

# STRATEGY AND THE FAT SMOKER

CHAPTER

The argument of this chapter is simple to state... [CONTINUE](#)

BY **DAVID MAISTER**

**THE ARGUMENT OF THIS CHAPTER IS SIMPLE TO STATE:** If skilled managers are a major key to an organization's ability to overcome short-term temptations and stay true to the high standards necessary for success, then how does an organization ensure that its managers are performing their role to high standards?

When trying to get an organization to move, there is nothing more powerful than a manager who is prepared to lead—by going first!

### Instead of saying “Charge!” we need to say “Follow me!”

We cannot expect an organization to raise its game, change its direction or pursue new, ambitious goals and strategies by saying “Charge! I want all of you, the troops, to climb out of your foxholes and go put yourselves in harm's way.” Realistically, that's unlikely to work. Instead of saying “Charge!” we need to say “Follow me!” We must energize others through our own example.

#### A SPECIFIC **RECOMMENDATION**

There are four steps toward making yourself accountable, and in turn, improving your organization:

**Step One:** Examine the specific statements below, one by one, and ask yourself whether or not doing well on each of these is an important part of your role—is it something you are *supposed* to be good at?

YOU, MY MANAGER...

- Act and live by the principles you advocate

- Act as a role model that people want to copy
- Are a person of integrity
- Enforce the company values
- Are a “part of the team” as opposed to being the boss, separate and detached
- Cause me to stretch for performance goals
- Are concerned about long-term issues, not just short-term profits
- Provide constructive feedback that helps me improve my performance

**Here’s my promise to you, right here, right now. If, in one year, I have not improved my performance on the agreed-upon standards that are embedded in my role, then I will step down from my role as the manager of the group.**

Eliminate from the list any statements that you think are idealistic, unimportant or not part of your role. Add statements (or criteria) that I have missed that you think you need to be good at in order to performing your role effectively.

**Step Two:** Circulate the final questionnaire you develop, asking everyone you deal with in your organization to evaluate you on the criteria you have developed. Have the surveys returned to a disinterested third party (inside or outside your organization) to give everyone the comfort and confidence that the individual responses will be treated confidentially.

**Step Three:** Publish the average ratings you receive to *everyone* in your organization. Everyone—administrative staff included!

**Step Four:** Call a meeting of those you manage and give the following speech:

“Here’s what you think about me. Don’t expect me to be perfect the first time we try this. Perfection is not a standard you can hold me to, and it’s not a standard anyone can hold any one of you to.

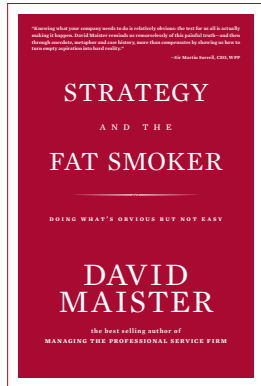
“What’s more, don’t expect me to be perfect a year from now when we repeat this, just as I will not expect you to be perfect. I don’t think that’s a realistic standard for any of us.

“But here’s my promise to you, right here, right now. If, in one year, I have not improved my performance on the agreed-upon standards that are embedded in my role, then I will step down from my role as the manager of the group.

“You do have a right to expect that I will get better at the things that are my responsibility. And that’s exactly what I’m going to ask of you!”

Now *that’s* going first! Can you imagine the impact?

## INFO



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Click here to get more details or buy a copy of David Maister's *Strategy and the Fat Smoker*.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Maister is widely acknowledged as one of the world's leading authorities on the management of professional service firms. For two decades he has acted as a consultant to prominent professional firms around the world, on a wide variety of strategic and managerial issues. In 2002, he was named as one of the top 40 business thinkers in the world (Business Minds, by Tom Brown, PrenticeHall/Financial Times). He is the author of the bestselling books *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993), *True Professionalism* (1997), *The Trusted Advisor* (2000), *Practice What You Preach* (2001) and *First Among Equals* (2002). These books have been translated into 14 languages. For seven years, he served as a professor on the faculty of the Harvard Business School (1979-85), prior to launching his consulting practice. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

In March of 2005, he finally took his own advice, gave up smoking and lost 30 pounds.

Visit his website at [www.davidmaister.com](http://www.davidmaister.com).

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