

Top three qualities of a good manager

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Experts say managers need three very important skills to retain staff and run a profitable business

The ability to listen attentively, motivate staff and offer regular feedback are some of the key competencies good managers need to get the best results from staff and run a productive business.

And the good news is - these skills can be taught, says Bruce MacDonald, convenor of the Programme for Management Development (PMD) at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB).

"One of the most powerful aspects of a management training programme is people gain insight into their own behaviour. If you don't understand your own behaviour then you will not be able to understand others and (you won't) be able to manage them," MacDonald says.



Bruce MacDonald

According to a recent poll conducted by Gallup, companies appoint managers 82% of the time, leading to poorly managed work groups, considered to be about 50% less productive and 44% less profitable in comparison to well-managed groups. The study indicates that choosing a good manager is probably one of the most important decisions any business makes. And it's believed only one in 10 people have the ability to manage effectively.

MacDonald identifies some of the top three qualities any manager needs:

1. Listening

Communication skills are vital for good managers, but very few communication courses focus on listening skills. Good managers should listen attentively and communicate properly, which often makes a "huge difference" to employees and how they relate to their manager and job. Knowing what people are saying takes a certain amount of psychological knowledge relating to the human dynamic and also requires managers to be more empathetic and accessible. But the positive spin-offs are huge - sympathetic bosses have more engaged and loyal employees who feel free to share opinions and ideas, as well as possible problem areas in the workplace.

2. Acknowledging

A few words of acknowledgement are considered an effective tool for managers. Employees who get regular feedback and words of encouragement feel valued at work. This helps to keep them motivated and drives them to perform. MacDonald says money is but a tiny motivator, adding that too many people think it is all about the money for employees. What keeps employees happy and engaged are not the perks or a big salary, but feeling that the job they do is important, that their opinions matter, and that they have the opportunity to do their best every day.

3. Motivating

The ability to motivate others is not as simple as it sounds. Inspiring employees to do great work, to come up with innovative ideas and give their best is about more than being a terrific orator. Instead, it's about having high expectations and getting people to fulfil them without telling them how to do it. Influencing people to do things out of their own accord is one of the most important and powerful tools a manager needs and forms a key focus area of further education and management courses.

"Changing the mindset of a manager is not easy, but it can be done and we do it all the time on the course. If you give people the tools and the resources to change, they will do it. This turns them into better leaders, which ultimately helps their companies run more profitably and successfully," MacDonald says.

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