

**THE LITTLE BOOK
FOR THE NEW MANAGER**

Lior Frenkel



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THE LITTLE BOOK FOR THE NEW MANAGER

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To Noor and Nina – may all your managers see you for yourself

APOLOGIES

My apologies to the employee I didn't give proper feedback to. He was surprised when he was suddenly fired. My apologies to the employee I didn't patiently listen to. I kept jumping up with advice for solutions and missed what she wanted to say. My apologies to the manager I was overseeing; I didn't prepare him for the change that was about to come, then I got angry when he took time to adjust. My apologies to the manager who experienced imposter syndrome, froze up and couldn't function. I interpreted it as laziness instead of asking her how she was doing. My apologies to all the employees I didn't treat with the respect they deserved. My apologies to those I had no patience for—I made the mistake of thinking that my job was “making things happen.” My apologies to those I wasn't transparent with when I could have been, then expected them to accept bad news with understanding.

This book is dedicated to them. It was written out of the mistakes I've made as a manager, and the lessons that helped me understand what I could've done better.

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PART 1

ANYONE CAN LEARN MANAGEMENT

“Because I hate managing!”

His stunned face was followed by an awkward silence. He wasn't expecting me to respond to such a generous offer this way.

I stirred my espresso. Trying to look busy, to look away. I knew I was letting him down. He'd taken me for someone else.

We were sitting at a trending café in Soho. I prayed for the waiter to come along and break the silence. My foot anxiously bounced under the table.

“What do you say about managing our local office? You'd be a Regional General Manager. Sounds good, doesn't it?” he'd tossed into the air two minutes prior. The look on his face said, *Here's an offer you can't refuse*. I refused.

Apparently, I got it completely wrong, I didn't get what it means to be a manager. I'd had an old-world stigma on management. I'd thought it was like you would see in the army: there's a commander saying what needs to be done, everyone salutes and carries out their tasks, and that's that. Whoever does a good job moves up the ladder; whoever doesn't feel like it, stays behind. Management had struck me as an old-fashioned thing: bureaucracy, politicking, reporting to managers who reported to

their own managers. It seemed to me like something that slows down work, collaboration, entrepreneurial work. I tried to explain, without offending him. He'd been managing for many years, himself.

"I think you're wrong," he said. "You've managed a lot of people, directly or indirectly. Maybe you didn't call it managing. Look where the people who've worked with you are today: Google, Facebook, Microsoft. I spoke to some of them before coming to you. Call it whatever you want to, but you've been a *de facto* manager for many years. Look at the communities you've built, the start-ups you've raised funds and built teams for, the people you've led in companies you've worked at."

"But I hate that title, *Manager*," I answered. "Telling people what to do, getting angry at them if they don't do exactly what I asked of them. I don't want to be *the boss*."

"There's no one way to manage," he smiled, "and the style you're describing is in fact starting to fade away. It doesn't fit our generation. Nowadays, workers want fulfillment, they want to understand why they do what they do. Not to be worker ants who serve the queen ant. Manage the way you believe in. Make what

has worked for you so far into organized methods and call it whatever you want.”

Since that conversation, I've understood that I understood nothing. I've found out that the worlds of management and leadership have long ago caught up. The stigma was in my own head—the world itself has moved on. Management isn't just about 'how to productively complete tasks,' or 'how to recruit and fire employees'. It hasn't been about that for years. These days, management is another name for people's development. It's about psychology, and behavioral economics. It's about leadership. About leading, even without the power and control managers had in the past. And it necessitates the development of skills that managers of previous generations didn't require.

Eventually, I confessed to him and to myself that he was right. I love managing. I love learning how to manage. Even teaching others.

I've learned that compelling good people, prompting them to do great work, to stick with you through the hard times, and to go through journeys of change – that's one of the most challenging tasks a person can take upon themselves. And the most fulfilling one.

MANAGING IS STRESSFUL 🤯

From the moment you're promoted to manager, it takes just a few days until your first panic attack. Just ask Irene.

Irene is intelligent, professional, and fantastic in her field. She'd worked for excellent companies before she and I met. She's a person for whom things work out, not because she is lucky but because she's diligent and reliable. Irene doesn't let any tasks slip through the cracks. She is any manager's dream. A “talent,” as we call it.

I offered that she manages a team with us. She hadn't been a manager before, but her potential was clear. Self-aware, with tons of professional experience and loads of ambition, who would be happy to advance her career. She said “Yes!” and didn't hide her smile.

She got vertigo once she started the job. She went into serious shock, almost to the point of freezing up. This was the fourth workplace she had worked at. Previously, she blended in at no time, but now, at the age of 34, as a first-time manager, she had to deal with new challenges.

On Sunday, Irene showed up to the weekly management meeting. They were just presenting their plans for the coming quarter. Everyone took an active part in the conversation—but her. She felt like an idiot. “Why don't I have anything smart to say? Where is my critical thinking?”

On Monday, the CEO called her in for onboarding. After telling her about the company's vision, they went over his expectations from her. She felt that they were on the same wavelength, it felt good. He spoke at eye level, and the meeting went better than she'd expected it to.

Just before she stepped out the door, the CEO called her to stop. “One tiny last thing?” he smiled at her. “I know this is kind of dumping this on you, don't stress yourself, but we're going to have to slash your team's expense budget by 30%. It's already been cleared with Ron.” The smile disappeared from her face. He went on: “So I'd love it if, at some point – no pressure – you could prepare a plan for how we're going to do that. Say, by the end of the week? I have to have it for the investor meeting.” Irene went out of the room terrified. She didn't know what the team's expense budget was or where to find it, certainly not how to slash

it. Okay, it's Monday, she's got until Thursday, she'll manage. It'll be okay.

On Tuesday she found out that Amelia, an employee recruited just two months before, decided to quit. “This is the employee that's going to boost your team,” Ron had promised Irene when he recruited her as a manager. Amelia decided that she doesn't fit the culture. “People here are too nice for me,” she explained by the coffee machine. The milk almost slipped out of Irene's hand. She was counting on her. There'd been two other resignations in the team recently, she was hoping Amelia would help her right the ship. *What was going on?*

She hasn't even understood what's what, and now she's going to have to start recruiting? How is she supposed to know how to do that? She's never recruited an employee before. Sure, she's sat through many job interviews, but being on the other side of the table is a whole different story. Who's supposed to help her? How does one get through this process? She's never written a job description before. Ron had told her that they signed her up to a manager development program—there she would learn everything she didn't know. But that only took place once a month

and was supposed to go on for a whole year. Can we please fast-track it?

On Wednesday, she woke up in an optimistic mood. "I've done many things for the first time in my life," she told herself in front of the mirror. "I'm hard-working, I'm good, I got this."

And, indeed, she got a win by that afternoon. The latest version of the app was in the air. Her team was in charge of that. True, she's only been here for four days, and her team has been working on it for months. So what? She gets some of the credit, doesn't she? Now that she's a manager, she'll experience that all the time. She's got a whole team making things happen. How fun!

The fun hardly lasted for two hours.

Her team forgot to let Customer Support know that a new version had been released. Now there was something in the air that they didn't know how to provide support for when customers called. And they did. About a third of the customers couldn't log into the app following the update.

It was 10:30 PM. Irene was looking at her computer in her apartment, trying to write an apology email. She had to take responsibility; she knew that. It's called *ownership*, and it was one

of the company's values. She also read about it in that book that explained how Bill Gates became a millionaire.

But she had no idea how this mess started. Why did the buggy update go live? Why were the departments out of sync? Who was she supposed to send the apology to? Should upper management be cc'd? Perhaps the customers themselves deserved an apology email, too? Or was that Customer Service's responsibility?

“At this time, two weeks ago, I was already binging on Netflix. Ugh.”

She finished just a bit after midnight. The emails were sent, and she wrote out clear tasks for the following morning, including an urgent meeting with Ron. She had to ask for help.

On Thursday morning Irene remembered that the CEO wanted something for today. A plan to slash the expense budget. *Damn*. She hadn't even started on that yet. On her way to her desk, she came across Daniel, the youngest employee on her team. He was leaning against the door with a sour expression. “Do you have a couple of minutes for me?” he asked. “Of course,” she said, and got a conference room for the two of them.

Sitting down in front of him, she hoped he wouldn't notice how tired she was. *He's going to drop a bombshell on me*, she thought. She'd put a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon in the fridge that morning, singing "TGIF" to herself. She couldn't wait for the weekend.

Daniel nervously started: "I don't know what to do with this project anymore." The previous manager, the one Irene replaced, had assigned Daniel a project: to build a new landing page for the app. Daniel jumped at it. He put his all into it. First, he went to look at what the competition was doing. He read something like 12 online guides and summarized all of the tips in a neat document. He then planned what the optimal landing page would look like. He gathered customer recommendations from the Marketing team, prepared preliminary texts, and even put thought into what the site's copy would say. He consulted friends who worked at start-ups and was proud of what he'd come up with.

But then, while Daniel was deep into planning, Leo, the VP of Marketing, came along for a surprise visit. He'd heard that Daniel was working on a new landing page. "Come on, show us what you've got so far," he said. Daniel proudly showed him, and Leo

asked that he send him the link so he could further review it. Then, without telling Daniel, he showed the landing page to Ben, the CEO. A few minutes later, the CEO called him into his office to look at it together. He wasn't ready for that.

“Ben thought it sucked. Like, he didn't say it in so many words, but I could see that he didn't like it. They kept coming up with new ideas on their own, brought up the designer's name twice, and spent half the time talking as if I wasn't even in the room.

“I've been working on this until late hours of the night for two weeks now. What, if it's not good enough for Leo or Ben then we don't use it? Should I just throw it in the trash? With all due respect, just because they're managers, it doesn't mean they know any better. Why did they ask me to do it if they know better?”

Daniel was bummed out. He was sure that his landing page was excellent. He had his head between his hands, and Irene was sure that he was about to start crying.

She had more than ten years of experience. This wasn't the first time she'd seen a junior employee so upset. Someone who was sure his work was about to be thrown in the trash. Nor was this the first time she'd seen someone getting mixed messages from

his managers. Moreover, she herself had experienced that dozens of times.

“Daniel, don't give up. We're in this together, okay? Do you know how many times I've thrown out something I worked on for two months? Even six months?! It's part of the job, Daniel. Leo and the CEO have many years of experience, so we also shouldn't disparage their intuition. True, they'll sometimes make mistakes. And sometimes they'll think that because they're more senior in the company then they know better. And that's not always the case.

“Come on, we'll go to Leo's office together and try to figure out what his expectations are. We'll see what didn't work for him and what he wants us to do next. We'll understand how the project can be defined more precisely so you know exactly what to do from here.

“Plus, you need to consider that just because you put so much effort into this doesn't mean you are necessarily right. There are ten different ways to build the same landing page. You yourself said you read twelve different posts—I'm sure you got some contradictory advice in there. Sometimes, even if we put a lot of work into something, that doesn't mean it's the best we could

have done. You're going to have to keep an open mind and be receptive to feedback in order to grow. You know what I'm saying? And I'll tell you another thing...

"I'm going to teach you how to better work with managers. The first lesson is, next time, you can't work on something for two months in a silo. Don't wait so long before showing your progress. You should show your progress, say, every two weeks to receive feedback. That'll save you going in the wrong direction. In any case, don't worry, I'm with you on this. What do you say?"


Daniel raised his head and continued talking. Irene listened. She continued to soften him, learning more about the person he was and about her team on the way. She was empathetic, and she told stories from her own personal experience to make him feel like this was a fairly standard incident. She was supportive. She convinced him that they would work on it together. But he shouldn't worry, as he was the only one who would get the credit. She didn't stop until she saw Daniel smile. He even laughed at her bad joke: "We're going to crash-land this landing page! They'll see what's what!"

They stepped out of the conference room together and scheduled to sit down and further discuss it. Irene quickly moved toward the

bathroom, not wanting people to see her smile. Looking at herself in the mirror, she knew she'd managed to help her employee. Within thirty minutes she managed to teach him what she had already learned long ago. Made him feel better. Turned him into someone more professional. She knew that today Daniel would be going home with 1% more experience and understanding than at the start of the day.

She was excited about having succeeded in forming a relationship with someone on the team. Simultaneously, without intending to, she proved to him that she knew what she was doing. She knew that his day was going to be better thanks to her. It will help him regain his drive. She felt pride and satisfaction.

She stepped out of the bathroom, and almost got to her chair, when the Head of Sales called out to her. "Irene! So, how's the first week? Being treated nicely? I heard you're a champ! Great to have you with us," she smiled back. He then continued: "By the way, did they fill you in on the management team-building exercise on Monday? You should come with a proper vision presentation. Let me know if you need any help?"

There goes the weekend. 

BECOMING A MANAGER, AND FAST

Like Irene, you probably weren't born a manager, either.

Someone decided to trust you. Decided that you deserved a promotion. Be proud of yourself – that reflects well on you.

You were probably excellent at what you did before. But now you won't be doing that work yourself – most of the time. Instead, you'll be watching other people doing it, at a quality or style that you won't necessarily like.

You're probably excellent at communicating. Only now you'll also need to learn to communicate with people on whom your job also depends. You'll be surprised to learn this, but they will want to manage you too. They typically won't be happy to hear your feedback, they won't like some of the tasks you assign them, and they'll be upset that you reassigned tasks to their colleagues that they would like to do.

You're probably also diligent and responsible. Except now your responsibility is on a greater scale. You'll be responsible for tasks you won't be doing yourself, and for workers who, how shall we put it, don't always really work, or work on the wrong things.

You might be good at dealing with pressure and workload. Only now the pressure placed on you is going to be. You're going to deal with crises and conflicts on a daily basis.

And in all of that, you're also a person. People who also want to have a life outside of work.

So, it's a good thing we met. This book can help with all these challenges. It'll help you understand what all managers initially go through.

The good news is your fears aren't so special. They're the same fears of everyone who's been a manager for the first (or the second, or third) time. You'll gain a better understanding of what is expected of you. What is more important to work on, and what not so much. You'll learn to fear failure less, and trust your employees, motivate them, and handle a never-ending list of tasks.

This book will help you understand which fields you should further explore, and which ones are already your strong suits. You'll learn which skills are most important for managers in this new world (according to Harvard Business School) and which should turn you into excellent managers (based on a decade-long study conducted by Google).

You'll learn how to help employees on the verge of breakdown, how to give effective feedback, when and why you should be more humane and vulnerable, and how to make your employees grow professionally and personally – making them stay loyal and committed.

Many managers out there inherited their managerial habits from their predecessors, who inherited those from their own predecessors, who learned how to manage in the style of the Industrial Revolution: the factory manager abusing his workers on the assembly line to get them to do their tasks, and quickly.

This management style doesn't work anymore. Excellent employees, and even mediocre ones, don't want to work in organizations with such managers. If your motivation to manage stems from a desire for control and power, you won't come very far, and this book won't be of much help, either. Your employees won't be the most skilled or diligent ones that you could find – the people who'll gravitate toward you will be those who lack ambition or an alternative.

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LEADING A GENERATION THAT DOES NOT BELIEVE IN AUTHORITY

The ivory towers of the world are gradually crumbling. Our world is one where YouTube and TikTok influencers can get more exposure than they would've gotten on the national news. Podcasters get more listens than they would've gotten on the radio. Yuval Noah Harari writes one history book that's read more times than all the academic history research written in the last fifty years combined. We live in a world where one tweet by Elon Musk gets more exposure than a U.S. President's address to the nation. This is a world where kids who didn't graduate high school can build planes and plan algorithms, sometimes better than people who studied computer science for four years.

Authority isn't as powerful as it used to be. The old loci of power have weakened, and the new ones are replaced every few years. *These kids have no respect*, those of the old generation might say. They are incorrect. They have respect, just not for 'authority figures.' They have respect for those that interest them, those who create, those who've achieved something they'd like to achieve.

They respect those who work hard to lead them. Those who give to them. Those who help them.

If previously it would've been enough for you to have the title 'manager' for employees to do what you want them to, today you'll need to learn how to lead them. You'll need to make them follow you.

What's the Difference Between Managing and Leading?

Managing is the ability to meet goals. To get results, through your team. Results that can be measured, and are anchored in a schedule. For example, a monthly sales goal, or the number of customers you can support in the next quarter.

Leadership is the ability to lead people (AKA your team) to complete their tasks in an effective way. To lead so they collaborate with one another, so they're happy and don't quit, so they feel a connection to what you're doing together. Naturally, if you know how to lead, it'll be easier for you to manage as well.

Managers have employees. They create circles of power around them. Leaders have followers. They create spheres of influence.

How can you recognize a leader? People who don't work for them want to be around them. There's a concept in organizations called ONA - Organizational Network Analysis, making connectivity and a desire to be close to real leaders actually measurable.

One can, of course, manage without leading. You can make your employees simply complete their tasks. After all, you have the ability to fire people or threaten to do so. On the other hand, you can also lead without managing - instilling in your people inspiration and vision, bonding them together, but not keeping track of the numbers, not adjusting everyone's work according to company goals.

Some people are born leaders. They have vision, and great faith, and they know how to enrapture people, and make them want to come work for them. But, when it comes to keeping track of the company's quantified goals, or executing the quarterly plan they'd set for themselves, they do a terrible job. While other managers are excellent at setting goals. Yet they're very boring, unimaginative, or don't have the energy to invest in making people want to follow them. These managers struggle to retain employees, or to recruit good employees to begin with.

To be an excellent manager, you're also going to have to learn how to lead.

Management Without Leadership Means Focusing on the Short Term

Gale manages a sales team, and she promised management that her team would make 30 sales this month. She'll do anything for her team to meet the goal. Gale has asked all employees to text her how they're doing once an hour. How many sales they've made today. If they've forgotten, she'll ping them. Gale believes that hourly reporting is the way to make sure everyone meets their goals. Perhaps she's right. But Gale's conduct has its implications.

Rick is a senior sales representative on the team. An hour ago, he forgot to report to Gale. She comes to his desk just before the next sales call starts. "Why didn't you send the report? We said every hour, didn't we?" Rick gets annoyed that she won't leave him be. He goes on the call in a bad mood, and botches the sale. Rick messed up - he was supposed to report every hour, true. But did Gale's behavior get Rick closer to his goals? Not sure.

The last call didn't close the deal. Gale understands that the goal is growing farther away and asks Rick to give an extra hour today, if he can. As a manager, she's doing her job properly. Her supervisors think the same. But, from her employees' perspective? Their motivation is hindered. Ever since her request for hourly reports, they've felt like they are treated as children. Why can't they report once a day? Is it worth demotivation? Eventually, some of the sales representatives are going to get sick of it. They'll try to switch teams or start looking for a new job.

What Would a Manager Who's Also a Leader Do?

First of all, she would create a connection between her people and the task at hand. Gale would rack her brains to find a way to make them understand the importance of their work. Maybe they're selling a product that could actually help people? Maybe they could talk to Customer Support, which would tell them how happy the customers who bought the product two months ago are? Or maybe with Marketing, to teach them what works well, so they can incorporate it into the website messages?

Second, a manager who is a leader would make sure that the team is well formed. She'd give them a group goal, rather than just

a personal one, if applicable. She'd make them want to help one another, and cover for one another when one of them is having a rough day. She'd take them out to drinks together, or to an escape room, or karaoke. A collaborative team is what creates "a whole greater than the sum of its parts". A loose knit one is the exact opposite.

Gale's Employee Has a New Idea

Avri came in one morning with a new idea. "Yesterday, I was reading about an app that'll automatically notify you about every call we had," he tells Gale, excited. "That means we won't have to report every individual call to you. You'll get all the information straight to the admin system connected to the app. You can know what's going on, not just once an hour but in real time!"

Does Gale send Avri straight back to his desk, or does she seriously consider the idea? And, if she goes for it, does she give him credit for the idea, or does she steal his thunder? Does she allow Avri to be involved with implementing the new system, even if it means that he'll sell a bit less that month?

A leader-manager makes sure to share the company's needs with the employees, making their ideas better and more precise. Slowly, the team will become one that has an added value for the company. True, maybe there'll be only 26 sales instead of 30 this month. Avri was busy implementing the new system instead of making calls. But the team will no longer have to send hourly reports. They won't feel like they're being micromanaged. Motivation will go up. Maybe there'll be 40 sales next month?

Managers Who Aren't Leaders Struggle at Times of Change

Every company goes through changes. Product lines are replaced, departments are consolidated, ten percent of employees are let go, or work on a certain project is stopped. Managers who aren't leaders struggle to handle such changes. Their team completes tasks without any authentic connection. Each one only has their place in mind, certain that it's a zero-sum game. So, they'll oppose any change, even in cases when it's positive. When the relationship is transactional, there's no faith in the system, and it's hard to implement changes.

It's easier to bring about change in teams that have leader-managers. Employees see the big picture, because they receive

transparent information about what's been going on the whole time. There's a chance that they saw it coming. In a team with a leader, employees understand that the ability to handle change and take active part in it also contributes to their growth, as people and as professionals.

Once that's the case, it's easier to explain the logic behind the change. Even if not everyone loves it, they'll at least understand why it happened and what they'll get out of it. Instead of going through the following weeks angry and frustrated, they'll try to adjust to the new state. They'll want to prove that they can do it – for an organization they believe in, or at least for the leader, whom they respect. For that person who fought for them, even when they didn't have to.

You Should Be a Leader

Employees who view you as a leader will want to learn from you and listen to you, much more than they would from strictly-managers. They'll want to please you, not out of fear or anxiety but out of love and appreciation. That means they'll be happier. They'll stay in the team for longer. They'll be happy to come and work with you, even at difficult times. Even when, once a year,

they have to stay in until the middle of the night. And it means they'll do more than you asked, and at a higher quality than you expected. When they talk about you with people outside the team, they'll make them jealous.

Now that we've understood the *why*, let's figure out the *how*.

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PART 5
DEALING WITH THE
LESS-COMFORTABLE MOMENTS

HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK 👍👎

Noon. A sweet hamburger bun comes out of the oven. The sesame takes on an alluring color. The dough is perfectly soft. It's cut in half, both sides slathered with a sauce that gives it perfect moisture. Fresh lettuce, thinly sliced tomato, and a tiny pickle are all gently placed on the bun.

Now imagine a 250gr hamburger patty. The chef left it on the shelf outside since morning. It was standing in the sun. Now it reeks, and it's full of germs. It's topped with a thin, white layer of yuck.

The chef places the disgusting patty on the grill, and slides it into your perfect bun three minutes later. Sauce covers it on all sides, a side-dish of fries, and it's served.

One bite of the burger, and you spit it out. Yuck.

That's how employees feel when you give them a "feedback sandwich." You may have only heard good things about it, and it does in fact seem sensible. But, if you've ever gotten feedback that way yourself, you know that it doesn't work. Giving someone compliments before and after you berate them won't soften the

blow. In practice, it's an ineffective feedback technique that'll make the other party feel like you're underestimating their intelligence. It leaves them with a bad taste that no fries will ever salvage.

How does one give effective feedback? Feedback that prompts a small improvement in your employees' thinking/process/habits? That's exactly what this chapter is about.

Hard Talks Are a Part of the Job

Let's start from the end: you're going to have hard talks with your employees. Emotional conversations. It's perfectly normal, and certainly not something to be avoided. You're going to tell them things people don't like to hear. Sometimes they'll react emotionally. So what? A person can't get emotional?

We're human beings. No matter how hard you'll try to be sensitive, how much you'll plan the timing, or how much you'll try to only say the right words – that talk will still be hard to have. Nothing to be done about that. It's part of your job. Managers who want their employees to be better aren't scared of tough talks.

Official Feedback Talks Aren't Enough

Your organization has a set feedback timeline. Once a year, or once a quarter, you're required to give each individual employee feedback. Organizations don't trust managers to remember to continuously give feedback throughout the year, and they're right. We don't feel comfortable giving feedback, so we avoid these talks. So, we're forced to have them – they put it in our calendars. After all, employees deserve to know where they stand, whether you're happy with them or not, and what can be adjusted about the way they perform their tasks, or behave with the rest of the team.

Official talks have two drawbacks. One, both parties prepare for the occasion like it's a court hearing. So, authenticity is damaged. Two, you rely on your memory. You struggle to remember what you wanted to tell the employee three months ago, when she lashed out in front of everyone.

Feedback is a Dish Best Served Warm

The most effective feedback is given shortly after the incident you want to respond to. If my employee was behaving egotistically, not

caring about his colleagues, I'd best talk about that with them that same day. The more time passes between the incident and the feedback, the more my and the employee's memories will both falter. Each will make up a story of what "really" happened and start to believe it.

Isn't it better to let things cool off to avoid a blow-up? No. 'Letting things cool off' is our brains' way of saying *I don't have the energy to deal with a hard talk, so I'll put it off until never*. The opportunity to grow or fix the damage will be squandered. Sure, you could wait a few hours to have the conversation in lower tones, but no longer than that. The next morning, at the latest. Younger generations of employees are accustomed to immediate feedback because of social media: instant likes, shares, retweets. They also expect that of you - both when things work out and when they go wrong.

Your Feedback Isn't as Pure as You Think

It's important to be aware that your feedback will almost always be swayed by stereotypes, bias, and other contaminants. It could be, for instance, that you were part of the team before you were promoted to lead it. Two of the members were your best friends,

and another two you didn't like working with. You'll have to make a lot of effort not to carry that weight into your new role as a manager.

Or, for example, perhaps one employee is culturally similar to you – she grew up in a similar socioeconomic environment, perhaps even in the same town as you. Another employee hails from a more privileged place that you personally have some grudge against. It'll be hard to completely filter out the criticism or judgment – in case you have them – for the one that's farther than where you are.

Or, as another example, maybe you have an employee who doesn't relate to your form of leadership. But that doesn't mean their performance is any lesser than another employee who really adores you. And yet it's clear to whom you'll find it easier to give positive feedback and to whom you'll be more inclined to give negative feedback.

So, true, you're not a robot. But, to make sure you can get the most, even out of those you're not head over heels with, and at the same time, give thorough criticism to those you really like – you'll have to check yourself. Just before you give feedback (negative or positive), ask yourself: Would you give the exact same

feedback to someone else on the team? Are you being harder on someone because of an unfair bias? Are you practicing double standards?

It's Better to Give Positive Feedback Than Negative

Our education system revolved around fixing negative behavior. Our teacher or parent would see us doing something wrong; they'd stop, direct our attention to the negative behavior, and/or maybe punish us for what we did. The goal is for us to stop our bad behavior.

This system's evolution includes not only the stick but also the carrot. What this means is that positive behavior would be encouraged, in the form of material reward (a prize, like a lollipop), symbolic reward (a kind word, interest taken), or social reward (a sticker to show everyone I'm an amazing kid).

Research from the past few decades shows that the most effective method is to avoid addressing negative behavior almost completely. By contrast, it's most effective for positive behavior to be accompanied by verbal encouragement (kind words, not material rewards) and explanations why the given behavior is

positive. It makes you do things not just for a reward but because you understand why it's useful, and what value it has for you or for others.

Every time we see a behavior we want to encourage, it's worth giving a kind word. Stopping for a moment and pointing out what has happened, and adding an explanation as to why it's positive. Not only will the employee feel good, but they'll also want to repeat their behavior. Here, too, you should give the feedback as swiftly as possible, without waiting with it until your weekly meeting.

On the other hand, laying into an employee for inappropriate behavior, for instance, or for a task performed less than brilliantly, is not very effective. True, sometimes there's no choice, but you should know that it's far less effective. Negative feedback goes straight to the ego, threatens your sense of identity, makes you get offended, angry, blame others, want to escape. These aren't feelings that cause a change in behavior. The more you manage to give feedback on the things you'd want to encourage, the more you'll influence your employees' future behavior and habits. The more you help employees focus on their strengths instead of

freaking out over their weaknesses, the greater consistent improvement you'll see in them.

And if you're already giving negative feedback? It can't be in a *Tut-tut! You've been a bad child!* style. Your employees aren't children, even if they seem to act like it sometimes. Your conversation should always revolve around *How can you grow from here?* Not looking back in anger, but thinking together about what can be done better next time. This is called feed-forward instead of feedback.

Sometimes you'll feel frustrated with employees when you give them the same feedback over and over again, and nothing changes. In such cases, try talking in "me language". What this means is, use only terms that describe your experience instead of blaming the other side: "It hurt *me* when you did that," instead of "What you did was awful." Or, "I started avoiding you because I felt that you betrayed my trust," instead of "Your betrayal of my trust was not cool." This way you're discussing the result (how you felt, the damage it did to you, etc.) instead of the act itself (you did this, or you said that). A small change in your form of expression, which makes a big change in the other side's ability to listen.

Negative Feedback Has to Be Discreet

Don't give negative feedback to someone in front of other people. Even if they're good friends. Humiliating someone or hurting their status is unforgivable. A personal meeting would be preferable, in the office if possible, or over video if not. Only do it over the phone if there's really no choice. Definitely don't send negative feedback by email, or text message, or Slack. There are ten different ways to interpret any written text, and nine of them aren't what you intended to say. If you've ever fallen out with a friend over text, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

And this feedback has to be discreet. It stays between you, and that's that. You don't share what you said to that employee with other employees. Even if it supports a narrative of yours. Must vent? Tell another manager who has no direct ties to that employee.

Positive feedback, however, can and even should be given publicly. Not only will you reinforce the employee's behavior, you'll also show the team what sort of behavior you value, and create an obligation for them to live up to these high standards.

Feedback Needs to Be Specific and Impersonal

“You’re really slow,” or “You’ve probably already been told that you’re _____” – this isn’t feedback. These are insults that’ll improve nothing and only drive you apart. Feedback doesn’t address personal qualities, nor values. Your personal values may be far from your employee’s, that’s a ‘you’ problem. You need to help them do the work better and grow. Don’t try to educate them, at least not with words. You can try to be a role model. You can criticize them for inappropriate behavior, or an uncalled-for way of speaking, or you can give advice on how to better perform a task, or even on new ways of communicating with colleagues. But not about personal traits.

And feedback should be specific. The only way to get your employee to listen is by discussing a specific incident that took place on a specific day, with specific people. No generalizations, and certainly no prejudice. If you’ve got any, keep it to yourself. Don’t pigeon-hole people. That’ll give them a feeling of *My boss doesn’t like me. He judged me like that on my first day, and I’ll never get a chance to fix that first impression.* That means that they’ll shut off, and you’ll have lost the ability to effect any change or growth in them.

They Have to Believe That It's for Their Own Good

They have to believe that you're engaging in good faith. That you're not giving feedback just to let off steam or to feel powerful, but out of a genuine intent to help them improve. In her book *Radical Candor*, Kim Scott explains that the two conditions for people to be open to your feedback are (1) that they know you genuinely care about them, and (2) that you're offering an executable, constructive solution – not just conveying an amorphous feeling.

Feedback Isn't One-Sided

Show your people that you believe in feedback as a method for improving when it pertains to you as well. Every so often, ask them, "What could I have done more, or less, to make working with me easier?" As soon as they know that they can also give you feedback, and that you'll take it to heart, they'll find it easier to receive constructive comments as well.

And, if you called them in for feedback, try to present it not as a one-sided lecture but as a conversation. Show them that you're listening, too, not just getting what you wanted out there. Try to understand whether the recipient has anything to say that might help you grow as well.

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