

Welcome to Management

How to Grow from Top Performer to Excellent Leader

by **Ryan Hawk**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Every year, millions of top performers are promoted to management-level jobs—only to discover that the tactics that got them promoted are not the tactics that will make them effective in their new role. In *Welcome to Management*, Ryan Hawk provides practical, actionable advice and tools designed to ensure that transition is a successful one.

He presents a new three-part framework distilled from best practices drawn from in-depth interviews with over 300 of the most forward-thinking leaders around the world, as well as his own professional experience going from exceptional individual producer to new leader.

Offering valuable research and powerful, practical strategies, *Welcome to Management* will help high performers make the leap from individual contributor to manager with greater ease, grace, courage, and effectiveness. Welcome to management!

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The three key steps for becoming an effective manager.
- Why managers must first lead themselves before leading others.
- The importance of trust, vulnerability, and ownership in company culture.
- Why managers must lead, manage, and coach to be excellent and achieve results.

Introduction

You've just been promoted and are in a new management position. Congratulations. You are now the subject of the dinner table conversations of every person who reports to you. You are now responsible for the careers of those who report to you. You are now "the boss."

Few first-time managers know what it really takes to lead, to earn the trust and respect of your team, to develop a culture that leads to high performance, or to communicate in a way that moves people. Being promoted up the ranks is exciting, but unfortunately, the typical organization does an underwhelming job of preparing its new managers for success.

As a result, moving from team member to team leader will be the toughest transition of them all. The following three sections, lead yourself, build your team, and lead your team, are designed to help you make the leap from individual contributor to manager.

PART I: LEAD YOURSELF

You can't lead anyone else successfully over the long term until you take ownership of leading yourself. This is why before we start looking at how to manage your new responsibilities as a leader, we must begin with focusing on you.

There are two foundational reasons why focusing on leading yourself well is the proper starting point to learning how to lead others:

Building skills. Having the qualifications necessary to get that new management job is not the same as having the skills to do the job of leading others. You are about to discover that issues you thought were obviously black and white as an employee are now shrouded in shades of gray as a manager, and the skills that made you an excellent performer in your previous role are quite different from those required for your new responsibility—getting others to be excellent performers.

In order to develop these skills, refine them, and keep them honed and relevant, you are going to have to embrace the mindset, attitudes, behaviors, and habits of a self-driven learner.

Earning credibility. Do not expect respect, buy-in, and attentiveness from your team as an automatic benefit of your new role and title as their boss. Compliance can be commanded, but commitment cannot. People reserve their full capacity for emotional commitment for leaders they

find credible, and credibility must be earned. Whether on the field or in the office, the best way to go about earning the credibility that leads to commitment is by modeling the behaviors you want your team to exhibit.

Lead Yourself on the Inside

To lead yourself well, we must begin by taking a hard look at what is happening in your heart and mind. The real work of leadership begins inside your own head.

What are the commonalities of those who sustain excellence over an extended period of time? These six words: Build yourself into a learning machine. "Learning machine" efficiently captures two important concepts: thoughtfulness and intentionality.

A person who is a "learning machine" is intentionally and constantly seeking new information with the goal of becoming better. Machines are not organic; they don't spontaneously generate. They have to be built. The same is true for a person to become a learning machine. Consider the Cycle of Learning, which involves four steps.

Step One: Learn

The beginning of any learning cycle starts with the intake of information. Taking charge of this process means proactively seeking information from people you trust and from those who have been where you want to go. There is no substitute for reliable expertise and the wisdom of experience. Learning can be sourced from three categories: mentors, virtual mentors, and coaches.

Mentors are people who have done what you want to do or have attained the position that you want to attain. Mentors are usually able to look at where you are in your career and offer specific guidance about how to move forward. The best mentors are those with whom you can build a real relationship. This is critical because the most important role a mentor fills is that of being the source of direct, honest feedback to help you improve.

Virtual mentors are people you may never meet but who teach you from afar. Books are one of the greatest ways to learn from experts from all over the world. Thanks to the power of fiber optics, cellular communications, and ubiquitous Wi-Fi access, you can watch videos of your virtual mentors wherever you are. Wherever you get your information, it's important to be selective about the knowledge you take in.

Coaching isn't about competition; it is about skill develop-

Disciplined leaders seek out opportunities to test themselves by purposefully and aggressively seeking out discomfort.

ment. No matter the domain, if you are aiming to improve yourself by developing a skill, you need someone who understands that skill to be on your sideline, wearing the coach's hat.

Step Two: Test

It is only through the kinetic energy of putting ideas into use in your daily life that you can test your understanding of what you have learned and the value of that knowledge. But practice must be accompanied by a feedback mechanism involving an expert. Scholar Anders Ericsson outlines a four-step process for “deliberate practice”:

1. Set a specific goal.
2. Cultivate intense focus.
3. Ask for immediate feedback.
4. Seek frequent discomfort.

Step Three: Reflect and Adjust

Once you have taken the action that puts the new information you've learned into practice, it is tempting to move on immediately to the next new thing you can learn. Doing this short-circuits the process and skips a vital step: thoughtful reflection on the action you just took. Turning your learning and growth into an iterative cycle requires a look-back period. After the implementation work is done, set aside time to analyze your implementation efforts and ask yourself, “Did the steps I took based on the new information work?” “If so, why?” or “If not, why not?”

Step Four: Teach

There is something unique about the power of teaching others that cements what you have learned. Think about any moment that you were asked to give a presentation. It could have been for an assignment back in school or a project given to you by your boss at work. Regardless of how well you ended up doing the actual presentation, the preparation you put in was a powerful engine for learning to take place.

According to the authors of a study published in the September 2018 issue of *Educational Psychology Review*, the tactic of self-explanation boosts learning and understanding more

than other methods, such as note-taking, problem-solving work, and hearing the material explained to the learner.

All of this internal, mental effort is designed to do one thing: to get you out from behind the walls of a fixed mindset and put you into the swift currents of a growth mindset.

Lead Yourself on the Outside

People who have discipline are able to do hard things. Why? Self-discipline gives them the ability to control their feelings and overcome their weaknesses, the ability to pursue what they think is right despite a multitude of temptations to abandon it.

In the words of pioneering baseball mental skills coach Harvey Dorfman, it is through self-discipline that one “is a master of, rather than a slave to, his thoughts and emotions.” Therein lies the secret to turning all the intellectual learning discussed above into real, tangible change in the physical world. This process starts with mastering what we do with our bodies, with our time, with our effort.

Disciplined leaders seek out opportunities to test themselves by purposefully and aggressively seeking out discomfort. You can't know how far you can go without regularly putting yourself in situations where you are stretched beyond the known and the comfortable.

Everyone will face adversity. Succeeding comes down to how you choose to respond in those moments of difficulty.

Your Presence Is Required

Great leaders know that being among the people they lead matters a great deal. Abraham Lincoln maintained a practice of hosting “ordinary people” in his office, where he would talk with them and listen to what was on their minds. Frustrated by the effects on his schedule, Lincoln's aides tried to cut the presidential face time sessions short: “Mr. President, you don't have time to keep talking with these ordinary people.”

“You're wrong.” Lincoln would respond. “I must never forget the popular assemblage from which I have come.”

There's no better way to tell whether the river you have to cross is 20 feet deep or two feet deep than by wading into it yourself. Be in the territory. Show up. Your presence is needed to make better, more informed decisions. This will build credibility with the people you lead.

Is it hard to travel to all the locations of your team members? Yes, of course it is. Managing a team is not for everyone.

Managing Your Time

Knowing where your time goes and being strategic and intentional about what you spend your time doing represent a huge lever that turns efforts to lead yourself into successfully leading others. For Peter Drucker, that meant applying a simple, three-step process:

- **Recording time.** Much like tracking one's spending as a means of budgetary control, make an accounting of where you spend your time throughout the day.
- **Managing time.** Remove the unproductive tasks that take time but don't produce value.
- **Consolidating time.** Manage the scheduling of time so that "discretionary time" (when your presence or attention isn't required by someone else) occurs in the largest blocks of continuous time possible.

Preparation: The Greatest Medicine for Fear

As a manager, there are countless moments in which you will need to be excellent at your craft. Your willingness to prepare properly for these important moments is critical to sustaining excellence as a leader.

For example, most people are not excited about going to a meeting. How can you change that as a manager? How will you open the meeting? What is on the agenda? What story can you share with your team to evoke the emotion and spark the ideas necessary to succeed that day?

How will you prepare for your one-on-one meetings with each team member? Have you thought about the unique qualities and personalities of each person and how best to connect with them?

PART II: BUILD YOUR TEAM

All of that takes prep work. It takes intentional effort and thought. To do it excellently, a manager must put in the time to think and be ready for the moment.

The building phase is the work of earning the respect of current and future team members and constructing the type

of culture in which people want to do excellent work. Cultures of excellence come from leading with vulnerability to create a place of psychological safety and empowering your team to have ownership over their work.

It starts with understanding what it means to build an excellent culture and how we, as leaders, work to do it and sustain it on a daily basis so that it lasts. That means creating a place where intellectual curiosity and creativity are encouraged, and understanding when tough decisions of change have to be made.

Cultivate the Culture

Culture is the combined essence of the people in the organization. It's the collective energy of the people on the team, in the organization, and within the business. The way we actually interact—the social system—results from the culture created by the people in it. And unsurprisingly, the leader is vital in setting the culture.

Hopefully, the work of building your culture is intentional, but guess what? Whether it is the product of thoughtful design or mindless inertia, your results will flow from the culture you build.

If you've done the work to earn the respect of your team, you will then be in a position to start building a culture you want to have. Respect is regarding someone with high esteem because he or she has been deemed worthy. Consider the following seven keys:

- **Demonstrate competence.** You possess the necessary and critical skills required to lead in your organizational context.
- **Exhibit conviction.** You display assurance that the chosen course of action will lead to positive results.
- **Set high standards.** You aim high, both for yourself and your team.
- **Listen to your team.** You listen to feedback and you incorporate that feedback appropriately.
- **Work hard.** You put in the time and effort necessary to get the job done.
- **Do the difficult.** You do the hard things, like holding people accountable, confronting bad behavior, and staying true to your values even when it hurts.
- **Be consistent.** Your words, actions, decisions, and

investments are in alignment.

There are undoubtedly many different components to building a healthy, performing culture. Three in particular are valuable: trust, vulnerability, and ownership.

Trust is the foundation for everything you will do with your team. Yes, you will have to earn it, but it doesn't stop there. Equally important and maybe even harder to do: You will have to learn to trust your team members. Regardless of your entry point, as the new manager you will have to build trust and overcome the skepticism that's resulted from previous bad experiences.

Vulnerability is about connection. People connect more with those who are open and willing to share where they're weak. As the leader, we must work to create a safe place for our team members to share truth. In order to gain trust, we must give trust, and the quickest way to build trust is to share your own vulnerabilities.

The key to making it OK to be vulnerable is establishing an environment of psychological safety. Dr. Amy Edmondson, a professor at Harvard Business School, defines psychological safety as "a climate in which people are comfortable being (and expressing) themselves."

The most successful teams are made of people who have **ownership** over their decisions and their actions. It's very simple: People don't feel ownership if you tell them what to do. According to Gallup, only three in 10 U.S. workers strongly agree that at work, their opinions seem to count.

Empowering your team means that you're able to give them responsibilities and let them run with them, and then help them learn and grow from the experience after.

If you're used to being an individual contributor, the idea of delegation may feel counterintuitive. Empowering someone else to do the work is difficult if you feel they won't do it as well as you can. And often, they can't—at least not initially.

However, your goal is to scale your team, your business, and your group beyond you. It won't ever scale beyond you if you never give your team the opportunity to rise to the challenge, to fail, and to learn.

Manage the Roster

The most important decisions you make as a manager are those about the makeup of your team. Surrounding yourself with excellent people will be the single greatest deter-

mining factor in your success or failure as a leader.

Building your team well requires accurately analyzing what you have, correctly identifying what you need, and developing a deep understanding of what you're looking for beyond the simple skills needed to do the task.

The key to making it OK to be vulnerable is establishing an environment of psychological safety.

Hiring: What Are You Looking For?

In order to build the right team, first, it is necessary to understand what you value in a person. The specificity of the role you must fill is obviously an important part of the equation. But, too often, hiring managers focus on those spec requirements as if they are the most important parts of the hiring decision.

Taking this approach is a huge mistake and results in a great hire only by sheer luck. Far more important than the tangible skills you can find in multiple candidates or deliver through effective training is the makeup of the person who will be a complete asset to your team. To get this right, you must be intentional.

Sit down with your personal board of advisers and create your list of "must-have" or "nonnegotiable" qualities. Avoid the temptation to enumerate generically desirable virtues. For this to be an effective guide for your hiring process, you need to tease out why each of these qualities is important to you and your business.

After defining what you value in a teammate, now comes the hard part: figuring out how to accurately assess if the candidates you are interviewing possess those skills. Simply asking straightforward questions like "Do you have humility?" is not likely to yield any real insights.

The interview is when candidates are on their very best behavior. If they're late for their interview, that is a big red flag that speaks volumes about their punctuality and what

you should expect from them as a member of your team.

Get them out of interview mode. Take the candidate to lunch or dinner. Walk around the office and speak casually. How do they behave when they are more relaxed and their guard isn't up because they're not sitting in an interview?

Dig deep. Most candidates prepare for the basic interview questions. The best interviewers focus on the follow-up questions. Do your homework. When making a decision for who you're bringing on your team, it's worth the time to speak with as many people who know the candidate as you can.

Firing: When Pruning Is Required

There will be times when the only path to sustaining excellence is telling someone that they will no longer be part of your team. Manage a team for any length of time, and you will have to do it, so it is necessary to understand how to do it well.

The first time an employee hears in person from you that her work is not meeting the standards expected of her cannot be during the meeting in which she is being let go over it. Such a scenario is grossly unfair to the employee involved, and despite being obviously so, it happens with alarming regularity. There are also legal implications at stake. Document and be clear with the employee from the instant things start going south.

Don't do this alone. Talk regularly with close mentors. Meet weekly with your human resources partner. Make sure that you are not missing any possible detail, either in the legal and policy requirements governing the termination of an employee but also the good faith effort to help a struggling employee avoid this fate.

Write a script. Stumbling on your words during a termination meeting can lead to bad consequences. It is not uncommon for employees to file wrongful termination lawsuits based on managers saying something they shouldn't have during the final meeting. Write your script, and share it with human resources, as well as your mentors. Once it's been deemed correct, stick to it.

PART III: LEAD YOUR TEAM

Now, it is time to lead your team. How well you are able to do that will hinge on how well you master the art of being an excellent communicator. That means understanding the power of story and how to really connect with your team. It is through communication that the work of influence happens.

Now is the most critical time to get to know your team and understand what makes them go, because making them go is now your job. How well others perform is now the measuring stick for your performance. You are now responsible for steering the ship without getting to put your hands on the wheel. It's quite a different problem to solve.

And it all comes down to the results. As the leader, you are ultimately responsible for the results that your team produces.

Spread the Message

Effective communication is the lifeblood of effective leadership. Your team must understand the big picture mission of the team, as well as their specific role that contributes to the accomplishment of that mission. They must know exactly what you expect of them at all times. Your team can't know and do these if you don't clearly communicate with them. If the team doesn't have vivid clarity, then it is you, the leader, who is responsible for the failure in communication.

How Much and How Often

How much you say can be as critical to having your message heard as how you say it. Brevity is important. It is the whetstone great communicators use to give their messages a honed, razor-sharp edge.

Great comedians, writers, speakers, and movie directors know how to cut unnecessary fluff. When you are watching a movie that is the work of a gifted director, everything you see onscreen is there for a specific reason. A lot of time, money, and effort went into producing scenes and clips that never made it out of the editing room because they proved not to be necessary to telling the story.

Just as important as how much you say is the frequency and cadence of your communication. When you're a new manager, it is best to err on the side of overcommunicating with your team. Frequent communication can allay fears and build confidence as your team gets to know what you're about.

They'll see that you want to hear from them and that you will do your best to keep the channel open in both directions.

When it comes to communication, it's important to always remember its purpose: connecting with other people. We communicate to build relationships, express feelings, share ideas, and work together to accomplish what we could not do on our own.

The key to connection is to avoid the (manager) monologue.

Great management is figuring out how to work within the current constraints of the system you are in.

Instead, the conversation is about helping the other person figure out the answer that will motivate them to move forward.

How

How you communicate with your team will depend in large part on the way your workplace is set up and the cultural expectations of the organization. However, regardless of those specifics, the best form of communication is done in person.

In their landmark management book *In Search of Excellence*, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman coined a simple phrase to describe this most basic form of leading others. They called it “Management By Wandering Around,” now often referred to simply as MBWA. The purpose of MBWA is to connect with your people through the serendipity of random interactions, to gain a qualitative understanding of what’s happening on the front lines.

However, there is a fine distinction between successfully employing MBWA to better know your team and their work versus crossing over into the dreaded practice of micromanaging.

If you’re communicating with your team via email, remember that economy of words is essential. Have a purpose for every single email you send. If you start forwarding a bunch of meaningless emails with a note saying, “See below,” the chances that your team will read them will drop dramatically. If they sense your emails have no point most of the time, your people are going to delete them and miss the important messages that you do send.

Make the Grade

When you raise your hand and step into the role of the leader, you are making the choice (whether you are conscious of it or not) to be responsible for the results of the team. Yet there’s a lot more to it than simply saying, “I’m responsible” and being the one who has to answer to others (a boss, a customer, a board, investors) for those results.

Being accountable for your team’s performance is a part of team leadership, but so, too, is the accountability you owe *to your team* to do the things that will help them achieve those

results. This side of leadership is much harder and far more complex, which is why it is done well so rarely.

To be excellent, you need to lead, manage, and coach.

Leading

The act of leading is about providing purpose, direction, and inspiration to the group. It presents a vision, sees the big picture, and devises a strategy to accomplish the mission at hand.

To lead well means to have what author Robert Greene calls “a third eye”—a way of guiding you toward the larger picture while avoiding getting trapped in the hell of tactics. A great leader has an overriding sense of where she is taking the team at the macro level.

Strategists think beyond a single battle or even a series of battles. They are focused on the playbook of the long game, in which they expect to survive multiple defeats and still push forward to victory.

To lead like a strategic visionary, you must start by thinking like one. That means thinking through a progression of lenses, from the most high-level and general to ground-level and specific: from mission to vision to strategy to tactics.

Managing

Great management is figuring out how to work within the current constraints of the system you are in. It is the administration and stewardship of resources. It is because those resources are always limited—always—that the act of managing is even necessary.

Resource constraints demand creativity. When you don’t have the luxury of throwing more money or people at a problem, you must be able to step back, identify what it is you’re trying to accomplish, and find a different way to do it.

Managing limited resources is only one arena that requires the manager’s attention. Another ubiquitous but ever-true cliché vying for the manager’s attention is “managing change.” As your competitive business market never stops changing, so, too, will the ways your company conducts its affairs internally.

When done well, how you manage change can serve as the steady bow of your team's ship, helping it cut through the turbulent waves of change while still staying on your prescribed course.

The primary reason change is met with resistance is uncertainty. No one likes uncertainty. One way to help your team navigate change successfully is to help them focus on what *isn't* changing. To overcome your team's resistance, intentionally couple your messages about the coming change with reassuring reinforcements of continuity.

Coaching

If leading is about strategic vision and managing is about administrative stewardship, then coaching is about developmental teaching. To be a coach is to give instruction delivered not to educate or inform but to improve.

For the manager of a team, coaching in this manner falls into two types: coaching for professional development (performance) and coaching for personal development (growth).

The best coaching for performance happens in the moments closest to when the performance happens. These regular, immediate bursts of micro-coaching should happen daily. Helping your team make the minor tweaks that improve their skill level doesn't require huge chunks of time devoted to training efforts.

Coaching for the personal development of your employees involves more long-term thinking. In this mode of teaching, your goal is to help them grow as a person in ways beyond their job performance.

This requires having conversations about their career ambitions in a focused, one-on-one setting. Or sharing with them

books, podcasts, or other tools for self-improvement aimed at their individual needs and strengths.

These development conversations are a critical tool for creating the type of culture where people want to do their best work. When people know their boss has their long-term interests at heart while also working on short-term ways to help them improve their work, the quality of their performance improves dramatically.

Leaders—the ones worth following—are those who see themselves, their team, and the challenges before them with unvarnished honesty. They are intentionally aware of the gaps, shortcomings, and blind spots. They see reality, but they don't accept it as destiny. Instead, they set to work to fill in those gaps, overcome those shortcomings, and illuminate the blind spots.

Leaders undertake these efforts in the belief that improvement of themselves and their team is not only possible but inevitable if one follows the process, embraces learning with humility, and inspires others to do the same.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *The Hidden Leader: Discover and Develop Greatness Within Your Company* by Scott Edinger, Laurie Sain
- *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth* by Amy Edmondson



Ryan Hawk is a keynote speaker, author, advisor, and the host of *The Learning Leader Show*, which *Forbes* called “the most dynamic leadership podcast out there.” As head of Brixey & Meyer’s leadership advisory practice, Ryan speaks regularly at Fortune 500 companies, works with teams and players in the NFL, NBA, and NCAA, and facilitates Leadership Circles that offer structured guidance and collaborative feedback to new and experienced leaders. He draws upon his experiences, empirical evidence, and expert insights to strive for continuous improvement in his own life and to inspire other leaders to achieve and sustain excellence.

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