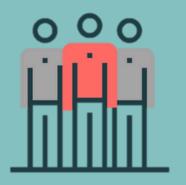# The 5 Mistakes New Managers Make

5 common mistakes a new manager may make, and how to overcome them

Managers play a pivotal role in an organisation's success, with employees citing their relationships with management as the top factor in their job satisfaction. But today's work environment – and the constant workplace changes that continue to occur – mean that many managers feel overwhelmed. In fact, 68% of surveyed HR leaders, believe managers are struggling to keep up as they navigate hybrid work and strive to acquire the skills needed to keep their teams engaged and productive.

Supporting the development of all managers as they acquire these skills is a critical piece of talent management. It's even more essential for new managers transitioning into roles where they need to shift their focus away from doing the work to motivating their team! It can be difficult for new managers to rein in the behaviours that helped them get promoted, and this often happens when you have promoted the best person to do the job! But success is unlikely if they don't embrace their new responsibilities and focus more on team management than their individual work and responsibilities.

In their excitement to make a great impression, new managers often make common mistakes in their first few months on the job, and here are Meraki HR's 5 common mistakes that we see new managers make, and how you can overcome them.

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1 Overpromising what your team can deliver

Overcommitting happens when high performers have been promoted to a manager role, as these high promoters continue to judge their team's performance by their own standards. Taking on more than your team has the bandwidth to handle is counterproductive to long-term success. It creates a high-stress environment for you and your team, leading to burnout and likely a failure to deliver the work promised.

How to overcome it

While new managers are eager to prove themselves with stretch goals, learning to recognise resourcing limitations is critical to effective management. Take the time to analyse projects before they begin to accurately scope timelines and promised deliverables.

Steps to take

- Plan the major projects your team will engage in during the next quarter, half, or year (depending on how your organisation approaches planning). Then decide who on the team will work on those projects. This forethought will help everyone have an idea in advance of what's possible to commit to.

- Create service-level agreements (SLAs) for your most common team project types. For instance, how many hours does it take to produce a report? Documenting those SLAs will help you determine team capacity and not overpromise on what you can deliver.

- Don't plan for your team's capacity using 100% of their working hours. Everyone has to check email, attend company meetings, and even grab a cup of coffee. Consult with your senior team on a good rule of thumb for benchmarking productive capacity for your team. A likely realistic estimate of time available for work is 65% to 80% of working hours.

- Plan extra leeway for the unknown – new projects or unexpected asks – that you can use some of your team's unallocated time to solve for.

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2 Stepping in to do the work yourself -AKA micromanagement!

It's a frequent temptation for new managers to step in and do the work — or at least tell your team exactly how you would do it. After all, managers are often promoted thanks to their proficiency in performing specific tasks or the execution of projects. But both of these approaches can erode your team's motivation and morale, plus divert you from the strategic work needed to help you guide your team. It takes time, effort, and preparation to manage a team effectively. And this is an important element of your new scope of work.

How to overcome it

Adopt the Socratic method. Instead of instructing or telling your team members how to do something, ask questions when they come to you with challenges or obstacles to overcome. Help them consider their options and let them arrive at their own decisions. When you let your team take responsibility for their work, they'll feel more empowered in their abilities, engaged with the tasks at hand, and motivated to reach their goals. And you will have more time to focus on planning for the future and managing your team members.

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Steps to take

- Encourage your team to reflect on their challenges and the decisions made to manage those challenges as part of your one-on-ones with your direct reports. This regular cadence will help them build the habit of examining decisions and articulating outcomes.

- Just as you plan your team's major commitments in the upcoming quarter or half, plan your own major initiatives and projects as the team leader. These will likely include planning, estimating team capacity, assigning projects, and working with crossfunctional teams to align on key initiatives, among other things. Estimate how long these projects will take you and block out time in your diary to complete them. Clarifying your objectives and top priorities can help ensure that you let your team take care of their work while you take care of yours.

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3 Failing to see the big picture

Now that you're responsible for an entire team's output, it's crucial to consider how your team's work connects to the broader company goals. Don't just focus on your daily tasks or personal output — keep the big picture in mind.

How to overcome it

Zooming out allows you to identify trends and spot potential problems. All you have to do is set the direction and put your trust in your team to handle the details. Understanding how your team's work fits with the company's goals is also an important part of keeping your employees motivated. Helping them know how their work connects to the company's mission can strengthen their sense of purpose in accomplishing projects. It's also beneficial to both team and manager to share and celebrate your successes and completion of significant projects or milestones to the broader business.

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Steps to take

- Use some of your regular team meeting time to discuss the company goals and how the team's work helps support those goals.

- Create your own team goals that nest under company goals and have your direct reports draft their goals to fit with the team's goals. That will help reinforce how individuals' work helps support the company objectives.

- Celebrate the wins! Ensure your direct reports know when they've done a great job and regularly announce their good work and accomplishments. That helps the rest of the company understand how your team's work contributes to the end goal that everyone is working toward, and it helps elevate their profile within the company.

4 Getting overwhelmed by your to-do list

Taking on a management role means your calendar and inbox can get filled with meetings, status updates, and much more information than you ever had access to before. So, it requires discipline and focus to stay on top of your deliverables, your to-do list, and your email.

How to overcome it

Block off time on your calendar to focus on tasks that need your attention. Know that you can push back and say no when necessary.

When invited to a meeting, ask for its PAO — Purpose, Agenda, and Outcome — before agreeing to attend. This offers a clear look into the meeting and how you'll contribute to its productivity.

You should also consider delegating tasks or even meeting attendance to your team if someone on your team has the ability and bandwidth to take something on, as it could be a good career growth opportunity for them.

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Steps to take

- When you engage in focus time on a specific topic, this will minimise distractions and help you to accomplish what you are working on. Turn off instant messages and email notifications so you can power through what needs to get done.

- Create habits to help you manage a new volume of communications and requests. Create automatic email folders for new asks, projects, or workflows.

- Establish a set time every day, whether that's the first and last hour of the day, or at set times throughout the day, to check on and respond to new email messages. The rest of the time, focus on the work at hand.

- Prioritise communications and requests from your team. While you want to put many communications in a queue and respond to them when possible, questions and comments from your direct reports should get your attention as soon as possible. Providing the support and input they need to finish their work keeps your entire team humming along and shows them they are your priority.

5 Feeling like you're in this on your own

There's a lot to navigate as a new manager, both in terms of your mindset and behaviour, as well as guiding your team's performance and meeting business goals. It can feel like a heavy burden, especially if you're now managing your former peers and your relationship with your closest co-workers has changed.

How to overcome it

Remember that you are never alone — plenty of people in your company have been in your position or a similar one, and if not from within your company, I'm sure you have friends who have been in a similar position?

A great way to overcome feelings of isolation is to build a network of supportive people. If your company has an internal mentorship program, sign up for it. Look for potential mentors in anyone with more experience than you and who isn't in your immediate chain of command. And if you can't find these people inside your own company, look for them outside of your company. Who are you connected to on LinkedIn for example, who could be a great mentor to you? Ask them if they would be willing to mentor you, I bet they will be extremely flattered! Don't forget that your own manager is also a helpful resource too. Be honest with them, and let them know what challenges you're facing and ask for their guidance.

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Steps to take

- Set up informal meetings with other new managers to hear what they are challenged by and how they are meeting those challenges. Or, try gathering a small group of new managers together monthly or quarterly. This support system will help you feel like you aren't the only one facing challenges — being a good manager and people leader is not easy! You may even suggest that your company's HR or Training team formalise this process for all managers.

- When you discover a new skill or technique, identify specific situations where you think that approach could be useful with your own team. Try applying the new approach and make some notes for yourself about how it works. Report back to your managers' group and get their feedback and thoughts.

What we can do to help?

Developing successful management skills with the Highly Effective Managers Program (HEMP)

Few of us are born with the skills needed to manage successfully, and Gallup estimates that only 1 in 10 managers possess a natural talent for management! But this statistic shouldn't dissuade people from moving into manager roles. Instead, it highlights the importance of training and development to help newly promoted or established managers, to build the skills needed to manage, motivate and engage their teams to perform.

You can equip yourself or your managers with the skills they need to manage and motivate their teams with our 6 module HEMP, which is run on line from February – July 2025 or September 2025 – March 2026. Learn more at https://www.merakihr.com/hr-resources/workshops/

The Highly Effective Managers Program (HEMP)

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