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Time Management

Don't Let Bad Time Management Undermine Your Leadership

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Summary.   According to a survey by SHRM, 84% of workers believe poorly trained managers create unnecessary work and stress. And poor time management is a huge factor. When you're not in control of your own time, you can end up overloading your team, creating unnecessary emergencies, and neglecting to provide essential support.

Even though you're working hard and have good intentions, you still may be stressing out or demotivating direct reports. As a manager, you owe it to yourself and your team to commit to improving these five time management flaws:

assigning your team work without a clear understanding of their existing workload, asking for help at the last minute, not setting boundaries with upper management, never being available to your direct reports, and not taking the time to give credit and positive feedback. **close**

You probably don't wake up in the morning thinking, "How can I make my direct reports miserable?"

But according to a survey by SHRM, 84% of workers believe poorly trained managers create unnecessary work and stress, and one of the top three skills they could improve is "managing time and delegating." And from what I've seen with my time management coaching clients, poor time management is a huge factor in bad management. When you're not in control of your own time, you can end up overloading your team, creating unnecessary emergencies, and neglecting to provide essential support.

If you struggle with time management, your issues likely have a negative trickledown effect. At the mild end of the spectrum, that could be a team's joking acceptance of the fact that you're always 10 minutes late for meetings. At the severe end, you could be debilitating the people who work for you: I've had time management coaching clients who have experienced anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, TMJ, and autoimmune flare-ups caused by managers who have more acute time management challenges.

Even though you're working hard and have good intentions, you still may be stressing out or demotivating direct reports. As a manager, you owe it to yourself and your team to commit to improving your time management flaws. Not only will this reduce everyone's stress, it may also affect turnover, given how critical having a good manager is to employee retention. I've identified five key areas where managers fall short in their time management — and ways to overcome them. After all, there is always opportunity for growth and change.

Flaw #1: Giving Work Without Any Concept of Your Team's Capacity

As a manager, you should assign and delegate to your team members. But there comes a point at which the people who report to you will be at or beyond their capacity. When you don't recognize when they've hit their limit, you run the risk of overloading your team, which can lead to unsustainably long hours, reduced work quality, and in some cases, paralysis because they feel set up for failure.

To avoid these issues, create a central place to capture what individuals are doing, what you've delegated, and how much capacity they have left. You can do this by having a shared task list for each direct report that you add to every time you assign a new task, using tools like Outlook Tasks or Todoist. Or if you're managing more extensive projects, set them up and assign tasks through tools like Microsoft Project, Asana, and Monday.com.

Then, review these task management systems regularly with your team. You could do this during weekly staff meetings or in one-on-one meetings. And if your team members raise concerns, don't brush them off or expect them to "just deal with it." Help them by guiding them on how to prioritize, set boundaries, and be more efficient.

Flaw #2: Asking for Help Last-Minute on Things You Knew About in Advance

Creating unnecessary emergencies because you neglected to tell your team about a task earlier is fast-tracking them for burnout. Yes, there are times when last-minute turnarounds are unavoidable. But in all other situations, employ these strategies.

As soon as you're aware of a new task, ask yourself, *Could I delegate this?* If the answer is yes, do so as quickly as possible. For example, you could immediately forward an email with a note asking your direct report to set up a time with you to discuss how to get the item done.

For larger projects, there should be some overarching roadmaps outlining key deliverables and milestones. If these don't exist, work with your team to create them. You'll want a clear, consolidated document of deadlines, what needs to be accomplished by those dates, who is responsible for completing the work, and who needs to sign off on it before it's finalized.

These roadmaps will then give everyone insight into where they are in the process, and what needs to be done for everything to come together on time.

Additionally, put a recurring reminder in your calendar at the end of each quarter or month to review the roadmaps and any other upcoming commitments, such as investor presentations or conferences. This helps you to delegate commitments before they become emergencies. It's infinitely better to let people know weeks — or even months — in advance that you need something done instead of springing on them on a Friday that you have a conference next week and will need a slide deck.

Flaw #3: Not Setting Priorities or Boundaries with Upper Management

If you say yes to every request from your boss, your team will be overcommitted and crushed. One of the best ways you can serve your team is to have clarity on their highest-priority items in alignment with your area's strategic goals. (If you use the strategies above, you'll already have these roadmaps in place.)

Then when new potential initiatives or projects arise, instead of immediately accepting them as add-ons, have a conversation with upper management around whether or not these new items are of higher or lower priority than what your team members are already working on. This could sound like, "That sounds like a fantastic idea, but my understanding is that our strategic

priorities this quarter are A, B, and C. Have our priorities shifted, or should we push this new initiative to next quarter?" Or, "My team is currently at capacity. What would you like us to deprioritize to make space for this new project?"

Your managers may not always appreciate this pushback. But your team will be grateful.

Flaw #4: Never Being Available

Most people don't like being micromanaged. But they do want to know that they can access you when they need support and direction. Integrate this into your schedule by making — and keeping — regular one-on-ones with your team members so that they feel like they have dedicated time to ask you questions, get feedback, and align priorities. You could meet with someone as frequently as multiple times a week or as little as monthly based on their needs. Mark them as recurring events and strive to cancel them as infrequently as possible.

Additionally, have "office hours" where your physical or virtual door is open to your team. Use this time to get through simple tasks like email so you can easily redirect your attention when someone uses this time. And if anyone pops in asking for help, give them your full attention immediately.

Let your team members know how to contact you for emergencies and be as responsive as possible. You don't need to always be on call for your team, but there can be times where they really do need an answer as soon as possible. In those cases, let them know if text, IM, or another method of communication is best.

Flaw #5: Withholding Credit and Positive Feedback

It can feel time consuming to respond to every team member about every project. But a little appreciation can go a long way. Gallup data shows that among those individuals who received meaningful feedback in the last week, 80% were fully engaged.

If in the rush to keep up, you struggle to acknowledge your team, start small. It could be as simple as confirming receipt of a deliverable with a simple, "Thanks so much. I've received it and will review." This can help prevent your team members from becoming demotivated when they send you things and hear nothing, assuming you don't care about what they've done or that they've done poorly.

When you have had a chance to review something and feel someone did a good job, give positive feedback either in person or through a message. Sometimes you're so focused on checking a task off your to-do list and getting on to the next thing that you can forget there's an individual on the other side of the email attachment. Never assume people just know that you appreciate their work.

Finally, where appropriate, give credit where credit is due. Take time to reflect for a few minutes before presentations on who were the most significant contributors to the project. If something was a team effort, remembering to say so can greatly reduce the probability of your direct reports feeling resentful.

If you recognize one or more of these five issues in your management behaviors, now is a great time to take action. As you get your own time in order, you'll be more realistic with and respectful of your team members' time. You'll feel less stressed, and your team will thank you for it.

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