

TRAINING NEW MANAGERS

If your organization follows the “leaders are born, not made” philosophy, you may find retention rates dropping as employees flee new supervisors who don’t have a clue about managing people.

Training new front-line managers or supervisors on management basics may not have the same cachet as coaching executives, but it’s necessary. “These are the leaders of tomorrow and it has to start there,” says Harvinder Phandal of Manager Boot Camp, a Vancouver firm that provides training to newly minted line managers.

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Communications

Crossing the employee-management divide means learning a whole new set of skills, and communication heads the list. It determines the relationship a new manager will establish with their reports and should figure highly in an organization’s management training.

“We find new managers struggle with critical conversations: how to deal with employees under difficult situations, whether it’s addressing performance, being clear about expectations or even giving kudos,” says Mary-Alice Vuicic, senior vice-president, human resources and organizational development, at Shoppers Drug Mart, who says the skill is key to a new people leadership course the chain is developing.

“Instilling the importance of feedback in new managers is very important,” says Phandal. “Giving none is bad and giving only positive is worse because it gives a false sense of reality for employees. Your goal is to develop people and that requires tough feedback sometimes.”



ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL FORTHOFER

Delegation

Many new managers are promoted because they've done their job well and often this means struggling with letting go and delegating work to reports, says Debra Watkinson, manager, People, Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, owners and operators of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Toronto Raptors.

"No one likes a micro-manager—they have to learn to let others take over, make mistakes and maybe take the blame if things go badly," she says.

Another reason new managers sometimes refuse to delegate responsibility is that they feel it will take too long to teach someone else how to do it. However, adds Phandal, it

DELIVERING TRAINING

Shoppers Drug Mart's leadership training program comes in response to feedback HR had received from stores and managers across the country. "We asked how we could better support them and they told us they needed more people training for new leaders," says Shoppers vice-president of HR, Mary-Alice Vuicic. It was also a strategic necessity for the pharmacy chain as its major growth constraint was a dearth of managers ready to fill leadership roles in new stores.

Shoppers uses interactive distance learning—weekly professional development sessions via satellite feed to stores across the country—combined with self study and work with store level coaches who provide guidance and answer questions.

And in order for a management training program to be effective, it must be a business initiative and be seen as critical by senior management.

"In devising a training program, it's necessary to conduct a learning assessment to see where the gaps are," says Manager Boot Camp's Harvinder Phandal. "It's also a good way to identify how people like to learn: classroom, online, offsite, etc."

From there, prioritize what you want to cover and ensure you have commitment from participants.

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always works out to be a real time-saver if they spend the time to train rather than taking on the task themselves.

Time management

A new manager can quickly find himself overloaded balancing job duties with additional management responsibilities, so time management training is key.

"Someone new to the role can expect to spend 50 per cent of their time managing," says Watkinson. "Sometimes you've got your whole day planned and one issue can sidetrack you for the rest of the day. We teach new managers how to prioritize tasks, keep to-do lists as well as create blocks of time in their day and week to catch up on calls, get work done and plan the upcoming week."

Recruiting and orientation

Since managers have to work with the people they hire, recruiting and orientation skills are also critical to a new manager's toolbox.

Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment stresses behavioural-based interviewing and hiring to fit the job description and the team, says Watkinson.

And once they've got the job filled, it's the manager's job to integrate them into the organization. That means providing new hires with guidelines, soliciting feedback and checking back with them at regular intervals to ensure they understand the job and that they're comfortable. "Bad managers put people in roles and let them go," says Phandal. "How an employee is treated in the first month of the job determines how long they'll stay."

Leadership

Ultimately, leadership is about setting an example. Phandal suggests telling new managers to think of the best boss they've had and use their own experiences with managers as their guide—what works, what doesn't, and mimic leadership qualities in managers they've admired.

Shoppers Drug Mart's leadership program also focuses on different leadership styles and how they apply to different situations and types of people. "It's about building relationships across functions and it involves candour," Vulcic says. "Good leaders don't hide behind process." **HR**

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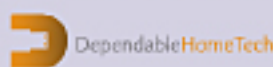
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