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BASIC SKILLS OF GOOD MANAGEMENT

WHEN
MANAGEMENT
IS YOUR
PROFESSION

A person in a dark suit stands with their back to the camera, positioned in the center of a large, complex maze. The maze is constructed from light-colored, curved concrete walls that form a series of concentric, winding paths. The person is standing on a small, circular platform in the middle of the maze. The background shows the maze extending into the distance under a soft, hazy sky. The overall color palette is dominated by warm, muted tones of pink, purple, and beige.

THEMA.

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Introduction

Managers today have to meet some very high expectations. They need to have expert knowledge in a wide range of fields, should be able to act decisively and must also be able to respond to all kinds of questions...

- How can you achieve the results you want in your department?
- How can you encourage commitment and dedication from your employees?
- How can you increase the autonomy, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit of those employees?
- How can you influence relationships and ensure that your team works well together, and does so with other departments in your organisation?
- How can you increase your employees' flexibility and availability?
- How can you ensure your own good health as well as that of your employees?
- How can you make sure that your own work continues to be fun and meaningful?
- What can you expect in the way of support and transparency from your organisation?

We'll cover all of these in this book. Management is complex and multi-faceted. As a manager, you're responsible for supporting both your organisation and your employees so that they are able to function effectively and efficiently. Then you have to steer the

process of continuous improvement and innovation, which applies to work processes and to people. You are also faced with the challenge of continuously learning new things and of motivating your staff to continue learning as well. As a learning manager, you develop expertise, steer and support companies and people in a healthy way, and help your employees to become as independent as is possible in their jobs.

Ideally, you keep close tabs on your own development and act as an example for your employees. You also monitor external developments closely. You ensure that you, your staff and your organisation are well prepared for the changes that may come at any moment – but you are also aware that you can only influence these changes to a limited degree. It is why you adapt the products and services of your organisation according to your own strengths.

This book regularly focuses on you as a person. In the first chapters we look at the objectives that you apply in the way you operate and think, and we'll give you a number of tools to shape your own personal development. In the concluding chapter we encourage you to think deeply once more about what has lasting value for you personally, and we provide you with a wide selection of tips and recommendations for acting on those things. All the other chapters offer a full range of possibilities for enhancing your expertise.

What else will you find here?

Our book contains a large number of guidelines to help you to deal effectively with the many different situations you face in the real world, complex as it is. It's a guide for taking effective action. We'll provide you with models, tips and recommendations, and we'll warn you of the many pitfalls that await. Occasionally you'll find frames of reference with a theoretical background; this is important information that we want to make sure you have at your fingertips. Throughout you'll find case histories of manag-

ers in different organisations that will provide you with practical examples in situations you'll undoubtedly recognise – examples that we've come across at regular intervals in our consulting and training practice.

In Chapter 1 we present a number of basic hints for promoting effective behaviour in managers. You can test how you would handle matters in daily practice, and there's detailed coverage of these points later in the book. Chapter 2 focuses on learning and selfdevelopment. We believe that learning, and the capacity to learn, should be a focus of attention for every manager. The third chapter highlights your own management role and we cover how you can make a successful contribution within your particular organisation. In Chapter 4 you'll find a look at results-oriented management, showing you just how results-oriented you are in your day-to-day practice. Chapter 5 covers the basic skills required for communicating effectively. Here are such topics as getting a message across, collecting information and providing feedback. Chapter 6 concentrates on the core of what it means to manage – namely giving your staff the support they need in order to operate as autonomously as possible. How can you have a positive influence on your employees? In Chapter 7 we go into detail about how you can let go of the reins without also losing control – it's about delegating, in other words. Chapter 8 focuses on managing teams. This includes co-operating within a team and between different teams, as well as synchronisation between the 'higher' and 'lower' levels of an organisation.

Managers – and that means you – are the focus throughout the entire book, but in the last two chapters, Chapters 9 and 10, we focus more specifically on your individual way of working. Chapter 9 looks at how you can look after yourself and your employees simultaneously, and in the final chapter we look at how you use your valuable and limited amount of time.

This book is brimming over with tips and recommendations that will help you in your everyday practice. Keep it to hand at all times. Whenever you're confronted with a problem and think 'Now, how did it go again? What do I have to watch out for?' we hope you will reach for this book and find that it helps you assess and control the situation. It should also help you maintain a realistic work/life balance.

Our aim in writing this is to help with your development. Our book can only help you as a manager if you review both your strong and weak points occasionally and give some thought to such questions as:

- What do I do well as a manager? And what do I do less well?
- What is really needed in my organisation? And does this match the things that I'm actually good at?
- What do I want in this situation or in my department – now and in the near future?
- In what way, either by myself or via other people, can I ensure that things will really improve?

EFFECTIVE MANAGERS:

- ☐ are able to look after themselves
 - ☐ have self-confidence and self-respect
 - ☐ know what they want to achieve within their organization
 - ☐ focus on things that matter and show initiative
 - ☐ dare to take risks and are also able to handle setbacks
 - ☐ are decisive and solve problems
 - ☐ communicate clearly and directly with their employees
 - ☐ enjoy their successes, and learn from failures and disappointments
 - ☐ are capable of putting things in perspective: 'There is always a positive side to things'.
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All of these characteristics have shown themselves to be especially effective, and we'll go into them in detail. We sincerely hope that this book will prove to be useful – both in your work and your private life.

Our basic starting points have been inspired by everyday practice within Schouten & Nelissen and by the questions that have been asked by participants in the training courses and coaching sessions we have organised. The ideas developed by Zenger & Miller / Teaching Systems Netherlands have contributed substantially to Anton's development as a management trainer and consultant at Den Bosch University. Furthermore, these are a mark of the importance that we attach to the desire to achieve results with other people. We would like to thank our colleagues and customers for all their tips and advice.

One note: when we use the term 'organisation' we not only mean the larger organisational unit – such as a company or institution as a whole – but also your own division, sector, department, project team or work group.

About the second edition

We note with pleasure and pride that the first edition of this book has been appreciated by many readers for its readability and practicality. Nonetheless, we've made a number of changes and additions by way of improvement in this second edition.

We'd like to thank the users of the book, and our colleagues, for the comments that they have provided. Without suggestions from Nicole Bremer, Richard de Vries, Tjeu van Heck, Sandra Tulp and Jolet Plomp, this edition would not have been the same.

Anton van den Dungen
Coen Dirkx

1 Where do you start?

Let's look at a number of basic points concerning effective managerial behaviour. The question is always whether you actually achieve the effects in your everyday dealings that you, your employees and your organisation are looking for. These basic points should encourage both you and your staff to take initiatives, as well as being results-oriented and flexible without suffering from excessive stress.

- 1 Express your guiding vision regularly and with conviction
- 2 Self-respect is the basis for functioning well – so assure self-confidence
- 3 You need one another to achieve results
- 4 Take action when things aren't going well
- 5 Make sure that you remain credible

1 Express your guiding vision regularly and with conviction

As a manager, you need a clear vision of your role as a leader. So do you know what you want to achieve in your organisation in the near future? Have you formulated your goals realistically or have you been more utopian? How do you think your staff will react if you are barely able to describe what you want to achieve in the organisation, and if you can only formulate your future plans in very vague terms? How can your employees know what is important

and what is less important, if you yourself cannot make that clear? A clear outlook or vision is absolutely essential if your organisation is to be effective both now and in the future. Ideally, your vision should include a well-thought-out concept about the core of the organisation, and about the role of management within it. You should know what added value is at present, and you should know what it will be in the future. You should also be able to tell your staff quite clearly which added value you want to develop and how you want to go about it. You'll have your own opinion about what can be expected of you as a manager, too. A word of warning is needed here. A vision that is not both measurable and translated into action inevitably leads to disappointment for yourself – and for others.

Your vision should target your own organisational unit as part of a larger whole, identifying the contributions you provide now and the ones you'll be able to provide in the future. It should also target relevant players outside the organisation: your clients or customers. You should express your views so enthusiastically that they inspire others, but this will only succeed if your vision is closely linked to your personal convictions and the things that really interest you. Continue to look at your organisation with curiosity, as this means that you should be receptive and flexible. And, most importantly, you should check regularly whether your employees know and understand your vision, and whether they know exactly what they and their particular department are contributing to it.

You have to stand with both feet firmly on the ground, radiate optimism and confidence, and you have to be open. You should be politically and strategically sensitive and also able to generate this sensitivity within your own organisation. You should be perfectly aware of which relationships within your own organisation effect (or could effect) the different interests which inevitably come into play. In short, your vision should paint a real and attractive picture of the future and meet the following criteria:

<i>Imaginable</i>	sketch a clear picture of the future.
<i>Attractive</i>	make sure that this picture appeals to any interested parties (other employees, customers, upper management).
<i>Achievable</i>	ensure that your vision is practical; translate it into achievable goals.
<i>Targeted</i>	make your vision clear enough to be used as a guideline for making choices or decisions.
<i>Flexible</i>	your vision should leave room for adaptation in the light of changing circumstances.
<i>Communicable</i>	you should be able to express your vision comprehensively in just five minutes.

2 Self-respect is the basis for functioning well – so assure self-confidence

How do you think that employees who have little self-confidence function? Assume that you never do anything to maintain or strengthen their self-confidence, their self-assurance. Assume you continuously react to their performance in a critical way, ignore their qualities or often confront them with something like the fact that they are frequently late or failing to achieve their goals. What would this be like for them? What happens in people who have no confidence in themselves? What is the effect on their working behaviour and performance? Self-respect is the basis for functioning well. This is true for you, and also for your employees.

It's your task to keep people alert. You're the one who inspires. You speak to people about agreements that have been made, both when things are going well and when they're going less well. You do that clearly and in a way which explains the consequences of any action, and you can be tough if you need to be. But you are also fair and – above all – have a real respect for other people, something that comes from your heart. Besides that vital quality, it is essential to know what your employees are currently doing. You must give people tasks and assignments that they are equal

to, but also ones which they can use to develop themselves further. You need to support your employees' self-development, and you should do that explicitly.

FOUR SOURCES OF SELF-RESPECT

So self-respect is the basis for functioning well, for managers as well as employees. A lack of self-respect leads to conformism, stagnation, marginal creativity, suspicion, not listening, despondency and trying to be in everyone's good books. It also leads to running away from confrontation, not showing much courage, displaying avoidance behaviour and having a insensitivity to criticism.

All of these mean that someone with a lack of self-respect sets few goals, or has unrealistic ones. People like this have difficulties in getting down to work and consequently achieve very little. A lack of self-respect inevitably leads to a decrease in self-confidence, and also decreases people's personal entrepreneurship.

The four sources of self-respect on which you have an influence are:

- 1 *Performance and competence*
You have a clear picture of the results that you have achieved and of your competence in reaching the desired result. You know what you're capable of.
- 2 *Personal authority and personal influence*
You have demonstrable and increasing authority and influence on others, and on situations that are important for you. You're able to organise things and people listen to you.
- 3 *Faithfulness to your own standards and convictions.*
Your behaviour conforms to your personal convictions, standards and values.
- 4 *Fondness for and appreciation of others.*
You're appreciated for yourself, not just for what you own or what you have achieved. This appreciation is given to you by people who are important to you, people whose judgement and opinions are significant.

You can contribute to your own self-respect and that of others, by taking the following actions:

- Formulate clear and realistic goals, so that you know precisely when you're performing well.
 - Do this with (and for) your employees as well.
 - Select the precise moments and situations on which you wish to exercise influence.
 - Give your employees the necessary attention, and give them the room to develop their own influence.
 - Know exactly what you find important and act on that basis.
 - Regularly give your employees compliments and show your appreciation for them.
 - Give your employees the opportunity to shine.
-

3 You need one another to achieve results

Working within an organisation means that people will work together for a longer period of time. To a greater or lesser extent, you are dependent on each other's contributions. How can such co-operation work, if it's primarily characterised by suspicion, fear and a lack of consultation? Take a moment to think about what influence your relationship with your direct superior has on your motivation and performance. For whom will you work the hardest – someone you are afraid of or someone you really like? And in which situation would you survive the longest? Now – how do you think this works for your employees?

A constructive working relationship, based on co-operation, doesn't mean you glossing over conflicts or avoiding costly cuts. It does mean that you will continue to be direct and communicate in an open way – about differences, too – based on the understanding that you need one another to achieve results. It means that you won't get personal but you should also hold other people accountable for the way they behave, and the effects of their behaviour. It means that you won't spend all your time looking at what went

less well and why, but that you'll direct your attention to future possibilities instead: 'How will we prevent this happening in the future?', 'How are we going to handle this?', 'What can we learn from this?'

4 Take action when things aren't going well

If you fail to intervene when things aren't going smoothly, perhaps because you dare not or do not know how to intervene effectively, then you can expect the following negative effects:

- Things will continue to go badly. Nothing changes for the better by itself.
- Your employees may start to doubt you, wondering whether or not you saw the problem in the first place and why you haven't done something about it.
- The results of your business unit or department will continue to remain below expectations – and this will not escape the notice of your superior.
- Your employees will take no initiatives to discuss problems, and they won't propose solutions. If you don't do it, then they think they don't have to do it either.

For all these reasons you must take appropriate measures when things aren't going well. Make sure that problems can be discussed and provide suggestions for or implement improvements. Remain realistic, and remember that not everything can be done at the same time; absolute perfection does not exist. Set your priorities.

5 Make sure that you remain credible

All managers fulfil a hierarchical role from which their power is derived, and this includes the power of influencing events and people, making them conform to your wishes. Sometimes this is necessary when decisions have to be taken and implemented, especially when you must provide direction in a crisis.

But those people who fulfil their management role primarily by exploiting their hierarchical power will experience difficulties in winning people over to their view. The development of trust, credibility and authority is of much greater importance.

What do you think will be the effect of, for instance, hesitant or disrespectful behaviour? What happens if a manager demands certain behaviour from staff which he or she seldom displays? A good leader always leads by example. That is, and will remain, quite difficult of course, because the impact of a single instance in which you've failed to give a good example is so enormous. In addition, it's almost impossible to be a shining example all of the time. If you do find yourself needing to behave in a way contrary to what you yourself find important, then you should make the background to your action clear. Say something about it to your employees: 'I'm also finding it difficult to...', 'In contrast to what I usually say...'.

Nevertheless, practice what you preach. It helps if you use language that describes reality, because it might have a negative effect on your credibility if you do not act in accordance with your convictions: 'Yes, she's good at talking, but when it comes to herself...'. In this situation your employees respond to your wishes on the basis of fear, opportunism and relative power, instead of respect, credibility and authority. And that's not very good if you want to get the best out of your staff.

HOW DO YOU GAIN AUTHORITY?

Build up credibility:

- ☐ Invest in a direct and open relationship with your employees. That takes time.
- ☐ Remain accessible and available for your employees.
- ☐ Pay serious attention to the errors your employees make and discuss these openly with them.