

absolutely business



Practical People Management Basic tools for extraordinary results

By Denise Walker FREC

Part two: Recruiting for management roles

In this series of articles, Denise Walker shares her management experience, ideas and methods that actually work from a practitioner's perspective rather than HR theory.

Of the thousands of definitions of people management, my favourite is: **“Getting results through others”**. Like all human beings, managers will have their strengths and limitations and some will be more suited to certain situations and roles than others.

As with any form of recruitment, we should start at the beginning: to have effective managers, we need to ensure they have the right qualities in the first place. This is obvious, isn't it? And there is also an obvious answer as to why there are so many people in managerial jobs, when they clearly do not have the right qualities for them: people are often promoted to management roles, for one reason: because that is seen as the next step in their career. This is wrong, wrong, wrong!

In my own case, when I was promoted to my first management role, the fact that I had the basic essentials necessary to do the job was sheer fluke; I had not previously been measured against these qualities and I certainly had not been interviewed and selected for the job. Many of my colleagues were promoted in the same way and some struggled for the whole of their management careers. This was evident through symptoms, such as low productivity, high staff turnover and obvious stress. Looking back, this was unfair, both on the managers and their teams – and it certainly was not good for business.

I am not saying that my employer was bad in any way – in fact, they were great in many ways but they were also no different from many thousands of employers, who promote people to managerial roles based partly on the fact that they are top performers and partly on length of service.

From working with a variety of different managers through the years, I believe that most effective managers are:

- Commercially and business aware
- Effective communicators
- Customer-focused
- Able and willing to develop others
- Flexible and adaptable
- Leaders
- Strong on measuring performance
- Motivational
- Planners / organisers

- Problem solvers / decision-makers
- Results-orientated
- Team-orientated

Recruiting against these types of qualities and competencies, whether recruiting internally or externally, should help you to ensure that your managers are competent to do the job. Not every good potential manager may have all of these qualities but they should definitely have some of them.

Some management qualities can be developed with training and experience. For example, as a new, young manager, I was not very understanding about how family problems can affect people's work; now I do, as I have a family of my own. Also, I never used to be keen on measuring performance but over the years, I have learnt that key performance indicators (KPIs) can be highly motivating to some individuals, as long as, in my experience, they are not used for micro-management.

However, I do suggest that if people have already demonstrated that they have at least some of the key management qualities prior to being offered a management role, they are much more likely to succeed as managers. For example, someone who has been willing to take trainees under their wing or has always considered the business as a whole when making decisions, will already be demonstrating the ability and desire to develop others and that they are commercially aware.

If the candidate has worked in your business, you will have seen evidence of this type of behaviour but you also need to obtain evidence of this from external candidates. This is why I am a strong advocate of competency-based interviewing (CBI); it helps to provide concrete evidence that the candidate has what it takes to do the job well. This includes essential qualities and skills, as well as those that are desirable but trainable. And the best thing about CBI is that you can be totally objective - and avoid the "horns and halo effect".

In conclusion, we obviously need to be careful about everyone we recruit; but I suggest that we should be even more careful about whom we put into management roles, because these are the very people on whom we rely to look after our businesses in our absence!

About Denise Walker FREC

Denise Walker owns and runs Absolutely Business, a specialist management consultancy, designed exclusively for the recruitment industry, delivering **business consultancy, training and training services**.

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