Practical Ways to LEAD & SERVE (MANAGE) OTHERS

MODERN MANAGEMENT MADE EASY: BOOK 2

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Practical Ways to Lead and Serve (Manage) Others

Modern Management Made Easy, Book 2

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This book is for sale at http://leanpub.com/manageothers

This version was published on 2020-12-23

ISBN 978-1-943487-15-8

Practical **ink**

In memory and honor of Jerry Weinberg who told me I should write a book about rewiring management logic.

For Edward Rothman, my first management mentor.

And, for Mark, Shaina, and Naomi, as always. Thank you for managing me.

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Acknowledgments

I thank all the people who read and commented on the management myths columns as I wrote them. I also thank Software Quality Engineering, now known as Techwell, who first published these columns.

I thank my coaching and consulting clients. You have taught me more than you know.

I thank Matt Barcomb, Pawel Brodzinski, Lisa Crispin, Andrea Goulet, Mike Lowery, Carl Hume, and Leland Newsom for their technical review.

I thank Rebecca Airmet and Nancy Groth for their editing. I thank Brandon Swann for his cover design. I thank Karen Billip for her layout and Jean Jesensky for her indexing.

Any mistakes are mine.

Introduction

Several years ago, I wrote a series of articles I called "management myths." They each described one way I'd seen managers act so that the manager created the opposite result from the one they wanted. Yes, the manager's actions created precisely the opposite effect.

I wrote a myth a month for 36 months.

I assumed as the world transitioned to agile approaches or approaches where teams, managers, and organizations needed more resilience, that managers would change. I thought no one needed to read about the myths in a world where we want collaborative, cross-functional, self-managing teams.

I was wrong.

As I worked with more managers who wanted to use agile approaches, I saw several problems with their management practices:

- The practices barely worked for non-agile teams. Teams succeeded in spite of their management.
- The practices prevented any team's adaptability and resilience.
- The practices didn't work for managers who wanted to lead and serve others.

And, in an organization attempting to transform to an agile culture? The more the managers tried to make old patterns work, the less agility anyone exhibited.

Why did these smart people behave in ways that didn't make sense?

They didn't know any better.

These managers had never witnessed useful management, never mind excellent management. They tried to do the best job they

could. And, they perpetuated what they'd experienced, or possibly even learned in school. They practiced what they'd seen—the old ways of management.

It's time for real modern management.

Modern managers face enormous challenges. Too many managers feel as if they are stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place.

How can you become a modern manager when the system, the culture, is based on old thinking and old practices?

Carefully.

I've divided the original essays into three books. Book 1, *Practical Ways to Manage Yourself*, asks you to consider how you can manage and respect yourself to build congruence and integrity in your actions.

This second book explains how you can serve a harmonic whole. The entire team or group can then work together in a culture of transparency and trust.

Book 3, *Practical Ways to Lead an Innovative Organization*, explores ways to create a human and innovative culture in your organization, so you can use the ideas of trust and integrity to create a place where people want to work.

You might feel many constraints in your situation. As you read these books, you might nod and say, "Yes, I can do that." And, you might shake your head at some ideas and say, "Not going to touch that here. Nope, not at all."

I do hope you consider each essay as a possible experiment for your management practice. You have options.

Who Are the People in These

Essays?

You might wonder about my use of names and gender in these books. For example, you might never have seen women as senior managers. I have seen men and women as senior managers. I've been a senior manager.

My experience tells me that a given gender does not equate to great or unfortunate management skills. Neither does a person's country of origin or any other kind of individual demographic.

To help you see what the management world could be, I've created parity across genders. I've used names of people I've worked with or admired. Even with that, I've changed all the names to protect the innocent and the guilty.

I've had the good fortune to meet and work with male and female managers worldwide. In almost every circumstance, the managers have done the best they could, given their company's environment and culture. The manager's gender didn't matter.

The company's environment mattered more than anything. You might—or might not—see the variety of people in roles that I write about here.

Through my work, I've recognized several principles that create great management and build healthy organizational cultures.

All three books build on these principles:

1. Clarify purpose—for you, the team, and the organization.
2. Build empathy with the people who do the work.
3. Build a safe environment. People work better when they can trust you, their colleagues, and the organization as a whole.
4. Seek outcomes by optimizing for an overarching goal.
5. Encourage experiments and learning.

6. Catch people succeeding.
7. Exercise value-based integrity as a model for the people you lead and serve.

If you can exercise these principles, you will gain these effects:

- Respect—for yourself, for the team, and for the purpose of the organization.
- Trust—possibly with boundaries—to encourage the behaviors and outcomes you want.
- Team-based approaches to working at all levels of the organization.

All three books explain some of the trickier parts of management. You'll get the most value if you read all three books.

As you read the dialogue in the essays, remember that I said most of these things to my managers. You might see these conversations as insubordination.

I didn't feel as if I was insubordinate. I used the principle of congruence to have conversations where my manager and I cared about the outcome, each other, and discovered our best possible outcome for the situation.

You and I are different people. How I frame conversations might not work for you. You will find *your* best ways to describe the situation and influence your manager.

You can practice human and humane management that produces superior results for your organization. You can respect yourself, the people you serve, and the entire organization and customers. You can act with integrity. And, you can have empathy without being a pushover.

Management is an honorable profession. We need managers—great, congruent managers who can use their interpersonal skills to get

the best out of themselves first. Then, they can extend those skills to the people they serve and across the organization.

My best to you. I hope you enjoy reading these essays and that you act to ease your way into modern management.

Let's start.

1. Managers Lead and Serve Others

When I work with managers, I ask them what they want from the people they lead. They say things like this:

- I want to know I can trust the people to do a great job and deliver great work.
- I want to know that the people are engaged and working hard to serve our customers.
- I want to know that the people are loyal to their team and the purpose of the organization.

How many of your management practices encourage these behaviors?

Here's what I see too often:

- People feel as if they can't do a great job—they don't have the time they need or the people they need to deliver their best work.
- People feel as if they are interchangeable cogs. The work doesn't engage or challenge them. They might not even know the purpose of this work.
- People don't feel loyalty to their team or the organization.

And the managers? They feel more and more pressure to deliver results. The managers often resort to directing and controlling the people they manage to achieve those results.

Consider this reframe: instead of managing other people, great managers lead and serve others.

When managers lead and serve, they can trust people. The people engage themselves and deliver the requested results. The managers create an environment where people engage themselves and develop loyalty to their teams, products, and the organization.

How do these great managers lead and serve? Peter Drucker, in *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*,DRU73, wrote that managers exist to fulfill these two specific tasks:

1. Create a team or workgroup that exists as a harmonic whole—the whole team or group is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. Balance the immediate and long-term future.

Managers lead when they create a team that can solve problems where those problems exist.

Managers who create a harmonic whole lead and serve. And, using that harmonic whole, they can balance the immediate and long-term futures. The manager can create an environment where people can do their best work.

We have a name for a harmonic whole: flow efficiency.

1.1 Encourage Flow Efficiency

Current management practices perpetuate a big misunderstanding about how people work effectively in the organization. Too often, we treat people as individuals, as resources. That misunderstanding has a name—resource efficiency.

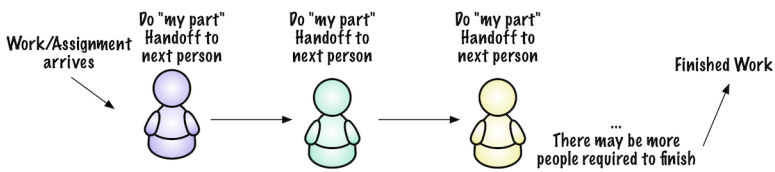

Figure 1.1: Resource Efficiency

Each person has their specific expertise. When the person on the left completes their work, they hand off that work to the person on the right, the person next in line. That person finishes his or her work and passes the work on to the next person on the right. And, if the people discover a problem, the work often returns to the front of the line, the left-most person. Every handoff requires waiting until the person is ready for the work.

Resource efficiency looks efficient, right? Resource efficiency says If we divide and conquer the work, we can do it faster.

For knowledge work, that's wrong.

When we hand off work to each other, instead of working as a harmonic team, we increase the delays in the team. All the work takes much longer than if we worked together.

When managers use resource efficiency, each person is a specialist. That means a specific expert—and only that expert—can do their work. You might have seen this cycle: the expert becomes more expert and specialized. Pretty soon, that expert is the only one in the organization who can do the work, and it takes too long to bring other people in to even learn about the work.

With resource efficiency, you optimize for each person along the way. You get the finished work when you get it.

Resource efficiency focuses on output. Each person does their job. However, outputs don't necessarily create valuable outcomes—a product or service a customer can use.

In resource efficiency, each person is "fully utilized." That full utilization leads to problems such as:

- "It takes forever to bring people up to speed around here."
- "Only Fred can work on that. He's the only one who knows that code (or whatever)."
- "You can't take a vacation. That's just before we want to ship, and you're the only one who knows that part of the product."

- Many features are partly done, and too few are complete. (The work in progress is quite high.)

It's very safe for managers to think in resource-efficiency terms. When we do, we can "hold people accountable," we can attempt to measure each person's contribution and rank the people, and we can blame people for "not doing their jobs."

Contrast that with flow efficiency, the idea in *This is Lean: Resolving the Efficiency Paradox* MOA13.

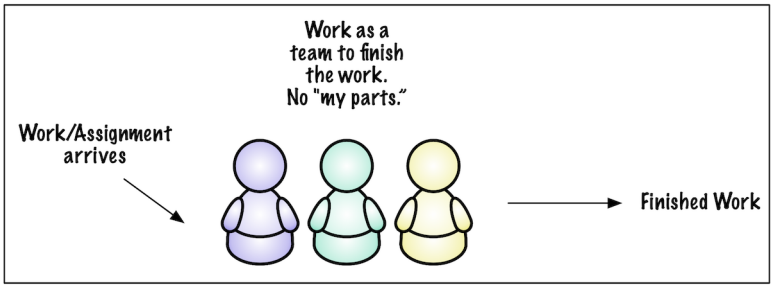

Figure 1.2: Flow Efficiency

When we use flow efficiency, the *team* takes the item and collaborates. The team might specialize in a particular area of the product, but the entire team collaborates to finish a given piece of work.

What happens if someone is out for a day or a week? The team can complete the work without that person. Yes, the team might be a little slower, but they can still release finished work.

When teams work in flow efficiency, it doesn't matter what each person "knows." The team optimizes its collaboration to finish the work. Teams take these kinds of actions:

- The team limits the total work they undertake for a given amount of time.
- The team decides how they collaborate. They might pair, swarm, or mob to finish their work.

- The team might use limits to manage their WIP (Work in Progress), regardless of the state of the work.

Resource efficiency is about optimizing at the level of the individual, for outputs. Flow efficiency is about optimizing for the team's throughput, for outcomes.

Customers can't buy busy-ness. Customers can only buy completed and shippable work.

Flow efficiency helps teams finish work faster. Resource efficiency creates delays.

Modern managers encourage flow efficiency. They don't manage for resource efficiency.

Flow efficiency requires that managers change their behaviors first, and then their mindset. These changes are tricky. That's because the words we use in organizations reinforce resource-efficiency thinking:

- We call the people who help with employee hiring, retention, and engagement "Human Resources."
- "Resources" work on projects.
- Some people do "load balancing" for humans working on several projects at a time.

If you use flow efficiency, you are more likely to get the results you want. That means you can trust everyone to do their jobs—and trust that the team can deliver the results you want. Trust is the next big idea for leading and serving others.

Flow Efficiency for Workgroups

If you manage a workgroup as opposed to an interdependent team, you might be puzzled. How can you use the ideas of flow efficiency where people are *supposed* to work alone?

Here's how one Customer Support group used flow efficiency thinking:

- Every time they hired a new person, they had the new person pair with one buddy for a couple of weeks.
- Every time people rotated to a new area of expertise, the new person paired with an experienced person in that new area.
- If anyone realized after 15 minutes they were stuck, they hung a ticket on a kanban board and continued to work on the issue. As each person finished their tickets, they would first check the board to see if anyone needed help.

No one felt alone. No one felt as if they were stuck. That workgroup worked as a team when they could, and individuals when they didn't need to.

When we, as managers, manage for collaboration, we change the culture. That collaboration allows everyone to function as the best person they can be.

A harmonic whole requires more than a reasonable flow of work. Harmony also requires psychological safety.

1.2 Create a Culture of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety starts with how safe you feel to discuss issues, and experiment.

You might think it matters how safe the people you serve feel—and that's a big piece of managing others. However, if you don't feel

safe as a manager, you can't extend that safety to the people you serve.

Amy C. Edmondson, in *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* EDM12, discusses the need for psychological safety in interdependent collaborative teams.

Edmondson's five points about safety are:

- Use clear and direct language.
- Encourage learning from small experiments.
- Admit when we don't know.
- Acknowledge when we fail.
- Set boundaries for what is a personal or team decision and what is not.

Safety allows the team members to discuss, explore together, and learn. You are also part of at least one interdependent collaborative team—the management team at your level. If you and your peers don't feel safe to ask for help, to create experiments, and set reasonable boundaries, the people you serve won't feel safe either.

That safety—or lack thereof—permeates the entire organization even if you don't have a highly interdependent team. Here's an example that includes how your organization rewards people:

- If the organization punishes people for making mistakes, why would anyone take a chance?
- If the organization punishes people for collaboration, why would anyone collaborate?
- If the organization punishes people for thinking quietly, why would anyone want to appear less than fully busy?

That lack of safety drags the entire organization down. That's one of the reasons people think management can exist without leadership.

The leaders stick their necks out and ask for help, admit when they're wrong, and experiment.

If you don't feel safe to ask for help, the people you serve can't ask for what they want. You'll have plenty of paperwork-based management. You'll cover your tush. Everyone else will cover theirs.

And, too few people will want to experiment. You won't be able to lead or serve.

Many of the essays in this book are about your safety so you can lead and serve others.

Edmonson offers a tool for fostering psychological safety.[1]

One way I like to think about how safety affects how we treat each other is in how we extend or don't extend trust.

1.3 Extend Trust

Are you supposed to trust the people you serve to do their jobs? Many organizations ask for status details that require a manager to micromanage—not serve—people. (I wrote about this in Book 1.)

Consider how you manage your life. You probably have a mortgage or pay rent every month. That means you manage your money.

You get yourself to work on time, fed, and clothed. You manage your personal needs.

You might have more responsibilities, such as with or to a spouse, family, pets. Maybe even to other organizations outside your family, such as your town or places you volunteer. You manage your responsibilities to others.

You are an adult who recognizes and manages your responsibilities. Things might happen that prevent you from delivering all the time—and you let people know when that occurs. Other people trust you.

[1] https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/understanding-team-effectiveness/steps/foster-psychological-safety/

You're an adult. So are the people you serve. You can extend trust to them, too.

A quick check: how many policies and procedures do you have, that you, as a manager, need to follow? (I'm not talking about physical safety policies, such as closed-toe shoes or safety glasses in labs. I'm talking about other policies such as around work hours, what people can spend money on, and how you think about hiring.) The more policies and procedures, the less trust you extend.

Adults don't need a lot of direction or control. They need to understand the reasons for the work you requested, the boundaries of their decision-making, the ability to integrate learning into their work, and the strength to work with others. You and they might need to agree on when to check in with each other, but you don't have to micromanage their work.

Consider these trust-building actions, as in Solomon in *Building Trust in Business, Politics, Relationships, and Life*,SOF01:

- Deliver what you promise to deliver.
- Be consistent in your actions and reactions.
- Make integrity a cornerstone of your work.
- Be willing to discuss, influence, and negotiate. Don't get stuck on your position.
- Trust in yourself and your colleagues.

When you trust people and serve them, you might:

- Decide what to measure that makes sense for the system and the person. Then, you might offer feedback when things do or don't go the way you want.
- Create an environment in which people can do their best work. How can you create an environment of ease? How can you avoid creating challenges that make the work more difficult?

- Create an environment in which people feel that both their team and manager support their work.

You might think of trust and safety as a balancing act—part of your management congruence. Here's why congruence matters when you lead and serve other people.

1.4 Congruence Helps You Lead and Serve

We all have the same amount of time in a day. You, as a manager, need to decide:

- How much time to spend with each person you serve, your peers, and your manager.
- In what form to spend that time. For example, in a one-on-one or as part of a team.
- What to discuss with people when you do work with them.

I find the idea of congruence helpful when I think about where, when, and how I spend my time as a manager. I first read about congruence in *Software Quality Management, Vol 2: First-Order Measurement* WEI93. It's a way to balance what I want (self) with the other person (other) in the context of the person and the organization.

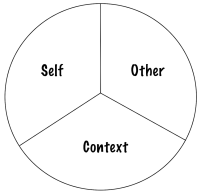

Figure 1.3: Congruence

Congruence is a way to find your balance between you and your needs, the other person and their needs, and the entire context.

If you ignore the other person, you might blame people for not working longer hours—even if they've put in a full day's or week's worth of good work. Or, you don't give them credit for the work they do.

If you ignore yourself, you might not make sure a given expert can help other people learn about their areas of expertise. You might placate or appease that person, or the people who pressure you for work by a too-early date. If you've ever seen a manager unwilling to address a team's conflict, you've probably seen placating behavior.

If you ignore the context, you might think you can use hiring shortcuts. Or, you might think that measuring time instead of outcomes is useful.

You build a culture of trust and loyalty over time, interaction by interaction. There is no shortcut to trust and loyalty.

The Buck Stops With You

Harry Truman, the 33rd US President, famously had a plaque on his desk that said, "The buck stops here." It meant that the President takes responsibility for the decisions—even if he didn't implement those decisions.

The more you can take the attitude that the buck stops with you, the easier it is for people to trust you, and for you to create an environment of psychological safety. You create a support system for the people you lead and serve.

When people make mistakes, offer feedback. And, determine if you or your team needs to trap those mistakes before the mistakes occur. However, don't blame people for doing the best

> job they can. When you take the approach that the buck stops with you, you can create a more congruent environment.

Incongruent managers don't consider the self, the other, and the context. They don't create psychological safety. They don't generate more business value because they don't take a strategic view of the entire situation: what the business needs (the context), how they as the manager fits (the self), and the people they serve (other).

Without congruence, managers don't create a coherent and congruent work environment.

1.5 Environment Shapes Behavior

Consider Kurt Lewin's equation about a person's behavior and how the environment shapes each person's behavior and performance:

$$B=f(P,E).$$

B is a person's Behavior. That behavior is a function, f, of the Person and their Environment.

What is the environment for a person? The team, the team's culture, and the organization's culture. That environment includes:

- How the team works, in resource efficiency or flow efficiency.
- How safe the people on the team feel to discuss their concerns and challenges.
- The physical location and how the person and team use that location.
- How much trust the team members offer each other.

- How organization policies and procedures help the team perform their work.

When we look at the environment to see why a person might behave in one way or another, we can lead and serve more congruently. Especially if we want to offer change-focused feedback. We might not need the person to change—we might need to change the environment.

We create the environment—the culture—when we live our values.

1.6 Manage With Value-Based Integrity

Congruent managers live their value-based integrity:

- Honesty, which means explaining what you want and admitting when you're wrong.
- Fairness, which means balancing the needs of everyone.
- Consistency, which means we can predict that person's behaviors within some bounds.
- Truthfulness, which means helping everyone understand the true state of the situation.
- Respect others, which means creating an environment in which people can do their best work, trusting people to do a great job, and not gossiping about others.

When you serve with value-based integrity, the people you serve remember how you made them feel. When people feel good about their relationships (with their managers and colleagues), they can collaborate, act on feedback, and solve problems faster and better than you might imagine. They create their harmonic whole.

I'm not suggesting you avoid the difficult conversations—not at all. As you manage, you'll create time and space for those conversations and conduct those conversations with respect. That's part of your leadership.

To effectively lead and serve the people you manage, examine your assumptions about management.

1.7 Examine Your Management Assumptions

We all have assumptions about how to manage people. Your assumptions drive the way you think about and act as a manager—all your decisions about how you manage or serve people.

Some managers use Theory X assumptions: that people are inherently lazy and require direction. Too many organizations use Theory X in designing the organization and teams; in how they promote people; in how they assess the relative value of a person.

Some managers use Theory Y assumptions: that people want to do a great job and need an environment in which to excel with their peers. (I've paraphrased these two theories from McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, MCG06.)

In my experience, few people are either Theory X or Theory Y—they use the context of the issue to select their behaviors.

One manager, Lil, using more Theory X assumptions, said, "My people can do the work themselves but not estimate well. I do the estimation for them."

Her peer, Sue, turned and said, "The people I serve can both do the work and estimate it. I only have to explain the direction we want to go." Sue paused for a few seconds. She then continued, "I do have to check in with them a couple of times a week, but those

are brief checkpoints, to make sure we still agree on the direction, the vision."

Neither manager is wrong, and neither is right. Lil was new to the organization, serving several teams of people who haven't estimated anything on their own for years. They were afraid of estimating "wrong," so they padded their estimates. Note that fear played a huge role in their behaviors.

Sue, on the other hand, had spent the previous three years reinforcing everyone's interdependence as teams, and the fact that when teams worked together, everyone won. The people were not afraid of the work or the estimates. They were more concerned about staying focused on the right direction, which is why Sue checked in with them regularly.

Both managers assessed the context before deciding how to lead and serve the people.

Your management assumptions will shape the culture you create.

1.8 Managers Create and Refine the Culture

When managers lead and serve others, they create or refine the culture and the environment, the system of work. Culture bounds your organization's system of work—the environment.

Edgar Schein in *Organizational Culture and Leadership* SCH10 says that our artifacts, values, and assumptions define our culture. When I consider a culture, I can boil it down to these three ideas:

- How do we treat each other?
- What can we discuss?
- What do we reward?

When I use that lens to think about culture, I can see a given organization's culture more clearly. That's why every organization's culture is different.

Managers reinforce the culture when they offer reinforcing feedback for the "best" behaviors and offer change-focused feedback for the "worst." You may have seen this Gruenert and Whitaker quote:

> The Culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate." —Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker, *School Culture Rewired*, ch. 3 (2015)

Cultures are not wrong or bad. The culture will determine how well—or not well—the organization works.

Every action you take—or don't—adds to the culture. Other people see how you treat people; what and how you discuss; and what you publicly recognize and reward. Even if you think you're not intentionally creating the culture, you are.

The less you think about culture, the more likely you are to create a culture you don't want.

A big part of any culture is how safe people feel to do the work. Aside from psychological safety, people feel safe when you, as a manager, serve with value-based integrity.

Managers can lead and serve others when they see the system of work—the people, the products and services, and how those people work together.

1.9 Consider These Principles to Lead and Serve Others

When managers lead and serve others, they adapt the principles in these ways:

1. Clarify the team's purpose so the team can know and focus on the highest value work. As a manager, you provide value by creating an environment that makes it possible for people to do their best work.
2. Build empathy with the people who do the work. When you acknowledge people's contributions outside the team, they realize why the work was important.
3. Build a safe environment. Your job might be to protect the team from organizational mayhem.
4. Seek outcomes and optimize for the overarching goal. Successful knowledge work arises from a harmonic whole—flow efficiency.
5. Encourage experiments and learning. The more people learn together, the better they can make their environment. They can improve a little every day.
6. Catch people succeeding. When people hear what they've done well, they are more likely to consider what else they might improve.
7. Exercise your value-based integrity as a model for the people you lead and serve.

You'll notice I didn't include transparency or communication in these principles. That's because if you use all these principles, you will communicate more effectively. You will be as transparent as you can be with the people you serve.

You create an environment where people can do their best work.

Given these principles, consider how you build your leadership excellence.

1.10 Lead and Serve with Excellence

Management excellence combines these principles with the idea of a harmonic whole. I've succeeded when I ask myself these ques-

tions:

- How can I feel safe and help others feel safe as they do the work? Safety encourages open conversation.
- How can I extend trust so people feel as if they can deliver to the best of their abilities?
- How can I build collaboration into the culture?

If I explain the outcomes I want and then ask myself these questions, I tend to exhibit more management excellence.

I'm not asking you to change your beliefs. Your beliefs arise from the results of your actions and interactions with others. Change your behaviors as an experiment. Then, you can decide if you want to change your beliefs and then, the culture.

You don't need to be perfect. If you can explain when you experiment, people will build empathy, trust, and respect with you.

Become a modern manager and build ease in how you lead and serve, especially to create that harmonic whole, where the team succeeds.

Let's start.

2. How Many People Can You Serve as a Manager?

Many executives think it's easy for first-level managers to manage more than nine people.

In my first management role, I "managed" one person. That person didn't need much management. He taught me how to manage capable people like him. He saved me from making too many mistakes. That experience was terrific practice for me.

Later in my management career, I managed a "team" of 15 testers. They were not a team. They were a group because they worked independently from each other on different projects. We were a team only for learning about testing.

I didn't think of my role as allocating people to projects, because most people remained on long-standing product teams. I managed the project portfolio for the test group, so I could match-make testers to products.

What else did I do as a manager?

- Conducted one-on-ones with each person, some weekly, some biweekly. But I had a private conversation with each person at least every two weeks. I discussed career development with each person at every one-on-one.
- Conducted a weekly learning meeting where everyone in the test group would learn something. This was a community of practice meeting. Sometimes it was about professional practices. Sometimes it was about tools. Sometimes it was about

project management techniques. The group decided what they wanted to learn. I greased the skids and facilitated their learning. People took turns presenting something. Yes, I did too. Sometimes, we invited other people across the company to present. We had a long list of things to learn.

- I made sure everyone knew what everyone else was doing. But not with a serial status meeting. I took people's email status to me, collated it, and emailed it to everyone. If anyone was interested, they could read it. If not, they could trash it. The idea was that since they were all working on different projects, they might discover insights someone else might want to know. I knew I was no longer technical enough to solve their problems for them. I could facilitate their problem solving, if necessary. I provided information they might not have. They could follow up.
- I made sure that the right people were invited to the right meetings. This was more difficult than it sounds. I did not want to go to all the meetings. But I was invited. I had to get uninvited, make sure the right testers were invited, get off the email list, and make sure the testers were on the list.
- I generated job analyses for all the open positions, phone screened candidates, and arranged the interviewing.

I'm sure there was more, but that's what I remember now.

I recently met a smart CTO of a company with about 100 engineers. He said he wanted a flat organization. That makes sense to me. Then he said, "Every engineering manager should be able to manage about 15-20 engineers and the projects that they work on, too."

Oh, boy. You will notice that I was not managing projects in my list above. I had full days with just my management responsibilities. Even with that, I worked after dinner. I conducted phone screens and wrote reports. I worked after dinner because I had no time during the day.

Could I have done any useful project management? No. Could I have managed any more people? No. Certainly not up to 20 people. Why? Because I needed time to meet with everyone, some people each week.

Why could I manage 15 people? Because, by this time, I was an experienced manager. I already had management practice. First with one person. Then with three or four. Then seven, eight.

When I served nine people, I realized I had to move to biweekly one-on-ones for some people. I asked the people who were more senior if they minded. No, it was okay. But if all nine people were more junior and needed coaching? It would have been a disaster. (At the time, I didn't know about mobbing and how fast a team learns when they work together.) By the time I served 15 people, I had some idea of what to do so I could serve them all.

No one can manage an "infinite" number of people and do a great job.

It's the same principle as code or projects.

If you don't care how good the code is, you can write as much code as you want. If you don't care how good your project management is, you can manage as many projects as you want. If you don't care how good your management is, you can "manage" as many people as you want.

Everyone has their own point where they no longer can be effective as a manager. For me, that number was 15 already fairly capable people. Maybe you can manage more people than I did, especially if the managers serve autonomous teams. When teams understand how to manage themselves, the manager doesn't need to do much for a given team.

And, if the teams you serve are not autonomous? You have too much work.

The problem with too much work is this: you can't think faster or harder. Each of us has some limit to how well we can think. If we

don't learn how to work differently, we can't "scale" what we do.

The more the teams manage themselves, the less management the teams need. That's why I recommend you Encourage Flow Efficiency. The teams might need your help to remove impediments.

Great managers offer feedback and coaching. They might offer meta-feedback and meta-coaching if a person wants to discuss how they develop their interpersonal skills. Once the teams know how to offer feedback and coaching to each other, managers can focus up, at the level of the team, not for each person.

Great managers create a culture of learning. That means they create and offer a learning environment for the people, a place for people to learn. I expected the people in my group to spend the rest of their time learning on their own and being responsible.

And, great managers build a trusting relationship with each person. That's the point of the one-on-one.

Because we were hiring, and because I had responsibilities across the organization, we were *all* busy. If I hadn't made time for our one-on-ones, I could have gone for weeks, not seeing people. That would have been Wrong.

How much do the people on the team need *you* as their manager? Can they manage their interpersonal relationships? What about their decisions? How many decisions can they make without you?

Back in Book 1, I suggested you, as a manager, learn to delegate. The more the team or group can manage their interpersonal relationships, the more satisfied the people will be. The more people know what to expect of you, the more they can build their relationships with each other.

Management is not about micromanagement. It's about creating an environment in which everyone can do their best work. If you are too busy to do that, are you really managing?

2.1 Myth: You Can Manage Any Number of People as a Manager

"Cindy, I need to add three more people to your team." Patrick, the CTO, leaned in the doorway. He turned, about to walk away.

"Wait a sec. We need to discuss this. You don't get to drop that bombshell and leave. Why do you want me to hire more people?" Cindy looked concerned.

"No, I don't want you to hire anyone," Patrick said. "I'm moving them over from Tranh's team. He's not coaching them well. You coach your team well. He's not. I want you to manage them."

"If you give me three more people, I won't be able to coach them properly. I won't have time," Cindy replied. "You don't want me to make team leads, which I don't understand. I'll have twelve people, which is too many. No. I don't want them. Give them to someone else or let me manage my team the way I want."

Patrick walked in and sat down. 'What do you mean, 'manage the way you want'? I don't interfere with you."

Cindy snorted. "Sure, you do. You have all kinds of rules. I can't have team leads. I must have a minimum of three people to manage. I must write code, no matter how many people I manage or what else I'm doing for you."

Patrick said, "Well, that's how I managed."

"You didn't use an agile approach. In fact, you were the Big Boss of the Code," Cindy said. "You're working off old data. None of your rules make sense in an agile organization. None of this helps me manage the project portfolio or provide coaching or career development or the kind of feedback that makes sense. Your rules don't help me help the product owners or the program managers. They don't help me work on the architectural decisions for where the product is going—even though I only facilitate those decisions."

Patrick frowned.

"I only have one-on-ones biweekly with my team," Cindy said. "I don't have time for more than that. And I don't have time for any more management work. You don't have time to meet with me. You keep canceling our one-on-ones. When you're free, I'm not."

Patrick said, "I'm pretty busy."

"So am I!" Cindy said. "And my 'team' isn't just one team. It's two cross-functional teams. I work with the testers as well as the developers. I don't know how to coach the BAs that well, so I don't. So, no—no, thank you," Cindy concluded. "I am up to my eyeballs. I can't manage more people without relaxing some of your rules. I don't want to manage any more people. Give them to someone else."

2.2 What Do First-Line Managers Do?

I wish there was a consensus on what first-line managers do. There isn't even a consensus on the title for these folks. Some first-line managers are managers. Some are called leads. Some managers code or test if they are functional managers for development or test teams, even in an agile environment.

For some teams, their manager is the way they learn "how to do things here." They have not learned that team approaches to the work, such as pairing or a buddy system or swarming or mob programming is just as effective, if not more, than manager-led coaching. Why? Because that's how their manager learned. And their manager, the current director or senior manager, got that promotion because he or she was the most valuable technical person.

Avoid filling a first-line manager's day so the manager can learn how to lead and serve well. When the first-line manager has sufficient slack in his or her day, the manager can take time to build

those necessary relationships with the people. These relationships are a great way to know if people are satisfied at work.

And, if a first-line manager is busy doing the work, how can the manager learn to delegate work and responsibility to someone else?

2.3 How Managers Serve Others

Here's a possible list of the ways managers can serve the people they lead:

- Creating space for one-on-ones at least once every other week. See Gather Data With One-on-Ones.
- Discuss the person's career progression.
- Offer reinforcing feedback.
- Offer feedback and coaching, or meta-feedback and meta-coaching.
- Ask about the kind of training people want and facilitate that training.
- Create and support Communities of Practice.

Managers serve their teams—and across the organization—by creating an environment where people can collaborate and learn with others. That learning will require experiments.

Start with the ideas in Consider These Principles for Leading and Serving Others. Decide how you can use those principles in your environment.

2.4 What's a Reasonable Number of People to Manage?

As always, with a juicy question like that, the answer is, "It depends." It depends on how seasoned the manager is, the kind of

process the team uses, and how much or little the team manages itself.

If the first-line manager is learning how to be a manager, the manager needs to practice with fewer people. Why? The manager needs to learn how to avoid interfering in the work. That's difficult enough with three or four people. It's close to impossible if a new manager has more people because the temptation to insert yourself into all decisions is impossible to resist.

My experience is that we have challenges when teams reach multiples of three. If you're a new manager and you practice, you can learn to manage a team of three people pretty quickly. You might even be able to learn to serve up to six people pretty fast.

But, something happens once you need to serve more than nine people.

When you try to serve nine people, you might not have enough time for one-on-ones. If the "team" is matrixed onto several projects, you attempt to serve people who work in different environments.

You don't serve one team. You're seeing the system and trying to manage the impediments for several teams.

What if you have 18-21 people on a team? Sorry, that's not a team with one goal and interdependent work. It's several teams. Even if they're all on one program or product, they are not all on one feature set. As soon as they work on multiple feature sets, they have different goals.

And, yes, you can serve those roughly 20 people, assuming they manage themselves most of the time. By that, I mean they:

- Know how and do offer each other feedback and coaching on a regular basis.
- Know how to create team consensus around various decisions. They understand how to progress as a team.
- Know how to trust each other to deliver the work.

Each of these knowledge areas means that people have learned or can learn. When should you consciously create learning opportunities?

2.5 Create Learning Opportunities

I meet too many people who are bored in their jobs. The people early in their career say, "I'm ready for more responsibility. I want more challenges. But there's nowhere to go. My manager won't let me learn. My manager keeps me under his thumb."

Too many people later in the careers say, "The Manager already architected or implemented a proof of concept. I don't have to think. All I do is code/test/whatever to their spec."

That's no way to work.

When I ask managers why they do this, the managers tell me, "I must maintain my technical skills."

You, as a manager, can maintain a level of technical skills that does not require you to be in the code or the tests or the UI, or whatever your area of expertise is. I recommend the team or workgroup learn together, whenever possible. I'll talk more about this in Book 3.

People deserve a chance to grow and learn. One of your jobs as a manager is to facilitate their learning. The first action you might consider is removing your expertise from their work.

2.6 Remove Yourself as the Expert

Many first-line managers see themselves as the expert, as the sole source of knowledge for their group. You may have started as the expert. However, as soon as you become a manager, start moving out of that expert's seat. You can't be the expert for the team. And,

if you Encourage Flow Efficiency, you'll resist the temptation to create experts. (See Do Experts Help Finish the Work? for more on this topic.)

Spread the expertise love. Ask people to work together. This is easy on an agile team, where people are likely to pair, swarm, or mob on features. If you don't have an agile team, ask who is interested in acquiring new knowledge.

Remember, unless you have a toxic environment, people want to learn new skills. If no one wants to learn what you know, that is information for you. Maybe your expertise is outdated, or the workplace is hostile, or people are already looking for other jobs. Use your one-on-ones to determine what's going on.

2.7 Build Trusting Relationships With Your Team

Your management position, first-line or not, is about building trusting relationships. The more people you manage, the more time you need to spend building relationships based on trust. What other deliverables does your organization request of you?

Every manager balances the leading and serving of each various team member with the other work. For example, if you're supposed to deliver customer presentations every day, when do you have time for one-on-ones?

I see too many first-line managers who are supposed to serve more than 10 people, and contribute technically, and participate in product decisions. When you're stretched, how can you serve the people you lead?

While this affects first-line managers more than it affects more senior managers, it's a management problem. It requires problem

solving and leadership. And that problem-solving is what management is for, right?

2.8 Focus on Serving, Not Controlling

Too often, I see senior managers who want to maintain a flat organization because they don't want too many "direct reports." That's reasonable. It's not wise to ask people to manage more people than they can.

If you desire a flat organization, make sure you help everyone develop trusting relationships with each other. You create a culture in which people can learn. These ideas work well when you Encourage Flow Efficiency. Resource efficiency is incongruent with a flat organization—resource efficiency doesn't fit the context of a flat organization. Resource efficiency requires more people who direct the work of other people.

Flow efficiency is congruent with a flat organization and managers who serve the people they lead. Flow efficiency helps teams become autonomous and self-managing.

If you're a senior manager, make sure you aren't asking another manager to control other people's actions. That's Theory X management. Worse, you won't get the outcomes you want.

2.9 Options to Lead and Serve

Consider these options to lead and serve the people in your team or group:

- Make sure you conduct one-on-ones with people often enough to learn what they want to do.

- Assuming you have that kind of work available for people, identify what the person needs to learn.
- With the person, create an action plan that helps the person succeed in that role.
- Encourage the team to work together, as much as possible. That will help you avoid being the expert. And, the team will learn how to learn together.

More from Johanna

I consult, speak, and train about all aspects of managing product development. I provide frank advice for your tough problems—often with a little humor.

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In addition, I have essays in:

- *Readings for Problem-Solving Leadership*
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Johanna