

EFFECTIVE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

WHAT EVERY MANAGER REALLY NEEDS TO KNOW
ABOUT BUILDING A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

Michelle Prescott

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I am always looking for practical books about managing people to recommend. This book is full of common sense and is at the top of my list!

Elizabeth Toogood, Toogood Critical Friend

www.ToogoodCriticalFriend.co.uk

This book can help you whether you are new to managing people or have been doing it for years. There are tips, insights and practical information that tell you the essentials of what you really need to know. They will help you to demystify the challenges of working out why people do what they do, and what you can do to build an effective team. I highly recommend this book to anyone who manages individuals on a day-to-day basis.

Peter Gibbons, Managing Director, Genius

www.GeniusConsultancy.co.uk

I've had the privilege of working very closely with Michelle, and benefitting from her knowledge and expertise first hand. As a new manager, Michelle's experience has helped make my transition into management seamless. This book captures Michelle's expertise perfectly and makes helpful reading for managers at all levels.

Jade Croucher, Operations Manager, The Open Data Institute

www.TheODI.org

The book is clear, helpful and strikes a good balance between being a 'how to' and being a general overview.

Polly Gavins, Polly Gavins Ltd

www.PollyGavins.co.uk

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I could not have written this book if it was not for the wonderful marketing skills of Chantal Cornelius.

I first met Chantal at a networking seminar soon after setting up my People Management business. For some years now Chantal and her team at Appletree have been looking after my marketing and I have been kept busy with work!

One of the aspects of the Marketing Plan Chantal devised for me was a regular series of newsletters that enabled me to discuss a variety of People Management subjects. In the newsletters I shared my learning and experience gained from studying for Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development (OD) qualifications and from over twenty-five years of working in People Management.

At one of our meetings to discuss the newsletters, Chantal said, "You should write a book." After a bit of cajoling and encouragement, I eventually started to write. Chantal has been wonderfully supportive during the whole process, reassuring me that what I have to say is relevant and would be of interest to an audience. She has shown limitless patience in the face of numerous changes, the occasional crisis of confidence and seemingly endless edits – thank you Chantal!

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START HERE

I have been working in the field of People Management for over twenty-five years. In that time I have been a manager and I have been managed. The benefit of learning and experience from both sides has proved invaluable when advising clients how to successfully meet their People Management needs.

Whether you are experienced or are new to People Management, my aim for this book is to provide you with insights, reassurance and ideas about what you really need to make your life as a manager of people more productive and successful. It will also serve as a useful reference point to deal with a difficult issue, or when you have an idea for doing something different in your organisation.

This book is not a textbook that tells you everything there is to know about the day-to-day practical and theoretical aspects of HR or OD. There are many excellent books out there on these subjects and a number of these are referenced at the end of this book. Similarly there are a number of websites that provide extensive details of employment law and aspects of HR that an employer should be following.

This book is a collection of insights into what managing people really entails. One such insight is that no textbook, research paper or established process will provide you with a guaranteed perfect solution to every challenge that working with people will throw at you. You and every one of the people you work alongside are unique human beings and there are no perfect answers when it comes to managing them.

The amount of information available on the subject of People Management is huge and covers a vast array of opinions and advice. In this book I look at the fundamental aspects of People Management that will help you establish the building blocks for managing and developing an effective team. It also provides pointers to the research,

theories and thinking that underpin these fundamental aspects.

This book examines how, as the Boss, you can impact on your teams and how you can plan your People Management strategy. There are also chapters describing the key elements of how to build a high performing team.

An important feature of the book is Five Key Factors I have seen employed by successful managers and business owners. Despite having very different personalities, these people all share a common approach to effective People Management that can be distilled into the Five Key Factors.

In each chapter I identify how the Five Key Factors apply to the subject matter and how you can use these to develop a successful approach to People Management. I will reference them at the end of the chapters of this book to illustrate how they apply.

As with any endeavour, it is important to build from the correct foundations. Therefore, each chapter in this book sets out 'A Good Place To Start' on the subject it will cover. Each chapter also concludes with a summary of essential elements that can be used as a reference point as you continue along your People Management journey.

In the years I have been helping clients resolve People Management issues and challenges I have found that whilst the approaches used to tackle them are similar, the detail of each case is different. Even now when I am helping clients with a People Management problem I am often astonished at the capacity that human beings have to surprise us. I often find myself using the expression:

"The only predictable thing about people is that they are unpredictable."

This is usually in response to an exasperated manager who has asked why a situation with an employee has arisen, why the employee has behaved in such a way or how someone may react in a particular situation.

Early on in my career I realised that it is impossible to accurately predict what people will do or how they will react. This does not mean that it is impossible to effectively manage the people you work with.

People Management is easier to do if you carefully think about your approach, including anticipating and preparing for a wide range of employees' personalities. As I have already mentioned, people are unique and will bring different ambitions, needs, frustrations, strengths and foibles to work with them. However, properly managed, you can use these unique characteristics to form part of your competitive advantage.

The first challenge for anyone who manages one person, or an organisation that employs thousands, is to recognise that a proactive approach to People Management is as much a priority as managing finance, marketing, sales and all the other functions that make an organisation successful. You may think that I would say that because that's my business. However, the reason I am saying it is because I have seen the human and financial cost of poor People Management that negatively impacts on individuals, teams and the whole organisation. I have also seen the positive impact that a high performing team can have on increasing productivity and making work an enjoyable place to be.

I can't promise you a quick fix 'People Management Made Easy' toolkit. Learning any subject, including People Management, is achieved through a combination of being taught, teaching yourself and applied experience. Perhaps most of all, it is through understanding the lessons from when we get it wrong as much as when we get it right.

CHAPTER ONE

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

At some point you will have decided whether to work in splendid isolation, or if you will follow a vocation that involves working with other people.

As you are reading this book we'll assume that you decided on the latter, and that you want to build a successful career whereby the management of people, in some shape or form, is likely to become a regular aspect of your working life.

People Management can be enjoyable, frustrating, rewarding, exasperating, unpleasant, fun, upsetting, confusing and inspiring, all in the same day. The enjoyable includes taking a chance on hiring and training someone and then seeing them develop a successful career. The frustrating includes having to deal with relatively minor issues such as "he said, she said" petty squabbles. The upsetting can include an employee's personal or health issues and the unpleasant will include grievances, disciplinaries and dismissals. These are all the things that come with any role involving the management of people that are not usually referred to in a job description.

To become a successful manager of people, a greater understanding and awareness of the subject of People Management will help you.

'MANAGING PEOPLE' AND 'PEOPLE MANAGEMENT': WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

In this book, the context of 'managing people' covers all the practical aspects of employing people, including paperwork, processes and legalities from recruitment through to when employment ends.

As I have mentioned in the introduction to this book, there are many readily available sources of good information that will help you with the minutiae of the practices and processes of managing people. This book focuses on the broader elements of the fundamentals that can help you to develop an awareness and understanding of 'People Management'.

I see People Management as a strategy for identifying and utilising a range of approaches to maximise the unique opportunity you have to develop your organisation via the people you employ.

A proactive People Management strategy acknowledges that people are individuals and that a 'one size fits all' approach is not the most effective way to get the best out of everyone in your team. It also acknowledges that there are no magic formulas or quick fixes when dealing with people.

Developing your learning and understanding about why people do what they do will help you to build an effective People Management strategy.

A GOOD PLACE TO START:

SEVEN ESSENTIALS OF PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

As a starting point for developing your people strategy, I am going to share seven essentials that I have identified and frequently relate to clients about People Management:

1. The only predictable thing about people is that they are unpredictable

This is a phrase that I often use with exasperated managers who are trying to understand an employee's behaviour. Whilst it is not possible to second-guess exactly what people will do, it is possible to consider different scenarios and how you might deal with them.

A useful tip is to not presume individuals will react in a predictable way. I learnt this lesson from one of my early experiences of having to give employees the bad news of redundancies. I had prepared for those people I thought would be distraught, only to find myself surprised when they weren't. Conversely, the apparently self-confident people who were then inconsolable equally surprised me.

One of the traps of People Management that I often see managers falling into is assuming that all the members of their team will think, feel and react the same way that they themselves would do in a given situation. They are often frustrated when someone doesn't agree with, appreciate or see something in the same way that they do.

Human beings, and remember that includes you, are unique and whilst there may be similarities in personalities and approach, don't assume that what you would do is what someone else will do. The over used phrase about 'assume' making 'an ass of you and me' is very often true with People Management.

2. One size does not fit all

Teams are a collection of individuals, all of whom are unique. Factors including their personality, the reasons why they are working, and why they work for you, will differ from person to person.

This means that taking a People Management approach that presumes

everyone will think and behave in exactly the same way will not work. This also applies if you take the same approach to the same scenario with different people. For example, two people may be doing the same job with a similar level of knowledge, skills and experience. However, one may be able to work with minimal direction whilst the other performs better when given more support in task setting and checking.

Whilst it doesn't mean doing everything completely differently for every person you employ, it does mean some aspects of your overall approach may require adjustment.

One size does not fit all when it also comes to processes. I am not saying that if you introduce a process you need to develop something that is individually tailored to each person. When planning any process think about how it can be flexible to better suit the needs of individuals and therefore, your organisation.

3. Change is inevitable and isn't always planned

Think about your life and the factors that have led you to where you are today. A number of aspects will have been planned, such as going to school, deciding on a choice of career or targeting an organisation you want to work for. Many more of them will have been unplanned, including meeting and falling for someone who lives miles away from you, or making a choice about a job due to the health and welfare of yourself or someone significant to you.

Just as you experience changes in your life, think of all of the things that will be changing in other people's lives.

Striving for nirvana in respect of the work you do and the team that you work with is a great goal. But remember that if you expect to reach a point when you can sit back and watch things tick over successfully in the same way for many months or years, you are going to be disappointed.

If in striving for nirvana you appreciate that you will need to be flexible and prepared to plan for or react to changes, then you will be more successful.

I often hear the phrase ‘people fear change.’ What I find is not that people fear change, but that they fear the unknowns associated with change. If a system or process changes, it may be that the person fears making a mistake, looking stupid or losing their perceived influence or status. Or they may be fearful of losing their job if they cannot cope with the changes.

Poor communication about the need for change and how it will impact on people can lead to them fearing the change. A way to avoid potential change pitfalls is to recognise and remember that people are different and that any change needs to be well planned and communicated in a number of ways. An important aspect of that communication is giving people plenty of confidential and supportive opportunities to ask questions and raise concerns.

The word ‘change’ implies a conscious approach to making a defined move from one static state to another. Of course there will be occasions where a review identifies the need for a significant and proactive change programme that does just this. However, there will be many more instances where the change is more of a ‘tweak’, made in response to an issue or situation. In our work or home lives and in the wider world, nothing remains completely static. People Management includes being aware of and prepared for constant evolution as well as planned change.

4. People have lives outside of work

You and your team have lives outside of work that at some point will impact upon it.

We often talk about finding a ‘work life balance’. This creates the image that we have two buckets, one marked work and one marked life, balanced at each end of a see-saw. The impression is that we can divide what we do between the two buckets to keep the see-saw balanced. In reality we can’t split ourselves in two; we only have one bucket. There may be a point in our lives when turmoil leads to that bucket being close to or actually falling over.

If you are a business owner or a manager then your main priority is likely to be your own organisation. The people you employ are unlikely to feel the same way, but that is not wrong and nor should you be upset or offended by this. Ultimately, when faced with a difficult situation in life, people will, quite understandably, be loyal to themselves and their families first.

The challenge in a difficult situation is to be supportive to one person, whilst managing the impact of their issues on the other people in the team who you are also responsible for supporting.

As an employer you will have a statutory responsibility as set by employment laws, for some aspects outside of work that impact on your employees' lives. This will include paying statutory sick pay and allowing unpaid time off for an emergency involving a dependent. However, this does not mean you have to be responsible for everything that happens in your employee's lives.

You are not your employee's 'nanny'. People Management is not about being responsible for managing employee's social and home lives for them or resolving any of their personal problems.

I believe that People Management includes building an open and supportive working environment as this will have positive motivational effects on a whole team. This needs to be tempered with guidelines on where an employer's responsibility starts and ends. However, issues are not always clear-cut, particularly when they involve the health of the employee or a family member. The challenge is then balancing their needs with that of your organisation during a difficult and emotional time.

From a People Management perspective being objective, ethical, open, fair and compassionate and building good lines of communication between the individual and the whole team, will help when facing difficult decisions.

5. Prepare to be unpopular

Another phrase that often springs to mind when dealing with people is that ‘you can’t please all of the people all of the time’. As a manager you can try to do this (and I don’t know of anyone who has managed a team who deliberately wants to be unpopular) by aspiring to be a good boss who avoids the mistakes you have seen poor managers make. Even so, you can’t always accurately predict how others will react to your decisions and judge your performance as a boss.

You are also likely to find yourself having to deal with matters that are not due to something that you have or haven’t done. This can include mediating in personal disputes, making decisions involving disciplinary and grievance issues, or telling someone their job is redundant.

An inevitable aspect of People Management is that at some point you are likely to have to tackle unacceptable performance or behaviour, or tell someone in your team something they don’t want to hear. Many people start a business or take on a managerial job not realising that they will have to give people difficult news or even dismiss someone, but it is a possibility. Whilst it is a small proportion of what you may need to do, it can have a significant emotional and long-term impact.

When dealing with a difficult issue, taking an objective, ethical, open, fair and compassionate approach to a problem will help to ensure it is handled as justly, practically and sensitively as possible. This approach can also be applied in deciding whether to terminate someone’s employment and examining whether, in all conscience, it is the right thing to do. When considering such action, protecting the performance, safety and integrity of the rest of the team and the whole organisation has to be a primary consideration.

I have yet to encounter a boss who has not at some point had to deal with a difficult issue. The best managers and bosses that I have worked for or with, have recognised and promptly dealt with difficult decisions and have done so with a sense of conscience, justice, respect and empathy. They have not shirked their responsibility to make carefully considered but ultimately difficult decisions for the overall benefit of the team or the long-term benefit of an organisation.

6. *We want to be like...*

I have had many meetings with clients who have read about a process or approach to People Management and want to do the same thing in their team. Aspiring to improve any aspect of People Management is commendable but I would like to issue a word of warning at this point. 'Beware the case study' and doing something because someone else is doing it, or wanting to do it in exactly the same way as they are.

You may read about an organisation that is similar to yours in respect of market and employee numbers. However, your organisation will be different if only because you employ different people and you are a different type of manager.

Case studies don't give you the perfect answer for your situation, but they can give you ideas and pointers to the best approach for your People Management.

If you want to consider various ways to be a good employer and you want to see good examples, I recommend that you go to the Great Place to Work Institute's web site at www.GreatPlaceToWork.co.uk. The Institute has information and reports on the reasons why organisations are regularly voted as being the best places to work, which may be of interest to you.

If you do want to implement something new in your organisation then don't forget that 'one size does not fit all' and take the time to carefully analyse if it will work for your team and organisation.

7. *It's the people, stupid...*

During Bill Clinton's successful election campaign in 1992, a strategist called James Carville hung a sign up that listed three areas to focus on and one of these was "The economy, stupid." This was intended to be for internal use only but was quickly seized on, becoming a mantra that can now be applied to many situations.

If you want to know how to make any organisation of any size successful, "it's the people, stupid".

The website of the Great Place to Work Institute mentioned in the previous section contains information on a number of successful organisations. Themes common to all of them are that they focus on their people and try to ensure they:

- **Feel trusted to do their jobs.**
- **Have trust in the people they work for and with.**
- **Feel pride in what they do and enjoy doing it.**
- **Feel valued, productive and listened to.**
- **Feel supported at work when home issues impact on their work.**

This book will cover the fundamentals of People Management that will help you achieve a similar people approach in your organisation, ensuring that its focus is on 'The people, stupid'.

KEY LEADERSHIP TRAITS

As well as having a strategy that covers the fundamentals of People Management and acknowledges the seven essentials set out above, successful managers exhibit particular key leadership traits.

Successful managers readily acknowledge that the success of their organisation is down to the people they employ and have a People Plan that is an integral part of their Business Plan. The plan is not just about how many people they will need and how much they are going to cost. It includes an approach to finding, developing and supporting people who will be fundamental to the growth and development of their organisation.

They also have good self-awareness in that they recognise and have evaluated their own personality traits and leadership style. They have acknowledged that they are not qualified, experienced or expert in all of the areas of running an organisation and building a team, and so bring in people who can help, including People Management specialists.

Successful managers also demonstrate and follow the values of being objective, ethical, open, fair and compassionate and recognise the value to an organisation of the people it employs. They are prepared to make balanced decisions about tough choices and have the humility to admit mistakes if the benefit of hindsight shows they didn't get something completely right.

There is no magic wand or quick fix to being a successful leader or manager, just as there is no scientific formula for effective People Management. As with most subjects we learn, it is about reading, learning, practicing and determining what works best in a range of situations. It's not about mastering the 'art of war', or blaming someone else for 'moving your cheese'; it is about being enthusiastic, open, empathetic, engaging, empowering as well as listening and learning.

THE FIVE KEY FACTORS – PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

I have worked with good and not so good managers and have learned a lot from both. As a result I have identified Five Key Factors I believe are fundamental to managing and developing successful teams and organisations. Great leaders develop effective People Management strategies that encompass the following:

1. Enthusiasm

Successful managers and teams have a collective sense of purpose and enthusiasm about what they are doing. This is not about whooping and clapping everything. It is about having a strong belief and determination in a product, cause or service.

2. Open Communication

Successful managers openly share information where possible. It is not about being gregarious or trying to be everyone's friend. It is about fostering an environment of honest two-way communication.

3. A Head for Business and a Heart for People

Successful managers balance a head for their business and a heart for their people. They build fun working environments based on ethics, trust and open communication but remain focussed on achieving targets. They balance compassion with objectivity in tackling problems and make difficult decisions when necessary.

4. Engaging and Empowering

Successful managers embrace every opportunity to identify and use their employees' skills and experience. They enable personal development for all, including themselves. They listen, delegate appropriately and empower team members to get on with their jobs.

5. Listening and Learning

Open communication only works when you listen, learn and act. Successful managers set and follow plans but don't slavishly stick to them just to save face. They listen to feedback, admit when they are wrong and are prepared to learn from their mistakes and adapt.

SUMMARY – PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

When developing or reviewing your approach to managing people and your People Management strategy remember:

- 1. People are unique, unpredictable and will not think and feel the same way as you do.**
- 2. Don't just follow the crowd. Your People Management strategy and plans need to be developed to fit your organisation. Work out what is best for your organisation and the people in it and keep up to date with the subject of People Management.**
- 3. The world and people's lives (including your own) don't stand still; embrace and capitalise on constant evolution and change.**
- 4. Organisations are only as successful as the people in them and effective leaders influence that success. Effective leaders have self-awareness of the impact they have on their team and take an objective, ethical, open, fair and compassionate approach to People Management and to making difficult decisions.**
- 5. As the boss, make sure you apply the Five Key Factors in your approach to People Management.**

In the next chapter we'll look at the 'Boss Effect' and the impact that your personality, approach and behaviour can have on the management of your team.