

# **MANAGERIAL MISTAKES, MISSTEPS & MISUNDERSTANDINGS**

**An Essential Guide to  
Avoiding Common Pitfalls**



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*Managerial Mistakes, Missteps and  
Misunderstandings;*

*The Essential Guide to Avoiding Common Pitfalls.*

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## Foreword

First, I will say **thank you** for making this book part of your growth as a manager. Through the years, I have been in several positions of leadership, both by formal position and without a title. The result is always the same, people will only follow someone they trust.

I have had the great pleasure to travel the country conducting corporate training in the professional development areas of; leadership, team building and better communication skills. I have spoken to and with thousands of business people with a wide range of challenges. As such, I have come to one glaring conclusion; the organization is only as good as its people. Unfortunately, I have seen organizations where the people were suffering as a result of poor management.

Management is not easy, but it can be very rewarding. Not only being a part of the organization but taking a hand in its progress is fulfilling for anyone who is inclined to help an organization grow. The manager is also uniquely in a position to help people grow as well and that is perhaps most fulfilling of all. But the manager must keep on top of his game through seminars, trade associations and books. The world is ever-changing and those in supervision must continually evolve.

As we move through this book, we will explore pitfalls to avoid as well as solutions to common challenges or at least seeing a challenge from a different viewpoint. When a challenge arises, we immediately understand our perspective; how does this affect me? But to be better managers, we have to understand the perspectives of our subordinates as well as our own boss. Each chapter of this book will discuss common pitfalls and highlight a common mistake, misstep and misunderstanding. Let's take a closer look at what those are.

A **mistake** is simply an error in judgement or attitude. Many times, it an erroneous perception on part of the boss. It's misguided thinking or an ineffective management style. All too often, this misconception is the product of observing how a predecessor acted and emulating that managerial style.

But was that style ever truly effective? It's entirely possible a tactic works in one environment but backfires in another. It may be a failure to make a decision at all or blindly thinking "everything will just work itself out." Here, the team leader needs to take an inventory of his or her people to better understand what might work or might not. One size does not fit all.

A **misstep** is a wrong action that affects how the team perceives the leader. The manager gets an "A" for effort, but the intended solution falls flat. I'm all in favor of trying something new so long as overall course corrections are made along the way. When it becomes obvious the direction is a dead end, one must be flexible and make a few adjustments on the fly.

Another great misstep is that of over-utilizing consensus. This is akin to not making a decision at all. A team understands that a major function of a leader is to... lead. The team wants a leader to make decisions and direct individuals toward the overall goal of the organization.

A **misunderstanding** is a notion every team member is on board with a leader's plan. It's a plan put into motion which by all accounts was a good one, but no one else in the group understands what it is. How the expected outcome will make the company better must be communicated to employees. Even in today's military, where commands are rapidly given and readily received, there is a need for good communication as to what is a priority and why.

Management today, more than ever must be flexible enough to change with the times. That is if you wish to be successful. Gone are the days of authoritarian rule and "do as I say, not as I do." Today's workforce is smarter than ever, and they demand answers, especially to the question of "Where are we going?"

You as the manager are charged with seeking a better understanding of your people and the circumstances you find yourself in. How you receive the information within the following pages is completely up to you. Though, I hope you will keep an open mind and gain knowledge from my own experiences and from that of others.

Through this book, we will look at the motivators and disincentives of people from all generations, gender and personality traits. We also examine the failure and successes of managers from several different industries; manufacturing, retail, sales, white collar, and blue collar. To achieve **your** success, I invite you to learn from these lessons as well as take a hard look at what may be holding you back from attaining excellence. Leading others is a noble calling and I congratulate you for taking on the challenge!



## **Ghost in the Machine; Just What is a Manager Anyway?**

As anyone ever caught in the middle of a situation can attest, it is difficult to consider two different points of view simultaneously. It can be stressful and emotionally taxing trying to bridge the gap between two shores. Yet, that is exactly what a manager does. On one hand, there is the mission of the organization. On the other, the people who will fulfill that mission.

It is hard to conceive that management as a science is largely an invention of the early twentieth century. How difficult it must have been to build a road, cathedral or pyramids without the analysis, development and communication skills at our disposal today. In the Roman army, the leader of a small squad was someone who paid for the position or simply the biggest guy. But the term "Foreman" first gained popular usage during the Industrial Revolution. From that, the distinction would grow into the position we think of today.

For those who are on the outside looking in, it may appear to be an easy job. "Rank has its privileges" and other common clichés paint a picture of someone who gets to lay back and take it easy while the peons do all the work. This notion in turn has done a lot of harm to corporate cultures around the world. If anything, supervision works harder and longer. There is a reason why most in management are paid a salary; they work more.

So, how would we define a manager? For that matter, what might be the definitions for several key terms of those in charge? Well, for starters if you don't have a TEAM, you are not truly a manager. You may have the title of manager, administrator or even director but if you are a team of one, you're not a manager. You are a specialist. You might be the accounts receivable person in a small company or the only human resource director. You may be the compliance officer whose sole job it is to ensure the company in a highly regulated industry doesn't

break any laws or guidelines. For many of these semi-autonomous positions, a manager is more of an independent contractor than a leader. There's nothing wrong with that, of course. In fact, one can take liberties a true manager cannot.

A more or less siloed technician can go through the day without speaking very much. He or she comes into work, puts in eight hours analyzing, developing and creating reports or in communication with officials outside of the organization. When the workday is over, the professional simply gets up and leaves. They go home without the need to express to anyone how the workflow moved that day or what the expectations are for the next. When he or she does arrive the next day, they simply pick up where they left off sixteen hours before. No need for checks and balances, reprimands, or rewards. And as long as the work gets done, usually, no one bothers them. For many, this is considered to be the ideal job. But it is not management.

Also, a manager is one who moves her team toward a common goal. She's not a boss unless she has people on her team. Even one who manages a process, like quality assurance, is not a manager. That's a coordinator. So in short, a manager manages... people.

Technically, the one who decides the direction in which an organization moves is a "leader." Though, within the pages of this book, the terms leader, manager and supervisor may be used interchangeably if only to prevent monotony. But a leader is the business owner, CEO, President, or vice president who is the decision-maker for the company. That decision-maker also has financial and legal responsibilities most managers typically do not.

Though the leadership terms of "President" or "CEO" may seem glamorous, I assure you the top dog cannot do his or her job without a good management staff. That staff unties the hands of C Suite executives. A quality leader will remember that a manager allows that executive the resource of time to; assess, plan, administer, promote and perhaps most important, establish the corporate culture.

If you are an owner of a company with fewer than a dozen employees, you are more than likely BOTH leader and manager, but understand the functions are not the same. It is fine to be both in a smaller entity, but it is necessary to switch hats from time to time. Otherwise, the issues of the day will force one's focus to narrow to only the immediate challenges. Then, there will be no long-range planning to move the company toward success. All you will be doing is putting out a string of small fires. Everything will be reactionary. In this instance, it is wise to have a more senior employee assist from time to time.

Though the role of manager and supervisor may not be as distinguishable, a supervisor is one who watches over the others in the group to see a job is done correctly. It is that seasoned worker who is a trusted individual and does much of the early training of new hires. In retail, it's the "key" employee because that person actually has a set of keys to the shop. In manufacturing, it's the front-line quality control who is still a member of the line themselves. Generally, their authority is limited, as they don't typically hire and fire. But this is often a starting point in their careers for full management later.

Now you see from where the term "MIDDLE management" comes. You're stuck in the middle. Being in the center of the chain of command can be difficult. You have to carry out the orders of leadership yet aid the rest of the department in accomplishing its tasks. This takes the ability to be flexible in perception and communication styles. For this, you are an indispensable part of the organization.

A manager, as the name implies, is one who maintains. He is charged with carrying out the instructions of company leaders. He figures out the **how** to leadership's **what**. It's the navigator of a ship to the captain who originally sets the destination. When the ship steers off course, and it will, the navigator makes corrections by telling the crew what they need to do to get back on course. If the vessel journeys into dangerous waters, it will be the manager who warns the corporate executive and then responds to the corrective actions. Without the navigator, the ship will be thrown on the rocks or lost at sea. Without a good manager, so will be the organization.

Then again, perhaps the policy or new idea is a bad one, to begin with, stemming from leadership on high, and it falls to the boss to implement the program. This is, after all, the function of management. How is one who does not believe in the new practice supposed to be able to roll it out to the rank and file? That is not easily done, yet this situation happens fairly often. This is where the job has to take on a certain amount of finesse.

Recently, I was speaking to a group of business owners. It was a luncheon, and I was brought in as the guest speaker. The topic that day was on turning new managers into effective ones. It was a portion of my one-day management seminar I had conducted several times prior. Entrepreneurs want to know how to get their management team up and running as fast as possible.

Not everyone eager for a promotion or a pay raise has the skills or proper attitude to lead others. This is where a boss must also be pragmatic about his or her abilities. I reminded the entrepreneurs in the crowd deciding who oversees your

business is as important as deciding to go into business in the first place and is not one that should be taken lightly. Yet, I am surprised at just how many do just that.

The overall tone of the workplace is established by those in charge. That attitude will be consistent whether the boss is physically there or not. It's a matter of influence. I always ask those in charge whether they want to take on a group of attitudinal carbon copies because they will.

That fact can be a double-edged sword and we must consider the examples by which we lead. If we are stressed out or toxic, we will be surrounded by a group of stressed out and toxic individuals. Even more so, what attitude do we want our staff to take with customers and our even own boss? This is why managers must be self-aware of the environment we create.

Every team has a leader, either officially or otherwise. We typically think of a leader as one who is out front like a businessperson at the end of a meeting table, a military officer leading his unit into war, or a conductor with an orchestra. Though not every influential person is out front, this is likely what we imagine and for good reason. A team will take comfort seeing the one with control over our livelihoods at the head of the pack. Or else, we start to wonder where that person is and get paranoid with all sorts of frightful thoughts.

In college, I was required to take a music appreciation class. I reluctantly attended, after all, what were you going to teach me about AC/DC or the Police I didn't already know? To my surprise, I did get a lot out of the class. Though I don't listen to Classic Music much these days, I gained respect for other genres. Perhaps the most appreciation was gained for an orchestra and all the tireless work that group goes through to make a concert seem effortless. One nagging question I had for years before the class was; what instrument does the conductor play? If the musicians know what they're doing, why do they need that guy? I mean, Sting and the Police didn't need a conductor.

I asked the professor to shed some light on the issue. He stated a conductor is also a composer and will many times put his spin on a classic piece. Although he cannot play many of the instruments, he knows HOW each should sound. If there is a problem, the conductor can devote time to working with the musician to figuring out what is wrong. Many such things go on behind the scenes, but when it is "go time," the orchestra and the audience expect to see him there.

In a lot of ways, that is how it is in business. The CEO may not have all the answers or be the smartest person in the room, but he is expected to lead, nonetheless. Like a conductor who cannot play the tuba, a leader may not be someone who has come

up through the ranks of the technicians (accountants, maintenance and IT people) they lead. However, the leader must demonstrate her abilities. Members of a team are always going to ask; "How is my job easier or more difficult with her around?" It's a fair question and one that all bosses must answer. Otherwise, the team will suffer from trust issues.

Sadly, some business owners will promote an employee to a supervisory role without fully considering the consequences that could occur by a bad manager. Bad morale, absenteeism, employee turnover, work slowdowns and lack of care or safety all affect the business' bottom line. The damage that could be done may even be irreversible and lead to that business folding. Once an organization is pinned with a reputation as a bad place to work, it is very hard to shake. In today's consumer climate, people often investigate a business before purchasing a product or service. Millennials tend to be a segment of the population that is very sensitive to what work conditions are for a company before they make a purchase decision to spend years of their career there.

It's all the more reason to ensure a good management team. Supervisors are the caretakers of your organization. Your business is your baby. How many of us will trust our children with complete strangers without having vetted them in some way? Company morale is a good barometer of production. More than likely, none of us would visit the local crack house and announce, "Who wants a babysitting gig?" simply because we thought we could hire someone there on the cheap. Yet, how many corporations and institutions hire from within solely because they believe it to be less time consuming and more economic than looking to see what talent is outside. If you want the best, you must start with the best.

Almost as important as what to do, is to know what NOT to do. With so many people, procedures and other considerations in any organization, mistakes are sometimes made. It is not enough for a manager to continue to develop his or her own skills. The boss must also be mindful to avoid potential obstacles that could derail an otherwise positive environment. Gossip, harassment and poor management will do just that.

When I was in college, I sought out a part-time position for some extra spending money. I wanted a schedule that would not interfere with my classes and still leave me time for additional studying and of course... girls. The newspaper (this shows you how long ago this was) had a listing for a warehouse worker at a local dairy processing plant. It was for three nights a week from 4 pm to midnight. This was perfect!

I met with the Human Resource director in an interview and confirmed the work shift with him, explaining I attended the university and 24 hours a week was the most I could do. He was a jovial individual who wore a big smile and asked about my major. We had a nice conversation and he confirmed the hours and said the job was mine. Then, he called the warehouse supervisor to come into his office. This was the man to whom I was to report Monday afternoon.

As soon as Bob entered the room, the HR Directors' smile disappeared, and the tone of the room shifted to one of melancholy. That didn't stop Bob from smiling, though. He was impressed with my size and said I would do well. "Boy, we're sure glad to see you. Welcome to the team"! That was the last positive thing Bob ever said to me.

Monday after class, I headed to the dairy and found Bob. He gave me a jacket, hat and gloves then walked me to the back of the plant. I tried to make idle chit-chat to see what my new boss was all about. "How long have you worked here?" I asked. "Too long!" was his reply. He certainly was not the conversationalist the HR Director was. However, I understood I was not here to talk but to work. The rest of the walk was in stone silence. Once we reached the back cooler, he handed me a two-prong metal rod and said Chuck will teach me everything I need to know.

Chuck and a couple of other guys were hard at work. The job was relatively straight-forward. All I had to do was use the metal rod to grab a set of milk crates stacked three or four high as they rolled in from the processing plant on rollers built into the floor and pull them to the back of the warehouse. Being these were dairy products; the room was set to the temperature of a refrigerator. However, after the team was there several minutes, we would work up a sweat and it was necessary to remove our jackets. After sitting in classes all day, it was good to do something relatively mindless and routine for a few hours. For the most part, Bob left us alone as he sat up in an observation booth, to which Chuck and the boys seemed relieved.

It wasn't even a week before the warehouse supervisor asked me if I wanted some extra money one Sunday. This was working with a completely different crew emptying eighteen-wheeled trucks of the empty crates once they returned to the loading docks. There were hundreds of them. I did it once but decided the extra pay wasn't worth the effort since Sunday was a big study day for me at the university library.

Next week, Bob again asked if I wanted to work on Sunday or even extend my shift in the cooler. I told him I would rather stick to my original schedule. Once he learned I could say "no" with relative ease, he would state if I didn't help out with

additional hours, the rest of the team would suffer to make up for additional work themselves because he was shorthanded. Like a sap, I fell for it about half a dozen times. Finally, it occurred to me to ask him "Why don't you just hire another person?"

Have you ever had an uncle or grandfather who would do the trick where he would raise and lower a handkerchief or his hand over his face to reveal a smile or a frown? Well, that was Bob. If I agreed to a request which was by the way, beyond that to which I originally committed, I saw a smile, while a frown would show his disappointment in me.

Toward the end, I got a lot of frowns, even though I did exactly what I said I would do... the job for which I was hired. Eventually, he would even cut my regular shift hours in an attempt to get me in line. Now I knew why the tenor at the end of my interview with HR changed once Bob entered the office. Apparently, he had a habit of running off employees after a few weeks or months. I was one of just a long line of employees who quit working there. It was up to Personnel to once again fill the vacancy which was on a relatively regular basis.

As a cautionary tale, let's review just a few things Bob did wrong. There was no consistency in his style of management, smiling only when he felt he had something to gain. He never took the time to get to know his team nor did he spend much time in proximity with his subordinates. I'm not sure why a warehouse needed a control room or observation deck, but he spent most of his time in it. My training, no matter how simple it was, was left up to other employees. This manager was deceitful, manipulative and if that didn't work, vengeful. Did I miss anything? Perhaps, but let Bob serve as an example of what NOT to do when directing a team.

Bob was not a good leader and not simply because he and I didn't see eye to eye. As one would assume, there was a lot of turnover with employees at this facility. Due to Bob's inflexibility and lack of perception and communication skills, he was unable to maintain a steady crew. This created more work for the existing workers as well as HR. This also meant additional money spent in placement and the lost time during the training of a never-ending string of employees. Had Bob used a bit more foresight in his planning rather than overcoming the same problem every few weeks, he could have made things move much smoother for the company and kept morale up. Anticipation and empathy are two very important leadership traits.

But not every leader in the department appears on the official company organizational chart. There are those with an almost natural charisma that attracts the interest for one reason or another of the rest of the team. The type of person

others ask for advice instead of the boss or perhaps in spite of the boss. It may be a front-line supervisor or a team lead, but more often than naught, it's just someone who has the respect of the others.

If you have a crew of three or more, one of them will be the unofficial leader when you are gone. It's just human nature and the one in charge needs to understand that. These "shadow managers" can be a great benefit to the actual boss. They can also be a detriment. It is best to identify this person and be sure they support your ideas, otherwise, they could be working against you. Where this person has the respect of the team and the boss does not, will more than likely see disruption in the workplace.

Management is an activity, not a title. As such, a supervisor needs to assess personnel, resources and time to accomplish the group's goals. We know how one communicates with others often dictates whether those goals are achieved.

If an employee feels she is not getting the answers, solutions or satisfaction she needs from the one with the title, she will go elsewhere. In an attempt to move the team forward or just keep the peace, this shadow manager may begin to issue directives. Where there is an absentee boss, a relationship like this could exist for years and simply be accepted as normal.

But a boss is one who is viewed by upper leadership as dependable. Someone who is not given to knee-jerk reactions or peer pressure by the group. A professional. One who can see that policies and procedures will be carried out, yet in an empathetic way. Executives may set a mandate, but managers set the standard.

A good manager is also one who is viewed by his subordinates as steady support. Someone who will take the time to give guidance so individual employees may better accomplish their job. A coach. Team members need to know they can reach out at any time if they have questions or doubts. A manager must be approachable.

A manager must have foresight and empathy. There is an understanding of where to go and what to do and yet, get there in a way that will be rational, even apparent, to the entire team. Generally, people dislike change. And offering an upgrade or changing their settings will not remedy that. But the 21<sup>st</sup> century is full of it. The manager's real skill is in how to present new ideas and policies to the organization. She needs the acumen to present a transition in such a way the rest of the group understands it to be a good move forward. Otherwise, a handful of people averse to the change can hinder a new product or service before it ever reaches the marketplace.

Both sides of the chain of command, that is up and down the organizational chart, must see the manager as one who is ethical. A lack of integrity breeds skepticism which breaks down the chain of command. Without confidence in the center of the organization, the effectiveness of both the top and bottom will begin to erode.

Not everyone offered the position of a boss should take it, however. If offered a position yourself, it's a decision that should not be considered lightly. I have coached several clients who accepted a promotion because it meant more money, or they liked the prestige of the title only to later find themselves in over their heads. During our coaching sessions, I will try to get them up and running as quickly as possible with solid management principles and the occasional advice. More often than not, my job is to encourage the client to view a situation from different points of view. To anticipate their own actions. Often the client goes on to be successful in the position, but sometimes they will pivot to something else.

But a willingness to look at problems from different angles is essential to being a good manager. Just be certain before grandiose plans are implemented, the team is on board with why and how. Helping the team navigate a shift in mindset or how things are to be done is one of the most important things a boss can do. It may take a little time for some to warm up to the idea of change. Remember, they're not machines and a switch cannot be easily flipped.

**MAJOR MISTAKE:** Assuming a management post will make that person's work life easier.

**MAJOR MISSTEP:** Assuming the role of manager and not having the basic skills necessary.

**MAJOR MISSUNDERSTANDING:** Not letting the team know the manager is there as a support for them.

## About the Author

Corporate trainer, public speaker, and coach Blaine Little has been training for two decades. Founder and CEO of Momentum Seminars Training & Coaching, he has helped THOUSANDS of business professionals across the country. He has presented for HCA, RE/MAX, Ryman Hospitality (Gaylord Entertainment), Superior Traffic Control, First Community Mortgage, Quik Mart and dozens of trade associations.

He is a Certified National Trainer, (CNT) as well as a Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM). Blaine is known for keeping training light and fun. After all, that's how people learn. The fact that he is a professional magician doesn't hurt either!

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