

Extracted from:

Become an Effective Software Engineering Manager

How to Be the Leader Your Development Team Needs

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Become an Effective Software Engineering Manager

How to Be the Leader Your
Development Team Needs

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Introduction

So, you're here. Why is that? Think about it. Perhaps you're interested in becoming a manager in the future. Maybe you've been promoted into a new role and are looking for advice on how to get started. You may have already been a manager for some time and are looking for a guide to help you become better at your job. No matter where you are in your career, this book is for you. Yes, *you*.

The technology industry is facing a skills crisis. This isn't because we don't know how to write software or how to scale our infrastructure. We've been getting a lot better at that. Instead, it's because we don't know how to manage people. Computers don't create software, people do. We need to make more *people* succeed. Good managers can solve this problem. *You* can be a great one.

This book intends to help address the skills crisis by giving you the hands-on, practical management advice that you need. There's no business fluff or leadership bravado here. You'll find no anecdotes about the military, no heroics, no cheesy metaphors, and no talk of Stanford. This book is about the tools that you need—the actual skills to do the job. In the same way that you would turn to a book to learn a new programming language, this book is here to help you learn how to be a world-class manager.

The Righteous Path

The problem with management, especially in the technology industry, is that many of us that become managers haven't been planning to do so for our whole lives. The same can't be said about creating software. Many of us tinkered with building websites, did online programming tutorials, or sketched out pictures of what we thought great software would look like way before we did formal education or started getting paid for it.

Often, we don't learn about management until we enter industry and see other people doing it. We might not learn about it until we see that there's

an opening to run one of the teams at our company. Regrettably, sometimes that choice is forced upon us as the only way to progress our careers.

This means that we haven't had enough preparation, we haven't done any formal education, and we haven't much of an idea about what we should be doing as managers. We can only learn on the job and from those around us, and we can't offer ourselves any guarantee that the way that we are managing others is the *right* way.

I certainly didn't plan to be a manager. When I joined a local startup, I had just finished my PhD in compilers. For the previous twelve months, I was trying to find an academic role, but I failed. I had to do something else. I decided to give writing back-end code a try instead. It was fun and I built some cool stuff. But I had no idea where I wanted my career to go. Would I be writing code forever until I retired? Was that my path?

As that startup grew rapidly, teams began to form. I asked whether I could be considered to manage one of those teams—mostly out of curiosity—and the rest is history.

I didn't know how to be a manager, so I bought books. Lots and lots of books. They were stacked on my desk in the office and also at home. Some were good, but many were bad. Few gave practical advice that I could actually implement in my job. It's all well and good learning how the CEO of a Fortune 500 company spends their day, but how did that apply to me? I just wanted to know I was doing the right thing for me and my team.

Searching online for advice was even worse: a mixture of contradictory information. Some of it was written by people clearly pushing their coaching services. Some felt wrong, old fashioned, or irrelevant. I didn't need *7 Ways to Motivate My Staff* nor did I need to know *The One Thing to Make Your Team a Success*. What I really needed to know was what I should be doing each day, week, and month that would make me a better manager and make my team better as a result.

That was almost nine years ago. Unfortunately, the situation hasn't changed much for new managers. I still talk to people who are running a team for the first time who find themselves without support, without suitable role models, and without the ability to confidently say that they are doing a good job. This is a tremendous shame, since managing people can be one of the most rewarding jobs out there.

Consider this: *you* can create the conditions that allow others to succeed, to learn, to feel psychologically safe, and to be creative. *You* can be the person

who helps your staff grow and achieve way beyond the level they thought was possible. *You* can create the team that allows people to enjoy turning up to work each day, ready to tackle challenging problems together. Twenty years from now, *you* can be front of mind when your staff are asked where their careers began to take off. Yes, that really can be *you*. This book will show you how.

Management and Leadership

The word *management* has a bad rap. Management may conjure up images of stuffy people in suits carrying stacks of papers in leather binders. Layers of bureaucracy. Pointless activities to maintain high-paying jobs in a hierarchy. *Leadership*, however, may be the look you're striving for. Being the inspirational figure that others look up to. Giving a talk to your department to rapturous applause. Being on the 40 Under 40 list. However, these two words are not disparate. They are strongly linked.

Management is the method and tools that you use to perform your job as a manager. However, using them well, alongside being a humble and caring human being, will elevate you higher. You will act with respect, grace, and kind consideration and will provide honest, candid conversation. You'll practice what you preach through your actions, and *that* will make you into a leader.

That's because doing management diligently, skillfully, and empathetically is *hard*. It is a rare skill. But it's a skill that you can harness if you read these pages, learn some new concepts, and then go out and *do* them. Management is a craft, much like writing software. You'll get better every day. It's an art, not a science. It's a mixture of your creativity, your personality, your heart, your mind, your ethics, and your values. It is *you*. You can be a manager and leader that others look up to. That others want to work for. That you enjoy being every day.

Your Journey

You may be at different stages on your journey. You may have picked up this book because you were interested in whether being a manager is something that you might like to do. You may have just been promoted within your existing company. You may have taken a leap into being a manager somewhere completely new. It doesn't matter where you are: you will find value in these pages. Even if you never become a manager, you will understand better about how they work. You can empathize. Bond. We will discover plenty of tools and techniques that are applicable to *anyone*, regardless of what job they are doing.

However, for the purpose of this book, we're going to imagine that you've turned up for your first day of your first managerial role in a new company. We're going to start afresh together and build from the ground up. It's going to be fun, and I'm honored that we're going to go on that journey together.

This book is split into three parts. It begins prescriptively: you'll be asked to *try this* or *do that*. Give it a go. As the book progresses, we'll consider more abstract and nuanced issues of management of which there is no right answer. There's only you and your way of doing it. How you act in those situations is where you begin to understand the most about yourself in this role.

You don't have to read the book from the beginning to the end, although you're welcome to do that. Care has been taken to write this book in such a way that will allow you to read chapters independently when you need some guidance on that subject.

The Outline of This Book

In the first part of the book, *Getting Oriented*, you're going to drop right into your new job. In *A New Adventure* you'll be getting to grips with your new role and working out who your team are, what they do, and how they relate to the rest of the organization. Then you're going to learn how to *Manage Yourself First* by getting your routine and habits in order.

Then we're going to move on to the second part of the book, *Working with Individuals*. Here you're going to learn all of the necessary tools and processes to be a success in your day-to-day role. We'll look at the ways in which you will be *Interfacing with Humans* every day, focusing on how you can make those interactions fruitful and positive. You'll then learn how to begin doing weekly *One-to-Ones*, which is the bedrock of your relationship with your staff.

You'll also learn how we're all motivated differently in *The Right Job for the Person*, understanding how you can use this to help people succeed and be happy. Then, we'll get to the nitty-gritty. We'll look into hiring in *Join Us!* and people leaving in *Game Over*. We'll close out the second part of the book by considering how you can begin to increase your impact outside of your team in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, where you'll find a number of ways that you can contribute to your department for the greater good.

The third part of the book is called *The Bigger Picture*. This is where you'll begin to experience the messier sides of management. We'll look at why *Humans Are Hard* and *Projects Are Hard* and what you can do in various tricky scenarios. Then we'll consider the information that you'll have to handle, share, and store in *The Information Stock Exchange*. We'll then dive deeper

into the often-paradoxical psychology of being an effective manager in [*Letting Go of Control*](#).

We'll then turn our focus to your environment. You'll learn ways in which you can make your department's communication more effective in [*Good Housekeeping*](#). Then, we'll consider how to create career progression tracks for your staff in [*Dual Ladders*](#). [*The Modern Workplace*](#) addresses inclusivity, diversity, and culture and what you can do to make your company a better place for everyone.

We'll finish off by considering *your* future. After all, this is a book about *you*. In [*Startups*](#) we'll explore whether you might want to try and accelerate your career by joining a small but fast-growing organization. Then, in [*The Crystal Ball*](#), we'll run through an exercise together that you can use to think deeply about where your career is going. And guess what? You can use it with your own staff as well.

So, What's Next?

All that's left is for me to thank you for embarking on this journey together with me. I hope that you find it entertaining and informative and that it helps you become a better manager and maybe even a better person. All I know is that if I had this book when I started, I would have felt more confident, more comfortable, and more able to know that I was doing a good job for myself, but especially for those in my team. I truly hope that it does the same for you.

Let's get started then. Are you ready for your first day?