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WHAT MAKES A MANAGER EFFECTIVE

Bill Reddin

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The manager's job is to be effective. It is his only job. Managerial effectiveness, in my view, is nothing more or less than achieving the output requirements of a managerial position.

It would seem that every manager would want to be effective but in fact, I believe, few ever make an effort to do so.

Defined by Clock

Many managers let the in-tray or the clock define their potential contribution. Some view their contribution as simply that of managing a going concern and keeping it on an even keel. Whereas one might see his job as having large components of subordinate development and creative problem solving in it, another might see the same job primarily as a link with other parts of the enterprise and, thus, take a wider view of his responsibility.

Over the course of their careers, managers are asked to be effective in a variety of situations. During one period of their career, they find themselves closely directed by a hard-driving, production-centred senior manager. During another period, they may be virtually independent and work alone.

The effectiveness of a manager can be measured by the extent to which a manager is capable of changing his style appropriately to a changing situation.

The flexible manager is open-minded. He is ready to see new points of view and to expose himself to influence. He is more concerned with full knowledge than in having his prior beliefs confirmed. Even when unable to accept another point of view, he will always listen to it, usually

contemplate it seriously, and often live comfortably with it although it may be contradictory to his existing beliefs.

The flexible manager spends more time in making decisions and less time in implementing them. He is more concerned with method of introduction, timing, rate of introduction, and probable responses and resistances.

The second factor, the management of time, is perhaps the most important skill a manager needs to acquire. Time management starts with a heightened awareness of just how much time is available and how it is spent. Managers who undertake a study of their time utilization are invariably surprised at their inefficiency.

Decision-making is the manager's stock-in-trade and a manager's main job is to make the right decisions. But timing of decision is just as important as accuracy.

Avoiding decisions

At any one point in time, a manager usually has several important decisions to make. On some, action is postponed for good reasons. On others it is postponed for perhaps no reason at all.

There is no value in making decisions hastily or too far in advance, but there is no point in postponing them for too long either. If a manager will review his decisions he will find that most could have been made months or even years before. The reason is that many managers avoid making difficult decision and let the situation take care of itself over time.

I suggest that managers prepare a list of all the decisions facing them. This is not the usual list of things to do. Rather it should contain each item on which a decision has to be made. The list should have the most pressing decision, which is not necessarily the most important one, at the top. This list can be used as a guide to action. With such a list, there is a great temptation to make it and then ignore it, or make it and then start with the easiest decision rather than with the more pressing one.

Delegating work

Time can also be saved by delegating more work to others. Every manager should ask of every piece of work that comes before him: 'Who below me

could do this?' He does not work himself out of a job this way; he works himself into his rightful job. He will work himself out of routine administration and into more important activities, such as long range planning, and allow more time to establish relationships with other departments and develop his subordinates.

Managers should try to utilize their time more effectively by simply making themselves unavailable on certain days or between certain hours so that they can get on with report writing or developing plans undisturbed.

Changing attitudes

A manager, however, cannot be effective alone. He will remain ineffective so long as he fails to improve the effectiveness or change the attitudes of those around him—his subordinates, his colleagues as well as his superior. Not all of these can be changed in the short run, obviously, least of all, his superior. Nevertheless a manager must make this one of his main objectives.

How can a manager influence his superior? There is no better way than by himself amply satisfying his superior's expectations. This usually directly involves the manager in becoming more effective and, at the same time, making the superior more effective.

If the manager's subordinates can take actions to improve his own effectiveness, then presumably the manager can do the same for his superior.

Co-workers are apt to be more open at committee meetings which they attend. Managers should, therefore, think of starting meetings with such questions: What is the objective of this meeting? How will we know if it has been successful? What are its effectiveness standards? Do we need it? Can we conclude it in fifteen minutes?

Out of the blue

To ask such questions out of the blue, I agree, might leave your colleagues a bit flabbergasted, but managers should get around to it and obtain answers to these questions as soon as they can in some way.

Over a period of time it is a relatively simple matter for an effective

manager to raise the aspiration level of his co-workers. He shares with them the past successes and failures. He can suggest that standards could be much higher, and by personal example, show that this is what he intends to do.

The best way of making subordinates more effective is by giving them challenging responsibilities early in their career. The more challenging the responsibilities, the more effective a subordinate is likely to become. Clear effectiveness standards for subordinates are crucial.

While the development of managers can be furthered by formal courses, 95 per cent of all real management development takes place as a result of the relationship between a man and his superior. The quality of this relationship determines effectiveness. The superior has, by far, the most influence in structuring it.

The best test

By improving his subordinates' effectiveness, a manager also improves his own effectiveness. Perhaps the single, best test of a manager is the effectiveness of his subordinates. As a minimum this would be expressed by the capacity for one or two of the subordinates to step into the manager's shoes.

A subordinate does not have to model his superior in order to become effective. The younger ones tend to do so, though, especially if the superior appears to be effective, has upward influence, and gives them support. Managers usually accept or even welcome such modelling.

In varying ways

But a manager's real skill is in recognizing, accepting and managing differences, and he can be effective in varying ways. Thus to force a subordinate into his manager's mould may not work or be necessary. A superior is not running a game 'How to be more like me'. He must demonstrate to his subordinates that they should meet their effectiveness standards, not to please him but to answer their position demands.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE YOU?

Here is a simple list of questions I have prepared for managers to ask themselves. It will identify and test their effectiveness in their jobs.

All the questions ask is: What is the job? but they ask it in different ways. Some managers find that ideas are triggered when the question is asked in one way and some when it is given another way:

What is the position's unique contribution?

Why is the position needed at all?

What would change if the position were eliminated?

What will change if I am highly effective in that position?

How would I know, with no-one telling me, when I am performing effectively?

What authority does the position really have?

What can the position most easily improve?

What do the job description and organization manual say?

What is the biggest external change made that affected the position?

How do I spend my time?

How would I like to spend it?

What would I be most likely to concentrate on over two or three years if I wanted to make the greatest improvement in my unit? In my superior's unit? In the organization as a whole?