

# Some Tips on Managing People

By David H. Maister

## The Right Way to Give a Critique

The worst thing you can do if you want to get somebody to listen to you is to criticize him or her.

As human beings, we hate being criticized. When attacked we attack back.

And we attack even when we are in the wrong. Right or wrong has nothing to do with it.

Many of us fall into the trap of thinking, "I know I am right, so I'm going to tell the others how silly they are!" It's tempting, but it doesn't work.

If you have the self-control and the presence of mind to put aside the needs of your own ego and say, "I've got a problem. Will you help me?" you are much more likely to get cooperation from the other person.

## The Only Way to Get Anybody to Do Anything

If you want to get something from another human being, you must first do something for them. In other words, you can't win influence unless you first invest in the relationship.

So before you need something from someone, make it your business to at least get to know them without making

any demands. This doesn't mean invading their privacy but it does mean making the relationship personal.

For example, I have learned that I should take my assistant her out to lunch occasionally.

This is not something I am naturally disposed to do, but unless I show an interest in her as a human being the relationship won't work. (I still don't do it as often as I should!)

If the only time she hears from me is when I want something, then she will form a kind of resistance.

## You Are There to Help

If someone comes in to criticize us or get us to raise our game, under what circumstances would we accept that person's critique?

That's easy. If I think someone is really trying to help me then I'll listen, I'll engage.

On the other hand, if I think someone is just trying to get the job done or make himself or herself look good, I may listen because I need to keep my job, but my heart won't be in it. My creative energies will be depleted.

So the bad news is that you will only have influence over people to the extent that they think you are sincerely trying

to help them. It's not a moral point. It's simply how human beings work.

The most influential managers are those who can be convincing to other people that they care about them as people.

### **Team Players**

The most common prima donnas are people who don't want to be team players at all. If they throw a fit about something, they are not really talking about anything specific: they just don't want to have to fit in with others.

If one person won't fit in, the minute you are seen to tolerate their behavior, to tolerate an exception, you as the leader have just given permission to everybody else to do things their own way, too.

You are better off without a prima donna if their actions ruin the teamwork of the whole group. If you want the benefits of collaboration you cannot afford to make exceptions.

### **Getting the Task Done**

Each time you have an interaction with someone there are two things going on: one deals with the immediate topic, getting the task done, and the second is the way in which every interaction affects your relationship with your colleague. It will be advanced, ruined or left neutral.

Bear in mind that you should not sacrifice the task to the relationship. Similarly, just winning on the task is not good if you have ruined your relationship. You've got to do well on both counts.

There is a certain way of saying things. Instead of saying, "You are wrong," you must learn to say, "Might there be another way of looking at this?"

It's about helping the other person save face. And the only way to get anybody to do anything is to make them want to do it. Some people are naturally good at these diplomatic human relations. Sadly, many of us have to learn these skills.

I have pretty much every business degree that the planet has to offer, but no one ever taught me about managing people. That skill I had to learn by trial and error. So for many of us it's a good idea to mentally rehearse our phraseology before we go into a meeting.

### **Don't Be Paternal/Maternal**

There is another trap to avoid. When you are giving feedback to an employee, it is easy to come across as paternal or maternal. Nothing will raise someone's hackles more than being treated like a child.

So, as an exercise, imagine you are going in to give the same critique to your mother or father. Turn it around and respectfully help "Dad" arrive at the right conclusion for himself.

### **The Domineering Boss**

There is a natural temptation for people in charge to say, "This is how I deal with people—like it or lump it." But if you want to influence others, then it's about what turns them on, not what turns you on.

On the other hand, there are bad managers who are so good at relating to

people that they never actually get the job done. They are too soft and caring to inspire hard work and positive energy.

### **No Two People Are the Same**

You don't influence everybody the same way. People do things for their own reasons—not for yours. So if you want to inspire someone, you don't give him or her some wonderful company vision.

Instead, you help them see what's in it for them. That varies from person to person. Some people are motivated by challenge, some by money and some by the social opportunities afforded by a project.

It's about reading the other person, finding *their* hot button, not yours.

### **Interest in People**

To be a good manager or team leader you have to have an above-average interest in people. If you are not very interested in people that doesn't make you a bad person, but you are going to have to work hard to overcome that if you want to be a successful manager.

It's also about laying down challenges, getting people to stretch themselves creatively and getting people excited about your ideas rather than seeing those ideas as stressful demands.

The best group leaders see themselves as catalysts. They like to accomplish a great deal but understand that they can do little without the combined efforts of others.

A good manager does not see himself as the "people's boss" but as the leader of a

cohesive team of autonomous, creative individuals.



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