

Five Common Mistakes That New Leaders Make

**By
Kim Freedman**



“One of the secrets of life is to make stepping stones out of stumbling blocks.”
~Jack Penn

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You have just been promoted to a leadership position. Congratulations! But, as the excitement begins to wane a few months into the job, you realize you might have made an error in judgment by accepting the promotion. You are regularly facing new challenges and situations you did not previously imagine. It seems that the skills and knowledge that made you a great individual performer are not enough to make you a successful leader.

This scenario is all too common. In fact, I had these very same thoughts and concerns when I first became a manager many years ago. During the ensuing years, I have seen other new—and not so new—managers make some of the same blunders that I made, as well as a few that I somehow avoided. While every situation is unique, I have identified five of the more common mistakes that new leaders make. Maybe you will recognize some of these.

1. Hoping That Performance Problems Will Magically Disappear

New managers often take the position of 'wait and see' when faced with a personnel issue – probably in an attempt to avoid conflict. For example, a couple of customers have complained about the level of service they received from one of your team members. You decide to wait and see if anyone else complains before bringing the complaints to the team member's attention. Your hope is that the problem will resolve itself in time. That is false hope because 99 times out of 100 the problem just gets bigger. Your staff expects you to effectively and rapidly deal with team members who are underperforming. Step up and do what needs to be done.

2. Punishing the Many for the Sins of the Few

This behavior is a first cousin of the previous mistake. Instead of dealing with an issue head on, the new manager often tries a less direct approach. Imagine that you have a team member who spends most of the day surfing the internet instead of working. You know that you need to address the issue, so you call a special team meeting and remind everyone on the team that they should limit personal phone calls and internet use to their breaks and lunch hour. After the meeting, the one team member with the problem goes back to surfing and the rest of your team will not make eye contact with you. What went wrong? Quite likely, all of the team members know the rules and all except one are complying. The one offender has decided the rule does not apply to him. The rest of the team members do not appreciate being chastised for offenses they did not commit. Next time, talk with the offending team member directly, one-on-one.

3. Confusing Sameness with Fairness

In an effort to not play favorites (a good thing), many new managers treat all their people in the exact same way. When it comes to people, one size does not fit all. Everyone is special and wants to be acknowledged as such. Get to know your people and treat them the way they want to be treated. If you treat each person on your team as a valued individual with unique needs, values, and goals, you will be treating everyone fairly.

4. Doing the Work of the Team

New leaders are often more comfortable completing the tasks that their team should be doing than they are in taking the lead role. Or, they think it is just faster and easier to complete some tasks themselves instead of taking the time to train someone else. Don't fool yourself into not delegating by thinking you are helping the team by taking on some of the workload. By refusing to delegate effectively, you are robbing your team of the opportunity to learn, grow, and develop. Remember that a manager's job is to accomplish results through the work of the team. So, point your team members in the right direction and support them through coaching and training.

5. Making Promises Casually

There is no faster way to lose someone's trust than to fail to deliver on a commitment or promise. In making a promise to a team member, a client, or anyone else, managers may not be thinking about all the possible things that could get in the way of them keeping that promise. Imagine that you promise a team member a bonus upon the successful completion of a critical project. Do you have absolute authority to deliver on that promise? If not, make a different commitment; promise only what you are 100 percent certain that you *alone* can deliver.

Have you made any of these mistakes? It is often said that experience is the best teacher; yet, there is value in knowing where some of the pitfalls are when starting down a new path. If you are a new team leader or manager, find an experienced mentor or a leadership coach to help you avoid common mistakes and to accelerate your learning. If you are an experienced manager, use this list as a tool in the development of the new leaders reporting to you.

Kim Freedman, President of [Catalyst Leadership Coaching, LLC](#), uses customized training programs and one-on-one coaching to help businesses develop effective leaders and productive teams. She also offers personal coaching to professionals who want to achieve their goals and have more time, energy, and money in the process.

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