

# Do You Have a Manager's Mindset?

by Katy Tynan

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Julie Long, a senior developer at a software company, was identified by her manager as a high performer. When she was asked to coordinate a team of three junior developers on a project, Julie was excited about the opportunity to finally move into a management role. However she quickly became frustrated. Things that were simple and easy for her were not getting done in a timely way by her team. After just a few weeks in her new role, as she reviewed the code her team members had

written, she found herself seriously considering scrapping their contributions and writing it all herself. She knew that if she worked a few extra hours, she could likely match the output of all three of her direct reports.

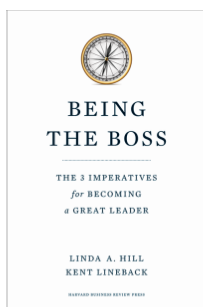
This scenario is all too common when an individual is asked to make the leap from expert to manager. It's especially common when someone is asked to lead a team of their recent peers. But jumping into the weeds and trying to do everything, even if it works initially, is not a sustainable strategy. Ultimately a manager needs to focus on becoming a successful teacher and mentor in order to help their people develop and grow, and to increase the overall capacity of the team.

But this requires a dramatic change in mindset, and it's this process that is so difficult for many of the recently promoted. Because coaching and coordinating others is not how you spent your days as an individual contributor, it can be hard to discard old habits. Start by tracking the improvement of your direct reports from where they are rather than comparing their output and capabilities to your own. If you assess people individually, their talents will emerge—and their progress will become a measure of your own success.

Here are some other things to keep in mind as you work on shifting your mind-set. Some of these suggestions may seem obvious, but the fundamentals have a way of flying out the window when new responsibilities pile up and the pressure's on.

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MANAGING YOURSELF BOOK Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback

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### Take the Long View

While individual contributors keep their heads down and focus on getting work done, managers need to be looking further ahead. Good managers spend much of their time anticipating challenges, negotiating political situations, and creating a road map that pulls together what each team member is working on independently. You also need to think beyond what will happen in the

ideal scenario and plan for contingencies.

Seeing the bigger picture involves doing two things well. First, you should have a solid understanding of the needs and goals of your department, as well as the entire organization. This clarity about the ecosystem in which your team operates will help you anticipate your manager's expectations. Second, you need to understand the capabilities of the individuals on your team. Recognizing your team's capacity will give you the ability to better forecast when your team will be stretched or when it will experience bottlenecks, and to set expectations accordingly.

### **Ask More Questions**

When one of your team members is struggling, it can be tempting to just hand out answers (or do the work yourself, like Julie). After all, you probably know what needs to be done, and quickly providing the solution will get you back to your own work faster. But if you get into the habit of being the answer dispenser, you don't give people the chance to figure it out for themselves.

Asking questions can be a great way to help a team member work through a problem. Have them describe what's frustrating - put it up on a whiteboard if you can - and then talk through all the angles. In many cases a solution will become obvious just through the act of describing the problem. But if it doesn't, your questions can be instrumental in helping your employee look at the obstacle in a new way or uncover alternative possibilities.

### **Focus on What and When**

As an individual contributor, you were rewarded for perfecting the "how" of getting your work done. You might have great ideas about what makes you more productive and allows you to do your best work. But what works for you might not work for others, and further, others might come up with new ideas or techniques that you haven't considered. It's always best when setting goals with your team to focus on what the deliverables are, and when they need to be complete, but to leave the details of how that gets done up to each person.

The exception, of course, is when someone asks for help, or if you observe a team member struggling. At that point you can look at how they are going about the task. But even in these cases you should approach the situation with an open mind, and not simply dictate what should be done.

Another reason to focus on the goals and not the process is to avoid micromanaging. No one enjoys having their manager hang over their shoulder and tell them how to do their job. It's a quick way to frustrate your team, and it won't make the work go any faster.

## **Trust Your Gut**

Stepping into a new role can throw you off balance. You are working hard to learn new ways of thinking and behaving and it can make you feel like you're wrong a lot of the time. But your instincts are still valuable. If you feel like a project is going off the rails, don't wait until it's too late to respond. You may be figuring out how to be a good leader, but your sense of whether the work is being done and done right is likely on target—especially if it's work that you've done yourself in the past.

Many new managers delay confronting a team member who is missing deadlines or struggling in some way because they doubt their instincts or aren't sure how to address the problem productively. But rather than waiting until the situation grows worse, sit down and have a conversation. Make sure you're aware of how people are doing, and check in with them regularly. When you feel like something is off, it probably is.

## **Be Patient**

Shifting your mind-set from the day-to-day responsibilities of an individual contributor to the broader view of a manager and leader takes time. Don't expect these skills to evolve overnight, and don't be discouraged if you have some setbacks as you try to strike a balance between getting things done and coaching your team. Most of us aren't natural-born managers. The mind-set of a manager can be learned and honed with practice.

When times get tough (as they're bound to do) or you're feeling overwhelmed by your new role, pause and ask yourself:

1. Am I seeing my direct reports' strengths and weaknesses clearly, or comparing them to mine?
2. Am I taking the long view, anticipating capabilities, challenges, and expectations?
3. Am I asking questions more often than dispensing answers?
4. Am I setting clear deadlines and deliverables, but leaving the "how" up to my team?
5. Am I second-guessing my instincts? (Don't.)
6. Am I being patient with my own development as a manager?



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Katy Tynan is an expert on how work is changing. She speaks regularly on the topic, and is the author of *Free Agent: The Independent Professional's Guide to Self-Employment Success*, from Productivity Press. Katy is Managing Director at CoreAxis Consulting. Follow her on Twitter @KatyTynan.

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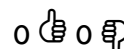
**SARANRAJ JAYARAJ** a year ago

Great article to start as new manager. especially the questions to ask yourself.

From my personal experience, the transition from the techie to leader changes the team dynamics as well.

A person who gets involved in most of the work and helps peers to achieve the work faster, when he/she becomes the manager, the same act looks like micromanagement. If you stop involving in the technical things, the team will think you have changed your attitude post promotion & it will ruin the admiration or respect they had for you, which inspired them to be like you at work. If you involve too much, its micromanagement for the team and too much for you to handle at the same time. The new leader should ensure he changes the mindset of the team members slowly. Use technique like "Different strokes for different folks" from One minute manager. Involve at different levels with different people. This will make your bond stronger with the team as well make you a better leader.

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