work and many idle team members.
- Ie, it is better to get some initial work when team size is small (2-3 members), get that work done well and use the learning to reinforce the basic skills and also help train others when the team grows.
- Getting some good work done at initial stages of team formation, where you can control the quality of work better, will help you secure further work. Also any negative image of your team's output, once perceived may prove difficult to overcome and may require lots of effort and energy.

The following subsections give an idea about things you should keep in mind when you get your team on board.

# Work on a Staffing Plan:

So what is a staffing plan ? It is a document which gives an idea of how many resources are needed to be part of the team over a timeline of coming months or years. In practise it could be a simple xls showing size projection of your team over coming months. In a typical organization you should have this information for at least 6 months to 1 year duration.

And from whom can you get this information ? Start with your line manager, add inputs from all project managers, and optionally any division or section heads for your location. Consolidate this information and present it to the stakeholders and get their agreements. Do include any others in the management who may need to approve of these hiring requests too.

# Arrange with HR, agencies to get candidates

Now comes the tricky part, where you source for candidates and this is best left to the experts who should be in the HR or the agencies contracted by your HR. Do remember to give enough of the profile of the candidates you are looking at in terms of

- experience, domain worked upon, special soft skills, and an idea of what the prospective job involves.

Do remember to plan your hiring activities in a way to fit in with any schedule you have for work to be done. Keep in mind the following things take time

- sourcing for the candidate profiles
- Arranging for the interviews (if multiple interviews are to be done try to get them done the same day, and if your manager / HR also need to interview do try to factor the same)
- Finalizing on the offer to the candidate with HR
- Getting candidate to accept the offer
- Notice period of the candidate before the joining date
- Training time for the getting the candidate ready to start the work

That looks like a lot of work and it is the most important work that you would do. The costliest decision for you and your company could be about spending lots of money getting the wrong people into the team.

Anyways do good and try to plan your tasks keeping in mind the lead time as shown above.

# Spend time with the interview panel(s) sharing the overall plan for the interviews

Planning enough time for each interview and also ensuring that you get all information necessary to come to a sound decision about the candidate. It is best that each interview have a focus and the panels know the overall plan of how many interviews and what points need to be covered as part of each interview. Also ensure each interview has a proper interview record and the materials used to be able to cross check and verify later when comparing between candidates if required.

Also do ensure that your interview panels know how to go about the business. Do conduct a couple of mocks or get to be part of some of the interviews to give them a good idea of what you expect to be covered.

Interviews that are well organized and executed tend to give a good impression about your team and company to the candidate and may increase your chances of hiring them.

# Spend enough time in the interview to give the candidate sufficient idea about what the prospective job in your team is about

Do make sure you go through the prospective job activities with the candidates in sufficient detail to give a good idea of what the candidate is siging up for. Again the motto is to avoid surprises to both sides (you and the candidate) after the candidate joins the company.

# As much as possible try to get the team members to interview candidates

The team members (if some are already in) should interview the candidates. This would give a stake for your team to decide on future members and empowers them in a way. Also it would help avoid playing the blame game later if and when the team feels someone is not fitting well. At the least it helps the team to find solutions for problems as they had a say in the hiring in first place.

# Get everyone's input but make your decision final on the hiring a team member

This part is not about having ultimate power of hiring with you. But more about taking sole responsibility for the hiring decision. Do take inputs from all panel including HR opinion, but decide for yourself. This way you convince yourself about the hire and would be taking head-on any issues that arise later about the new team member.

# Look not just for technical competency, but also for proper attitude and ability to be a good team player

Does the candidate possess good attitude to gel into the team? Does it look like he has patience and ability to push towards results when the circumstances are not too easy? Would the candidate be willing to put in some extra effort to meet a tough deadline but still maintain good relations in the team? Does the candidate look like he can appreciate some good humour?

These could be some of the things that you need to judge the candidate on. In most teams the team on the whole needs to deliver good consistent results and under pressure it is attitude not talent which determines results.

# Once you have hired someone do your damned best to give the team member your complete backing

Ever remember the times when you had to work under someone who would not be ready to stand up for you? Who would not support you or help you in your decisions? Who would not plan sufficient training time for you to get started on some difficult and new tasks? Who would simply pass instructions from top management directly to you and would constantly try to push you towards insanely tight schedules time and again?

Even if you have not worked under someone like that I suppose you get enough of a picture, what such working conditions imply. Last thing that you do should be to act like one such manager to your

team member. So remember to back your team member in all the ways possible, so that you give yourself and your team member the best chances of having very meaningful and successful partnership. And yes one that will keep the team and yourself happy too.

# Taking over an existing team

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## Sessions with the Old Manager

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### Get to know about the plan for transfer of responsibilities.

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### If possible try to get some of your decisions and analysis reviewed by the existing manager.

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## Ensure that all forms and artifacts related to HR processes and other records get transferred to you.

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## Get the manager to share his detailed assessments of each team member.

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## Get to know what are most pressing issues and concerns w.r. the team.

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## Try to understand what was the existing manager's style of work.

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## Avoid inheriting the current manager's prejudices and opinions about the team.

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# Getting to know your team

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## *Have an Ice Breaker session.*

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## Find out what team rules about work are in place.

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## Arrange for detailed one to one sessions with each team member.

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## Build and maintain a team database.

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# Employee Engagement: The Heart and Soul of People Management

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## So what is employee engagement?

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## Gallup and Q12[1]:

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## What are one on one (1-1) meetings ?

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[1]Gallup Management Journal, "Feedback for Real"

# Why do we need one to one meetings ?

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## Situation 1:

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## Situation 2

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# The Mechanics of 1 on 1 meetings.

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## Formal vs Informal.

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## Duration of the meetings.

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# Frequency of meetings.

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# Attitude during the meeting.

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# Agenda for the meeting.

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# The first meeting.

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# Minutes, Actions and records.

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# When 1 on 1s don't work...

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# Other Tools for Employee Engagement

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## Skip Level Meetings

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### What is it?

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### How useful is it?

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### Who attends it and how often?

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## *360* Feedback:*

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## What is it?

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## How often can it be used?

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## How do you do it?

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## Should you allow the team members to know the source of the feedback ?

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## How useful is this 360* feedback and other such techniques?

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# Employee Engagement Surveys (EES)

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## What is an EES?

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## How is it conducted?

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## Can i have a more simplified employee survey?

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## Can i have an even simpler survey only for my team?

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