

Your First 30 Days as a Manager

Strategies for Success

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Your big day has arrived. Whether this is your first time supervising or simply a transition into a new leadership role, your first thirty days will set the tone for your performance. Not only is this a chance for you to get your bearings and learn about your new responsibilities, but this will be a time of first impressions. How will your employees see you? Do you come across as someone they can trust? Are you a top performer or just punching the time clock? What will your boss think of you? The first 30 days is all about answering these questions in an intentional way.

This article will outline success strategies for your first 30 days as a manager.

Before you start, do your homework.

- Ask for copies of your job description and those of the people in your team and review them.
- Request the phone number of the person who used to hold this position so you can interview them about the strengths and weaknesses of your team.
- Read up on the organization you'll be working for. What does the press say about them? Who are their competitors? What are their values?
- Plan to keep a personal journal of your experiences for at least the first month on the job. You will be a fresh set of eyes to your organization, and as such your impressions are valuable. Decide how you'll keep your notes (pen and paper, online, etc) and set up the document or purchase the notebook. Plan to journal at least a few paragraphs every day.

In your first 72 hours, make powerful first impressions.

- Schedule a meeting with your boss, and ask about his/her expectations of you and your team. Ask "what two or three things could I do this year that would make the biggest difference for our organization?"
- Walk your department and begin making casual and friendly introductions to your staff. Tell each person that you are interested in their perspective on how things are going in the department, and that you'd like to meet with them individually within the next 2 weeks. Be interested in them as individuals.
- Make key contacts with the person who handles employee relations (usually in HR), a couple peer managers in aligned departments, and the administrative assistant(s) who support your executives. Tell them that as a new person you are interested in their perspective on what is working

well and what could be improved. Ask them how your department could better serve the organization.

- Find out from your peers which meetings you should be at (even if they are not required of you) and get them on your calendar. Ask them to introduce you to others, and make an effort to create a personal contact with new people every day. Begin memorizing the names of people on your team.

In your first week, get the lay of the land.

- Spend time observing your department operations, asking questions, and learning how things currently work.
- Continue to informally survey staff about the effectiveness of your department. Keep a running list of what is working well and what needs are currently being ignored.
- Spend some time with your Employee Relations person reviewing the files of your team, and assessing which employees have critical development needs or disciplinary issues you may need to attend to.
- Begin your one-on-one meetings with staff. Ask each person “What is working well here?” “What is not working well here?” and spend 90% of the time listening rather than speaking. Ask each person about their career goals and keep notes.
- Keep a list of things that baffle you about the organization and what you are curious about. Resolve to get those questions answered.

In your second week, begin making assessments.

- Complete your one-on-one meetings with staff. What appear to be the strengths of the department? What themes emerged in employee opinions? Which employees seem to be top performers, and which ones need some help? What processes need further examination? Does the way your employees describe the department seem to match the perceptions of your peers or boss?
- Begin crafting a list of priorities for your first six months given what you’ve learned. Schedule a regular meeting time with your boss and at the first meeting run your impressions and priorities list past him/her for feedback
- Begin designing your first all-team meeting. This meeting should include the following:
 - A “thank you” for sharing their ideas with you.
 - A synopsis of some of the themes you heard – and some of the directions you plan to take as a result of what you heard.
 - Some clarification of the expectations in the department as appropriate. (for example, if during your one-on-ones there were complaints about inconsistency in the attendance policy, clarify the expectations for attendance in the meeting).

- If there is any lack of clarity on job expectations, create a plan for communicating those expectations to your team.

By your third week, begin delivering value.

- Remember all of those opinions you gathered your first few weeks? Once you've prioritized the issues begin acting on them.
- Consider bringing one major "problem" to your boss with an action plan. Choose something with a high "pain factor" for the organization that you know you can resolve.
- Begin (If you have not already) providing performance feedback to your employees. Make a point of providing positive feedback to at least three people per week and notice what is working well. Remember that good feedback is timely, specific, personal, and honest.
- If you've identified a few "high potential" employees on your team, find special projects to give them that address some of the areas for improvement you've identified. Ask them to collaborate with you on defining those special projects.
- Devote most of your time to handling nuts-and-bolts work in your department. Continue to build your knowledge of your new team.
- Ensure that the link between your team's work and the organization's success is understood. Develop a clear understanding of how your team contributes to the mission/finances/results of your organization. Make sure your team understands it as well.

By the end of 30 days, assess your progress and look forward.

- Ask your team, your peers, and (more formally) your boss "How am I doing?" at the end of your first month.
- Look back at your first month and make a list of your team's accomplishments large and small, who can you share them with?
- Revisit your impressions in your journal. What have you noticed that needs attention? What are you doing about it?
- Set a regular schedule for your team meetings, and begin to set up communications structures with your team so they can keep you apprised of what is going on in a way that suits your needs. "Now that I have a better idea of how procurement is done, just check in with me on Fridays to give me an update" for example.
- Set annual performance goals for yourself (if not done yet) and for your team. Do this even if your organization doesn't formalize this process.
- Set tactical plans for the next 90 days that match your performance goals. Keep linking your individual and team goals back to the organization's direction and strategic plan.
- Celebrate! Your first 30 days have been a success!