

## *Chapter 11 – Preparing for People Management*

“A good manager is best when people barely know that he exists. Not so good when people obey and acclaim him. Worse when they despise him.”

~ Lao Tzu

(Chinese Taoist Philosopher, founder of Taoism, 600 BC-531 BC)

Originally I was planning to combine this chapter with the previous chapter. After all, people management is the obvious central activity of managing down.

I did not do it because 1) practically speaking the chapter would have been too long and 2) I would have lost your attention on this key discussion.

Managing people is the core, vital practice for Managers. I stress “practice”. Just like lawyers practice law, managers practice managing people because few people naturally are experts on day one. Managing people is more art than science, intangible than tangible, situation-based than cookie cutter-based, experience-driven than academic-driven.

As was mentioned earlier, the greatest challenge as a manager is managing your herd effectively. The technical part of your responsibility and departmental function is relatively easy. You’ve been focused most of your life on the technical aspects. All your schooling has been to learn facts, information, theories, lab work, and so forth. Where have you learned about people? Formally it might have been in one or two classes, such as Organizational Behavior, Sociology, or perhaps Psychology. Informally you may have been exposed to organizations and activities such as Boy’s Scout, Student Government, Fraternities, and other clubs.

You may not have realized it, but you experienced all the good and bad of people in organized activities. Hopefully you experienced it both as a member in the group as well as a leader of the group. Managing people is difficult. People are unpredictable, conniving, calculating, complex, in addition to being a myriad of other things.

If managing people are such an important part of being a manager, why isn’t there more training? The answer is irrelevant at this point. The better question at this point is, how do you prepare to be good at it sooner?

Let me present my accelerated version of People Management 101. It's a completely different approach than the traditional, old school method.

### Tony's Stories

For me, I thought if I do my best at my job and train to be a manager, it'd happen. It didn't quite work out that way. Early in my career when I was at Apple Computer, I did my job pretty well and received high praise and excellent reviews from my Manager. My Manager, in fact, recommended me for the Apple Manager Survival Course. This was a big deal. The course was a weeklong retreat at the Claremont Hotel in the Oakland Hills. Not a cheap date! Apple was a very progressive, young company with very young employees. The average age of employees in 1987 was only 29 years old. And the company's growth was meteoric. They were adding 50 employees a week at their corporate campus in Cupertino, California, and had to hold two employee orientations per week to accommodate. The company had enough realization and foresight to invest heavily in training to help their young employees to mature and develop leadership skills quickly, particularly people management skills. The growth was so tremendous that it was common for individual contributors (who were not hired with previous people management experience), such as secretaries, accounting clerks, and Product Managers, to be promoted within a year to manage some new department or to take over the reins of their current department because their Manager was promoted or moved to lead another department.

The Manager Survival Course was very good but it did not get me a Manager's job. I did not get promoted to be a Manager for four years. When I was finally promoted into a Manager position, I had forgotten most of what the course taught and I was not smart enough to review the notes and workbook from the course. Life, personal and business, has a way of moving very fast and consuming all of your time. And, to be quite honest, half of what I learned in that Survival Course did not stick. Much of the content was not relevant because I was not a practicing Manager, so it was difficult for me to relate. It's like being taught how to raise a child when you are single with no children. I believe it would have been more helpful to take a shorter, introduction course before becoming a Manager. Then take a detailed class, like the Survival Course, after you've been a Manager for at least 6 months.

## **People Management 101 (Tony's version)**

I really was very lucky early in my career. I had all sorts of corporate training. I had extensive sales training at NCR; and I was given books and countless skills classes at Apple and HP. I was provided a mentorship program at Apple and given a gazillion books, classes, seminars, and articles about how to manage people. Some of these charge a hefty amount. If you're fortunate enough, your company will pay for them. All my previous employers did. I was very lucky to have access to so many resources.

Despite all the formal training, managing people was a foreign activity. In retrospect, managing people really is an art and all the academics only helped to a limited degree.

There is science behind it, but you still have to recognize the situation and know which tool to use. I have learned there is no one formula or one method to help people learn the intricacy of this topic. I've also learned that all the reading and classes are fine, however, you still need real life experience. By all means, go to the classes and read all the books. As I've stated, it helped me to some degree. The way I learn, I needed other examples and modes of learning. Everybody learns differently; some are visual learners, some need written instructions, some need hands-on, and so forth. Personally, I learn best by watching examples and having something I am familiar with to compare them to. I'm going to share with you two people management models that helped me break through the mechanics and academics of people management and leadership to where it felt more natural.

### **1. Manage people like you raise children or dogs.**

Alright, suspend the criticism about comparing adult employees with kids, at least until you finish hearing me out conceptually. When I was first given this golden concept, I did not have children and I was not much of a dog person. Therefore, this golden concept made no sense to me until a couple of years later after the birth of my daughter. About the same time, my wife (a natural dog whisperer) started a pet-sitting business and I began learning about dogs from her. The idea made perfect sense and I learned to apply it effectively with employees. I found nearly all of the principles used to raise kids and dogs carried over perfectly to managing people.