Dale Carnegie® Training’s Leadership Guidebook:

5 KEY SKILLS FOR FRONTLINE LEADERS

In a world that increasingly values specialization, and an organizational reality that promotes high-performers, it’s common for employees to be suddenly thrust into a new leadership role with little to no managerial experience. The transition from colleague to manager can be challenge enough, but with studies linking retention rates directly to leadership skills, an inexperienced manager can result in costly turnover.

Numerous studies have shown that employees don’t typically leave their positions for money or more perks, but rather because of a negative relationship with their manager. As a frontline leader, you have a direct impact on the engagement and motivation of your team. It all starts with you.

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Frontline Leadership Skills to Master

One of the factors that holds many new managers back from becoming outstanding leaders is “success delusion.” Success delusion occurs when the behaviors that led to a successful promotion end up preventing success in the new position. The remedy requires letting go of the behaviors and mindset of a specialist, while embracing a new and unfamiliar set of challenges as a leader. Learning how to delegate and take a sincere interest in each team member are key foundational skills.

1. Delegation: By delegating work to a team, it becomes easier to shed past responsibilities and avoid backsliding into old habits that won’t serve as a manager. The process of “deputizing” members of a team enables you to not only distribute the workload you’re responsible for, but gives employees clear and defined goals, as well as a sense of accountability. It also provides ample opportunity for you to communicate with employees.

2. Interest: Whether on the front lines or in the C-suite, exceptional leaders take a genuine interest in what motivates the people around them. Throughout this process it’s important to recognize each individual’s motivation. By communicating openly and in the context of the employee’s interest, it becomes easier to determine rewards and encourage professional development on your team. If you’re communicating virtually, put others at ease by asking about their interests first, rather than cutting to the chase.

3. Pairing: Of course, in today’s business world, few projects can be handled by a lone individual. Through ongoing conversation and check-ins, you can determine the working styles of each member of your team and recognize which individuals work best together. If it isn’t clear at the outset, ice breaker activities, networking events, and social networking are all helpful methods for learning more about a team and how they mesh. Trust your gut rather than what you “think” works.

4. Coaching: Once you’ve identified each team member’s working styles, strengths and goals, the next step is individual coaching. By using the coaching principles below, it becomes easier to establish a rapport with employees and correct mistakes before they become serious issues. Communication that’s free of negativity and judgment is essential here.
Begin in a Friendly Way

1. Begin with praise and honest appreciation
2. Call attention to people’s mistakes indirectly
3. Talk about your own mistakes before criticizing the other person
4. Ask questions instead of giving direct orders
5. Praise the slightest improvements and praise every improvement. “Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise”
6. Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to
7. Use encouragement instead of criticism
8. Make the fault seem easy to correct
9. Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest
10. Embrace technology to make coaching sessions convenient for both of you

Another important aspect of coaching is the “feed forward” process. Too often, feedback is received poorly. It may be rejected if perceived as negative or inconsistent with the employee’s self-image. The feed forward process focuses on the future and areas for improvement, as opposed to addressing past mistakes or undesired behaviors. Since we can’t change the past, putting the focus on the future provides employees with new ideas or solutions and a chance to improve. These improvement opportunities are harder to take personally, which defuses potentially hostile reactions from the start. What’s more, this process helps workers focus on the rewards that will come from improvement, rather than what they’re “to blame” for.

LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS: 10 TIPS

Use icebreakers to build comfort with virtual tools and help your team form connections.

Don’t neglect small talk - it can create a sense of camaraderie and prevent feelings of isolation.

Create a “Virtual Water Cooler” for sharing non-business information, through Skype or a similar program.

Utilize video.

Schedule regular one-on-one meetings. with your team members.

Have team members take turns leading meetings.

Communicate your expectations clearly as online communication is easier to misinterpret than face-to-face communication.

Hold interactive group contests to encourage team building and facilitate trust.

Celebrations remind your team that you notice and appreciate their hard work.

Build trust and demonstrate credibility by following through, keeping commitments, and showing that you can be relied on.
5. Recognition: Verbal rewards are extremely important to keeping the team satisfied and working at their full potential. Without proper rewards or recognition, employees can quickly become unmotivated.

   1. Make sure that the recognition or reward provided is congruent with an employee’s personality.

   2. Give recognition that is genuine and specific. Vague praise will come off as insincere and may prove to be more damaging than no recognition at all.

   3. Be spontaneous, as scheduled rewards can become too predictable and diminish their effectiveness.

   4. Make sure that the reward matches the achievement. If the same reward is given for minor and major successes alike, it can breed discontent and hurt motivation.

Recap

A successful frontline leader must hold himself accountable at all times. As a leader, it’s your responsibility to keep employees motivated, and set the standard for not only the quality of the work, but also the culture of the workplace or department. If you’re a new manager, put in the time to learn about each team member in order to determine which incentives and which rewards are most effective. By letting go of past successes, deputizing team members to tackle projects that keep them engaged, and providing valuable coaching to each employee, you can make a positive transition to your leadership role – and position your team for future success.