

16 Essential People Skills You Need to Be a Great Manager

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A survey of more than 100 managers about what they believe are the most important people management skills reveals the top traits to develop.

What do you really need to be a great manager? Are there certain people skills you need to succeed? How do great managers operate to oversee and lead the people on their teams?

We surveyed more than 100 managers about what they believe are the most important people management skills. From understanding employee motivations to mastering negotiation, here are the people skills you need to be a superb manager.

NEGOTIATION

Although there are a lot of skills that make up a brilliant manager, I think that mastering the skill of negotiation can deliver the greatest payoffs. Few people understand the complexity and multi-layered nature of this skill, as it comprises emotional intelligence, communication, reflection, adaptability, and many more. Without it, you, as a manager, cannot reach an agreeable solution, no matter the subject or issue.

Like many of us, I wasn't born with this skill, and I had to hone it as I worked my way up to becoming a CEO. Today, a win-win negotiation style helps me get excellent results for everyone involved, secure new clients, and build rapport with the team. I also encourage our managers and team leads to nurture this skill as I understand the long-term value of it—both in the professional and personal life.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict resolution skills aren't just helpful when there's a disagreement between colleagues in your team. Resolving conflicts well means you're able to listen to both sides without judgment to understand where each person is coming from and what they want.

It also requires patience, collaboration, negotiation, consensus building, creative problem-solving, and the ability to stay calm when faced with highly charged emotions.

These skills are just as valuable for preventing conflicts and maintaining a healthy work environment on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, people who are skilled at conflict resolution also are exceptional managers across the board.

Archie Payne, CEO, CalTek Staffing

ACTIVE LISTENING

With people management, there is one skill that stands out from the rest as absolutely necessary for being a superb manager: active listening. Active listening creates better

relationships and trust between you and your team, which leads to improved communication and the successful execution of tasks. It also helps foster mutual respect for each other's opinions and ideas, so everyone can feel heard.

Active listening involves not only hearing what someone is saying, but understanding their perspectives, intentions, emotions, and behaviors. Through focused attention, you're really absorbing the message from someone's statements, rather than just their words. This goes beyond surface-level conversations, as it allows you to get an insight into others that they may have never thought to share otherwise.

Travis Lindemoen, managing director, Nexus IT group

CONSISTENCY

Great people managers prioritize weekly, at a minimum bi-monthly, and touch bases with their direct reports. These pre-scheduled meetings support connection, collaboration, clarification of progress against outcomes, and formal moments for mentorship.

When these touch points are inconsistent, I lose touch with how my direct reports are doing or notice productivity lags where projects, processes, or programs take longer.

My team and I have used Loom, a video messaging tool that helps us get our message across through instantly shareable videos, as a resource to keep communications going when, for whatever reason, we may miss a meeting here or there. Loom has offered personalization and efficiency in communication that a mere text-based email cannot do.

Chelsea C. Williams, founder and CEO, Reimagine Talent Co.

MOTIVATE WITH RESPECT

I have been a senior project manager for over 20 years. When people feel unmotivated, they don't move to meet objectives as quickly as they should. Individuals are assigned to different projects with different people.

On projects, I thank people in front of the entire team. I also send emails to Senior Leadership to share the names of people who did something outstanding. Saying thank you is free, yet so many people refuse to say it.

Many leaders think saying thank you is a sign of weakness. I was recently pulled into a meeting with senior leadership to ask how I got a project with 175 resources to progress so fast. My response was, 'I respected everyone.'

I was told it had to be something else. I stated again that I respected everyone on the team and the skill they brought to the project. People find out about my projects and ask me if I need them on my project team. The motivation of people is a skill falling by the wayside. Let's all pick it up again.

Beth Smith, life coach and owner, Thriving With Resilience

CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

In order to be a great people manager, having the ability to create psychological safety among direct reports in both 1:1s and team settings is critical to success. Essentially, this comprises creating an environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing honest thoughts, ideas, innovative solutions, mistakes, and feedback without feeling hesitant or concerned about receiving any negative backlash.

A way to show this as a leader/manager is being vulnerable yourself and sharing your own workplace failures and out-of-the-box project ideas to establish the playing field that this is welcome and seen as a positive contribution in a safe space. Everyone has unique strengths to contribute, and managers should encourage that through psychological safety.

Megan Dias, career services coach, Parsity

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence comes to mind first. I have found, over the course of being in HR, that many are not always aware of how they show up with others. As a leader, if you can manage your emotions and channel being intellectually curious, then you are well on your way. Many think or say that emotions equate to weakness, but this is not true.

I believe innately that humans want to see that others are just as human. We feel that if we show these cards, others will think less of us. Greatness and evolution come from simply being honest. Are you upset? Own it and handle it correctly. Don't hide it and contain it. Are you nervous? Name the emotion and still do it afraid. Or, simply ask for help. Whatever you do, just channel it.

You are human and you must manage outcomes and how you feel. The best leaders are the ones who are self-aware. Despite any shortcomings, they are fine with simply being. Emotional intelligence changes relationships and it changes your life.

Tanya Turner, MBA, SHRM-CP, PHR, HR director, SALTO Systems

PERSEVERANCE

After a 20-year career working in Silicon Valley and with both start-ups and Fortune 500 companies, I've had the gift of getting to know some of the most outstanding leaders in the world. I've seen companies skyrocket and I've seen many of them crash and burn. I've learned what makes an outstanding leader successful and what it takes for a company to cross the chasm. It all comes down to one trait: perseverance.

The first signal we see when a candidate doesn't have it is job hopping. Two years or fewer at multiple jobs send off our warning signals. It shows us you can't stay the course when things get tough or you could not persevere through the toughest of times that either you were going through or the company was weathering.

Companies, like people, are continuously faced with unforeseen challenges, and it is the leaders who persevere through these challenges that are the most interesting for us to hire.

Kristine Shine, founder and CEO, Shine Talent

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence involves understanding and effectively interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. It enabled me to be more adaptable, empathetic, and open to diverse opinions, which ultimately all contribute to fostering a positive company culture.

As a manager, having cultural competence is essential for building relationships with team members from different backgrounds. It requires a commitment to creating an inclusive work environment where all team members feel respected, valued, and supported.

This can be done by promoting diversity, addressing bias and discrimination, and providing opportunities for learning and growth. A culturally competent manager is respected and can help create stronger ties among team members, leading to a better working environment and increased productivity.

Abeer Raza, CMO and cofounder, TekRevol

PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET

Managers deal with conflict and unexpected problems consistently. You're there to help your team and department navigate through these problems and identify solutions and the path to reach them.

You may find yourself understaffed, not reaching your goals because of an internal or external reason, or having people on your team who don't get along. One of the most crucial skills you need to have to become a great manager and handle these unexpected situations is having a problem-solving mindset.

When employees have issues, as their leader, focus on the path to a solution. If your department is hitting a roadblock, put the reasons for that roadblock aside, and focus on the tools that can help you get to a solution.

Adopting this mindset will help prevent burnout for you and your employees and support your team's growth, motivation, and long-term vision.

Inbar Madar, founder and business consultant, M.I. Business Consulting

FACILITATION

A manager who can facilitate well will encourage collaboration, encourage participation, and help to resolve conflicts within the team. Understanding that facilitation is a necessary ability for managers to guide and support the objectives of the organization effectively is critical. Effective Facilitation involves creating a supportive and inclusive environment where all team members feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ideas.

The ability to facilitate requires curiosity, inquiry, active listening, and the capacity to understand different perspectives. One who can facilitate will empower their team members to take ownership of their work and work together towards common goals.

Facilitation is an essential people management skill that is critical for successful managers to possess. Effective facilitation can help to foster a productive work environment, build strong teams, and ensure that everyone is working towards the same objectives.

Douglas Ferguson, president, Voltage Control

EMPOWERING OTHERS

The people management skill that I've found to be most essential to being a brilliant manager is the ability to help individuals navigate around problems they need to solve. Regardless of how well-structured someone's role may be, there will ultimately be occasions where an issue or problem arises.

If a manager swoops in and problem-solves for their staff, those staff members may feel well supported. However, they may also depend on the manager to solve every problem that comes up in the future. Knowing when to give staff the space to problem-solve themselves is a powerful management tool.

Instead of giving staff the answer or solution, try empowering them to solve the problem themselves. If they manage to, they will probably gain immense satisfaction in owning the success of the outcome. A Staff that owns a solution is much more invested in executing it, too.

Having staff who are motivated to independently problem solve will make your job as a manager much simpler.

Kayvan Moghaddassi, business strategist, Kayvan Consulting

FINDING MANY DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

I believe that one of the best people management skills to have is the ability to be a problem solver. It's important for leaders to understand that there can be more than one solution to a problem. When a leader displays problem-solving skills to their team, this sets a great example for them.

Their team can then apply those skills to situations by identifying more solutions than meets the eye, even in situations where there may appear to be no solutions. Problem-solving skills are unique because they teach others that there can actually be many ways to accomplish the same goal.

John Hall, cofounder, Calendar.com

BALANCE OF MICRO- AND MACRO-MANAGEMENT

Understanding when to take more control while knowing when it's best to step back and let your team takeover is a delicate balance that excellent managers can achieve. Doing too much or too little will lead to frustration and an inefficient workflow, but finding the right equilibrium can be incredibly rewarding and beneficial for your team.

This calls for effective delegation, supervision, and quality assurance to ensure tasks are completed efficiently while providing guidance and support that encourage team members to

take initiative. By maintaining this balance, you can create a cohesive work environment that nurtures future leaders while inspiring and motivating your team to work at their best.

Effie Asafu-Adjaye, founder, Beautiful Sparks

TRUST

In any sort of relationship, trust is important, which is especially true in the workplace. Regarding this, managers can show their employees that they trust them.

One way is by reducing micro-management. By looking over your employees too rigorously, you can annoy them and make them feel you don't believe they can take care of the task themselves.

Instead, try to outline the expected outcomes and let your employees know that if they encounter any problems or have questions, you are there to help. This will help your employees grow, become more confident in their skill set, and let them know that if they ever need help, it will be there for them.

Matt Bieber, CEO, Queries AI

EMPATHY

The greatest skill I've developed over time that helps me to manage people is developing empathy for the people on my team. Empathy has helped me to better engage people by better understanding their motivations and being able to connect with them in the language that they'll respond to best.

This approach to establishing a connection has also helped me to improve how I communicate with my team and to be more thoughtful about how they'll perceive what I'm communicating.

Ultimately, managing people well requires them to trust you, and there's no better way to earn trust than to show a person who you care about the things they care about and that you have their interests in mind. When you do that, you show them they can trust you to decide and put them in a position to be successful consistently.

Randy Holloway, cofounder, Filament LLC

Now that you've learned about what managers are focused on from a people skills perspective, it's time to take a look at how you manage your team.

What people skills do you wish you had?