

Managing your Ex Peers

Getting promoted can mean you are now in a position of authority over people you used to work alongside, and here's a newsflash: they may not be as excited about this change as you are.

Top Tips for your First 90 days

Extracted from article by Elizabeth Garone of The Wall Street Journal based on details in the book of Sherri Thomas, "Career Smart: 5 Steps to a Powerful Personal Brand."

Beware the two extremes

New managers often fall into one of two categories: overbearing and power-happy or unable to step up to the plate and manage even the simplest projects.

"Some managers jump into their new role using a more forceful and bullying style to show that they have more 'power' within the department and the company. They tend to dominate meetings, make key decisions without asking team members for input, and even micromanage the smallest projects," explains Ms. Thomas. "While they are eager to accomplish goals and impress senior managers, they usually create feelings of resentment, withdrawal, and even hostility among key team members." This results in an unproductive team whose members are more likely to leave the department, or in the worst case, try to sabotage the manager in his or her new position. Your former friends can easily turn on you if you adopt either persona.

Don't undermine your new position.

On the other end there are new managers who spend all of their time worried about losing the friendship of the former peers they now manage. "Some new managers implement a softer, more collaborative management style because they want to preserve friendships," says Ms. Thomas. Do that and you could end up having a hard time making decisions, resolving conflicts, and leading through difficult situations," she says. You also won't be able to gain the respect you need to lead the team if you fall into this trap. Instead, make sure you quell problems quickly rather than let them languish. Take a softer approach when appropriate, but if you need to take charge, do so.

Strengthen your credibility.

As a new manager, you need to fully understand senior management's expectations of you -- and your team as a whole. "You need to be able to clearly articulate and role model the company's vision as well as the team's role and goals," says Ms. Thomas. Go to your supervisor first and come up with an outline for what's expected of you. Call a meeting with your staff to give an overview so there's less chance they'll feel left in the dark.

Align your expectations with those of your team.

It is also imperative to understand your team members' needs and to help them realise their unique contributions to the team. Take the time to meet one-on-one with them and discuss their roles and responsibilities, align on expectations, and address any issues. "Specifically, you should share how you plan to manage the workload and team, including your own personal management style, how decisions will be made, and how conflicts will be resolved," says Ms. Thomas. "It's critical that the manager asks if the employee has any concerns and really listens to the answer." And it's even more important in a situation where you're managing people you sat shoulder-to-shoulder with just days before.

Establish a support network.

One area new managers often overlook is establishing a strong network of mentors and coaches who can provide strategies, support, and inspiration needed to succeed. "Network with those who have been successful managers, and those who you admire as a leader," Ms. Thomas says. Those managers can also point out mistakes they made when they were in the same shoes.

Realize that mistakes are okay.

Everyone makes mistakes, especially in those first few months. But, that's okay. "It takes time and experience to become a good manager. Every successful manager has had to overcome difficult challenges," says Ms. Thomas. "But having a network in place to help coach you through these situations can help you ramp up quickly into your new role, and set yourself up for success."

Recent thinking

A newly promoted manager posed this type of question to the coach at Chartered Management Institute, Miranda Kennet.

Q: I've just been promoted. It means my former peers, some who are older than me, now have to report to me. I'm afraid that they'll resent me or ignore my authority. How should I handle them?

A: You have a delicate balancing act to perform between the need to establish your authority reasonably rapidly and the need to remain on good terms with your former peers. So how do you walk this tightrope?

Stage One: What is the work?

- What are the tasks your team needs to do?

Once you have got these broad parameters, you'll be able to gain a sense of direction for your management role and can identify your priorities.

Stage Two: Who will do the work?

Consider your team members and their capabilities.

- Who might best help you to tackle your priorities?
- Who has knowledge or experience that would be of use?

Stage Three: How will the work get done?

You should meet with the team members who will do the tasks.

- Outline the result you're looking for and ask them for their suggestions on how to achieve it.
- Listen carefully to what they say and ask questions if you need clarification,
- Thank them for their input and decide what should be done and, if needs be, reevaluate who should do it.
- When the tasks are complete make sure to sure to give credit to those who did the work.

Link to recently posted video discussing Ex Peer Management

http://www.bnet.com/2422-13722_23-240244.html

Further Reading

http://www.canadianbusiness.com/managing/strategy/article.jsp?content=20060424_76353_76353

http://www.itstimetogetalife.com/eprise/main/web/us/hr_manager/articles_july07_managecoworkers

Questions for consideration

- What strengths do you have that will contribute to you to succeeding with your ex-peers in your new position?
- What do you think you could learn from the newly promoted managers you have seen in the past handle the transition well?
- How will you handle someone in your team undermining your authority?
- Which of your team members have strengths in areas where you may need their help?
- Who in your organization could act as a mentor for you?