
Advice to a New Manager

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I was recently asked by a new Category Manager for advice as she began her career in general management. I pass that advice on to each of you in the hope that you can profit from it as well.

1. As you begin as a Category Manager, **keep an open mind**. Your key focus should be **on learning**... what currently is; why it is the way it is; how well is it performing; how important is it. This will enable you to make an informed decision on whether why should be a priority in the future and/or should be changed.
2. **Establish** for yourself, on one sheet of paper, a **personal action** plan and agenda, to be revised over time as your knowledge base increases. Key elements of this action plan should include the **key business opportunities, the key business fixes, and the people needs**.
3. Once you've decided what your key opportunities are, make them known. **Develop your own game plan** which encapsulates your approach to the business. As you develop that thinking, test it with trusted others...to ensure that it rings true, and/or to find ways to make it better. This will also get the alignment process going within your business.
4. **Plan your life effectively**. Make sure your schedule reflects a forward macro look at what you must accomplish over the next 3-6 months. Book in advance key field time, manufacturing review time, key dates for business reviews, etc. Make sure that you're **proactive, not reactive, with your calendar**.

Make sure your direct reports know your schedule so they can ensure their and your needs will be met. Set the standard that all key program reviews, etc. must be set up in a disciplined, timely manner.

As part of this planning exercise, say "no" when you are convinced your time will not be productively spent. Don't invest the time if it does not lead to building profitable sales or building organizational capability.

5. **Set up an effective monitor and control** process so you know what important is happening to the business and can quickly take action if necessary. Key to this will be **to define those few factors that will make a difference** in achieving the Category's financial and business results. Once those are defined, require **weekly or monthly reviews** that target how we are progressing versus those outcomes. This will allow you to add your own perspective and thoughts on a timely basis.
6. **Keys to productively working with your organization:**
 - **Take the time to understand each of your direct report's own hierarchy of needs, capabilities, and track record**. This will let you determine how to elicit the best results from each of them.
 - Once you've taken stock of your organization and better understand their proven

competencies, **assess whether your organization is capable of delivering your strategic objectives**. If they are not, make the necessary changes. (Remember, oftentimes personnel changes take a while to implement.)

- **Forge close working relationships with key staff heads.** Make absolutely sure that their functional objectives are 100% congruent with your category strategy objectives.
 - Make sure you personally know and work with personnel at least two levels lower in the organization so you can better **assess organizational culture, core competencies**, and gauge the overall **bench strength** of the organization. It's important for each Category Manager to personally evaluate the talent pool within their category and take actions accordingly.
 - Develop a **personal contract** with all direct reports, **making clear what constitutes excellence of outcomes**. Then live and breath it, constantly reinforcing the themes and values established.
 - **Be very straightforward and candid with your feedback** to you direct reports. Don't hold back or sugar coat any negative feedback. Similarly, provide lots of positive encouraging feedback. Never be afraid you're providing too much positive feedback.
 - **Give no grace to victimization mentality.** Be clear with your organization that you expect them to take personal control and have personal accountability for fixing problems with the business.
 - Establish the standard in your organization that you value **team work** and that you fully expect the organization to **respect** each other and to **work together** to accomplish difficult results. Internal bickering or finger pointing within the organization should not be tolerated. Also, whenever possible, avoid "cutting the baby in half". Have your direct reports make decisions among themselves if at all possible.
7. **Work effectively with Senior Management.** Take every proactive opportunity to seed and harvest ideas with your direct management. Work issues with them through on-going dialogue. Never miss the "magic moment to persuade." Once you have seeded an idea, use more confirming data to reinforce your points of view. Persuasion may be gradual and progressive over time.
- When receiving an idea from Senior Management that is counter to your own, make sure you take the time to **think about its essence before rejecting it out-of-hand**. Oftentimes, their new thinking can shift paradigms and foster an ever better idea that is perhaps the synthesis of both ideas. Also, take care to protect your organization from the "idea of the day club."

In working with Senior Management, always employ the following skills:

- **Make sure you fully understand what they are saying to you.** At times, this will require you to stop them and say "I'm not sure I understand what you are saying...is this it?"
- **Make sure you are as proactive as possible.** Take the lead. Aggressively go after the business and what you need from Management to get the job done.

- **Have a system for following up on paperwork** needing formal approval from their office. Oftentimes that will involve working closely with administrative support personnel to make sure that they are working in your behalf.
 - **Engage your boss early on key issues** in order to harvest the best of his or her thinking. This will also surface any key issues promptly so that proposed solutions are responsive and optimum.
8. **Learn the business** well enough so you can add creative top spin and innovative thoughts to it. Learn what the key drivers are to the technologies of your business so you can make suggestions on how to improve achievement of consumer goals. Always look for the big market concepts that can change the rules of the game. Also, always look for already existing “best in class” solutions to the problem you face, either from other parts of the world or by benchmarking competition.
9. Act on the following until they become second nature to you:

Key Points for Managers:

Mastery

Become a functional master in every job you do.

- Knowledge is key.
- Facts mean everything.
- Capabilities reign supreme.

Leadership

Develop your leadership and interpersonal skills.

- Watch other leaders.
- Learn from them.
- Ask them questions on how they achieve.
- Seek out opportunities to practice leadership skills.

Strategy and Deployment

Develop your ability to pin down the right strategies for your business.

- Identify the things—those few things—that will truly make a difference to the business. Be highly critical in your choice of those few things. Do not keep changing them. Make sure they get done.
- Define the absolute minimum necessary to get the job done and make sure it gets done.
- Maintain a constancy of focus.

Action Results

- Develop your skills in how to get things done.
- Learn to prioritize and place intensity of focus on the most important actions.
- Learn the Company’s systems and effectively harness them.
- Become an effective sales person.
- Drive executional excellence.

Seeking Competitive Advantage

- Determine success or failure on the sole basis of whether what you do or lead beats the competition in a meaningful way. Ensure that you win big.
- Ask yourself what you have done for the consumer that is important and what competition has not done.
- Ask yourself what you have not done and what competition has done that is so important.
- Rectify both...fast.

Seeking to change the world

- Set imaginative, bold, competitive goals and set about achieving them.
- Think “If it is to be...it is up to me.”
- Think about what après article about yourself and your accomplishments would look like in five years. What do you want the magazine article to say?

Bedrock of Continued Growth

- Remember the principles on which your company is built. Make sure you understand and follow those principles, e.g.:
 - Integrity
 - Honesty
 - Forthrightness
 - Seek to continuously improve.
 - Find mentors to help and inspire you in your life. Study great leaders and combine the very best points from them. For example:
 - Socrates (knowledge, intelligence and a teacher)
 - Attila the Hun (winning)
 - Winston Churchill (courage, imagination, inspiration, tenacity).
- 10.** Develop your own profile on where you fit vis-à-vis these characteristics of success. Then develop a personal strategy to increase your effectiveness by building on your strengths and improving your opportunity areas.